

The Grammar Elephant in the Engineering Classroom: Panel Proposal

Mr. Brad Jerald Henderson, University of California, Davis

Brad Henderson is a faculty in writing for the University Writing Program (UWP) at University of California, Davis. Henderson holds a B.S. degree in mechanical engineering from Cal Poly State University San Luis Obispo and a Masters in Professional Writing (MPW) from University of Southern California. Currently focusing his career on engineering communication and professionalism, he has worked as a design engineer and technical education specialist for Parker-Hannifin Aerospace and Hewlett-Packard Inkjet. Henderson was featured in the book—*Engineers Write! Thoughts on Writing from Contemporary Literary Engineers* by Tom Moran (IEEE Press 2011)—as one of twelve “literary engineers” writing and publishing creative works in the United States. Henderson’s current project is a book pioneering a new method for teaching engineers workplace writing skills through the lens of math. A Math-Based Writing System for Engineers: Sentence Algebra & Document Algorithms is forthcoming from Spring Nature, 2017.

Prof. Ruth Ann McKinney, The University of North Carolina School of Law

Ruth Ann McKinney, M.Ed., J.D., Emeritus Clinical Professor and former Assistant Dean, directed the writing program and academic success programs at the University of North Carolina School of Law for more than twenty years. Professor McKinney is the author of *Legal Research: A Practical Guide & Self-Instructional Workbook* (West 5th ed. 2008) and *Reading Like a Lawyer* (Carolina Academic Press 2d ed. 2012), and she is the original senior editor of the national academic support website, LawSchoolASP.org. Together with co-author Katie Rose Guest Pryal, she published *Core Grammar for Lawyers*, the first in the Core Grammar online series, in 2011, and received the national Academic Success Section Award from the American Association of Law Schools in 2014. She has most recently put together a team of engineering educators and digital learning experts to publish *Core Grammar for Engineers*, a discourse-specific, self-instructional program for engineering students that will be released in 2016-17 (see www.thegrammarproject.com).

Dr. Julia M. Williams, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology

Dr. Julia M. Williams is Executive Director of the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment and Professor of English at Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology. Her research areas include technical communication, assessment, accreditation, and the development of change management strategies for faculty and staff. Her articles have appeared in the *Journal of Engineering Education*, *International Journal of Engineering Education*, *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, and *Technical Communication Quarterly*, among others.

The Grammar Elephant in the Engineering Classroom:

Panel Theme: Engineering professionals form a distinct discourse community with a shared way of thinking, speaking, writing, and operating in the world. As members of this discourse community, engineers are expected to write often and with impeccable accuracy, aim communications at a variety of audiences, and be able to produce professional-quality correspondence and documents that are grammatically correct. What happens to engineering students who do not have the grammar skills necessary to meet the expectations of their chosen profession? What are universities doing to address this developmental need?

Panel Description: This panel will run 1.5 to 2.0 hours (depending on competing needs for space and timing of other conference sessions) and raise questions about the grammar component of engineering education. We envision the first 45 minutes devoted to a guided discussion among the panelists led by a moderator who will ask pre-drafted, open-ended questions. For example:

- Where does grammar education best fit in—dedicated writing classes, threaded modules, or non-classroom delivery?
- What do employers say the consequences are for student interns or young professionals who use grammar that is confusing or inconsistent with professional standards?
- Are grammar issues prevalent across the board, or are some populations (such as first-generation college graduates or students for whom English is not their first language) at greater risk?
- What promising approaches to grammar instruction have the panelists used or observed?

The remaining time will be open for questions from attendees or could include breakout sessions on specific topics.

Confirmed Panelists (in alphabetical order):

Michael Alley, Associate Professor of Engineering Communications, Penn State College of Engineering, and the author of *The Craft of Scientific Writing* and *The Craft of Scientific Presentations*.

Susan Conrad, Professor of Applied Linguistics, Portland State University, and principal investigator for the NSF-funded Civil Engineering Writing Project.

Brad Henderson, Continuing Lecturer in Writing, University of California, Davis, and author of *Sentence Algebra & Document Algorithms* (forthcoming Spring 2016), a look at grammar instruction through the lens of math.

Robert E. Johnson, Professor and Dean, The William States Lee College of Engineering, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Ruth Ann McKinney, Emeritus Clinical Professor of Law, The University of North Carolina School of Law, and co-author of *Core Grammar for Lawyers*, a self-instructional digital learning platform used widely in legal education, and lead author of *Core Grammar for Engineers* (forthcoming Spring 2017).

The panel moderator is Dr. Julia Williams, Executive Director of the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment and Professor of English at Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology.

Follow-on Activities: Provided sufficient interest, we would like to set up a meeting place/time after our session for educators interested in the topic of grammar to network and extend the conversation. Also, we plan to set up an online discussion board to allow interested attendees and panelists to continue to learn from one another after the conference.