

Introduction to Issue 1.2: Intersections of Social Justice in Scholarship, Teaching, and Activism

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In this second issue of *Technical Communication & Social Justice*, we include four articles, a dialogue among five members of our editorial board, and a call for proposals (CFP) for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) statements. As we reviewed each of the pieces in the issue in preparation for writing this introduction, we found ourselves replaying editorial board conversations and reading the articles against the ideas and ideals expressed by board members and by us as co-editors. Not surprisingly, we all had a lot to say about the importance of forging an intersection among scholarship, teaching, and social justice activism in technical and professional communication (TPC), which is implied in the *TCSJ* mission statement. It is true that we are all scholars and teachers, and in some cases, administrators. But when we look around among our own *TCSJ* editorial community as well as the broader TPC community, we realize that most of us also engage in social justice activism in various ways that draw upon or inform our work as scholars and teachers. Increasingly we are seeing how often our scholarship, teaching, and activism intersect and blend. Merging academic work and social justice activism, as we see almost daily throughout much of the U.S. and elsewhere, obviously involves treading upon political turf and is drawing aggressive reactions from legislators and governors. We hope and believe that we must not give in to attempts by governing officials to suppress social justice activism, and therefore, in this introduction we foreground the activist elements in the three peer-reviewed articles in this issue. Despite the range of topics covered in this issue, we want to call attention to the variety of ways that activism is invoked, explicitly or implicitly, potentially or inevitably by the authors.

April L. O'Brien's "Mundane Documents, American Exceptionalism, and Savannah's 'Unique' History: A Comparative Rhetorical Analysis of the Confederate Memorial Task Force's Reports" appeared as an early advance publication last month. We published the article in advance because it speaks directly to the increasing number of efforts by governmental officials to censor speech, to suppress access to books, and to silence educators across the U.S. Addressing a closely related concern, we recently posted a Call for Proposals online and on the [TCSJ website](#) (also included in this issue of *TCSJ*) concerning efforts by state-level officers and legislators to take down diversity, equity, and inclusion statements from public university web pages.

O'Brien's study is a rhetorical analysis of reports from a task force assigned to examine whether Confederate monuments in Savannah, Georgia should be removed. Her analysis exposes the rhetorical moves by the task force to redefine the meanings of the monuments and to justify their presence as essential to maintaining Savannah's "unique history." In this instance, O'Brien deploys rhetorical analysis, a fundamental scholarly methodology deconstructively, making clear the ways city officials and other groups attempted to preserve the status quo for unjust ends. But O'Brien goes further toward social action in proposing three methodologies, drawing upon work by TCP social justice scholars, for countering the kind of tactics applied in Savannah in efforts to nullify the task force's ostensible purpose.

In Elizabeth Lane's and Kristen Moore's "The Invisible Work of Iterative Design in Addressing Design Injustices," they show how design, which has become an established way of conceptualizing TPC in recent years, can be "complicit in the creation and destruction of oppressive structures." Lane and Moore provide guidelines and an example of how their concept of design as iterative can be applied in the work of bringing about socially just change, not only in academic contexts but in communities. Lane's and Moore's article is a call for reflection and action in our work with design thinking within and outside of academia.

Recent activism by rhetoric and technical communication scholars, including a number of journal editors in our field, have resulted in the "[Anti-Racist Scholarly Reviewing Practices: A Heuristic for Editors, Reviewers, and Authors](#)," to which, at last check, 357 individuals and 14 journals and organizations have signed their commitment, including the co-editors of *TCSJ*. However, signing a declaration and effectively implementing the guidelines of the heuristic, as we have with increasing humility been realizing, is not a matter of an instantaneous decision. It is a learning process as we examine the minutiae of discourse as it arrives in our inboxes in the form of article submissions. As Sam Clem points out in their article, "Teaching Technical Editing for Social Justice," "The ideologies currently circulating in [technical editing] are the presumed objectivity of editing and instrumentalist expediency based in the linguistic singularity of American Standard English (ASE)." We suggest that Clem's article, and likely also their course, constitute more than scholarship and more than pedagogy. This is social justice in action. Some readers will no doubt lament, in some cases loudly, "but this is anarchy! We must have standards!" This is what iconoclasm sounds like when it comes to language. And while we do not (nor, as far as we know does Clem) advocate anarchy, neither will we have patience with canons rooted in racism or any other socially or culturally exclusionary principles.

Finally, in "How Marginalized Students Persist in TPC Academic Programs," Chris Dayley describes a study which brings together a number of factors that students who identify as persons of color contributed to their success in completing their TPC degree programs. Dayley's rationale for this study combines both scholarly and social justice activist motives:

Colleges and universities, just like all institutions, have embedded cultural norms and practices that have been highly influenced by students, faculty, and other higher education institutions. If a student's social, cultural, and financial background does not match that of the institution where they are enrolled, they are likely to struggle. This adds an extra burden for marginalized students that makes access to a college degree unequal

for marginalized students. If TPC program administrators are committed to social justice in their programs, then they also need to be committed to doing everything in their power to support their students to graduation including changing cultural norms and assumptions that exclude and create barriers for students and faculty who don't fit in with the currently accepted social and cultural norms.

Dayley's study is one that many readers, regardless of their institutional role, may find helpful in implementing measures at multiple levels—classroom, department, college, or institution—that could make positive differences in retention for MMU students.

Along with the peer reviewed articles, we include a “Dialogue” among five of our editorial board members, responding to questions devised by assistant editor Erin Trauth. Erin designed the discussion to move the participants (Mike Duncan and Godwin Agboka, *TCSJ*'s founders; board member and first special issue co-editor Laura Gonzales, and *TCSJ* co-editors, Lucía Durá and Jerry Savage) beyond the basic language of the journal's mission statement. Erin's questions prompted us to articulate our individual understanding and vision for the journal, to discuss why we agreed to accept Mike's and Godwin's invitation to serve on the *TCSJ* board, to consider the journal's unique position on the broader terrain of TPC and closely related journals, and to discuss more generally what *TCSJ* might contribute to academic programs in TPC in relation to social justice. We hope Dialogue readers will be drawn to issues that connect to their own interests, concerns, and passions. For us (Jerry and Lucía) we keep pondering the commitment to social justice action that recurs in various ways in response to Erin's prompts.

The editorial board's Dialogue also emphasizes that *TCSJ* is committed not merely to publishing scholarly studies about social justice but to advocating, supporting, promoting, and stimulating social action and social change. Each of the articles in this issue are exemplary scholarly work but they also, directly or indirectly, suggest methodologies for enacting social change. Finally, with this issue we have also included a CFP for DEI statements that have been removed or censored. This CFP is a response to recent events and legislation challenging DEI objectives in higher education. Our goal is to house a contextualized archive of statements that have been taken down so that these statements can be preserved and considered in social justice activism.

Finally, we want to acknowledge the hard work of our associate editor, Erin Trauth, in getting the word out about the journal and its work, our managing editor, Mike Duncan, who has been instrumental in setting up our publishing infrastructure (and keeping it running despite uncertain funding!!), and our generous copyeditors, especially Leslye Pearson and Will Banks.

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