

Joel A. Kline 2009 Sabbatical Report

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Introduction

This report summarizes the activities for my sabbatical leave during the spring of 2009. I spent this period studying for my PhD qualification exam, preparing my PhD reading list, and establishing a research plan for my doctoral research. I successfully passed my PhD qualification exam in April of 2009. The *Activities* section of this report provides more detail on the different tasks that I completed during my sabbatical. The *Research* section introduces research that I began after the qualification exam was completed. The *Appendices* section contains supporting documentation including materials regarding my qualification exam, field trend summaries, and my dissertation reading list.

Activities

Activities during my sabbatical centered on preparing for my PhD qualification exam by reading and writing on my dissertation topic. My topic, the sharing of knowledge between academic and practitioner communities in technical communication, includes several disciplines and concepts ranging from Knowledge Management (KM) to Communities of Practice (CoP). For the qualification exam process I needed to create a reading list, develop a pre-proposal, and prepare written summaries of trends in the field.

Pre-proposal Development

The Technical Communication and Rhetoric program at Texas Tech University allows a student to sit for his qualification exam only after the student has developed a dissertation pre-proposal. Unlike some graduate programs, where a qualification or comprehensive exam is taken directly after coursework, my PhD program requires several months of pre-proposal and reading list development. I began the process of writing a dissertation pre-proposal in summer of 2008. Subsequent refinement and submission to my committee led to its approval in the late weeks of 2008. This permitted me to begin the process of reading the references on my reading list and refining my reading list at the start of my spring 2009 sabbatical. The dissertation pre-proposal is contained in Appendix A.

Creation and development of a reading list for the topic(s).

Since May of 2008, I had been developing a reading list to support the questions for my qualification exam. From January to April, I was responsible for refining that list as well as reading the books, articles, and presentations that were on the list. The Department of English at Texas Tech recommends a reading list of roughly 100 books. Four periodical articles count as the equivalent of one book. I purchased and employed the citation management software *EndNote*, which I used to maintain my reading list. My original reading list that had been approved by my committee in Fall 2008 contained 52 Books, five Book Sections, 21 Conference Proceedings, 111 Journal Articles, and one Report (190 total sources, see Appendix B). Subsequent refinement led to the addition of some generic textbooks and topical texts for the general questions on the qualification exam, as well as additional articles and books that were located from reading the materials on the original reading list. This pushed the current bibliography of the dissertation to 276 sources from the original 190. From this list, articles on Knowledge Management (KM), Communities of Practice (CoP), Technical Communication and Rhetoric, and Academic/Industry relationships were read and notated during the sabbatical to assist in the preparation of field trend summaries.

Field Trend Summaries

I was required to produce field trend summaries in preparation for my PhD qualification exam. These summaries examine three trends for each field of study included in my dissertation (Technical Communication, Knowledge Management, Communities of Practice, and Academic/Industry partnerships). The trend summary document provided my committee members with feedback on my reading as well as possible topics to generate qualification exam questions. I submitted my field trend summaries to my committee in late March 2009 in preparation for the qualification exam. The field trend summaries that I developed are contained in Appendix C.

Passing qualification exam

On April 26, 2009, I began the five-day qualification exam process. The exam contained four questions and my complete answer package totaled roughly 10,500 words in length. I completed the answers by Thursday April 30. When I arrived to my annual PhD May Seminar on May 11, I was informed that I had passed the qualification exam. My exam questions and answers are contained in Appendix D.

Research

I began formulating my research plan after completing my qualification exam in May of 2009. My initial research plan on my dissertation pre-proposal explained how I would compare specific components of the academic community to the practitioner community within the field of Technical Communication. Subsequent refinement led to the use of a current Society of Technical Communication (STC) project as a case study. This STC project, known as the Body of Knowledge Project, is designed to bring together technical communicators from academic and practitioner backgrounds to develop a unified body of knowledge for the discipline. My dissertation pre-proposal was refined to reflect the use of the case study method to examine the STC Body of Knowledge project in June of 2009.

My research methodology will be mixed-method, with a combination of quantitative information collected from surveys and qualitative information collected from personal interviews of STC Body of Knowledge (STC-BOK) participants. During the summer of 2009, I completed the Institutional Review Board documentation. This documentation is required if one's research will have any contact with human subjects. I submitted an expedited request to the Texas Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB), because my research methodology was neither performing any physical research on humans nor asking them for confidential or sensitive information. The IRB approved my research plan in July of 2009 and in August of 2009; I began developing the survey that will begin the dissertation research. The research plan I submitted to the IRB and the subsequent approval from the IRB are contained in Appendix "E".

My research for the dissertation is currently ongoing. I have developed a survey site and invited members of the STC-BOK project to answer the survey. From this pool of participants, I will solicit personal interviews. I expect to complete the dissertation in mid to late 2010.

Sabbatical Timeline

Table One shows a timeline of activities that were completed for the dissertation process. The grey shaded area shows the activities that were completed during the actual sabbatical period.

Table One: Sabbatical Timeline

Time	Activity
May 2008	Completed coursework and began working on dissertation pre-proposal and reading list.
December 2008	Committee approves reading list and pre-proposal.
January 2009	I begin reading periodicals and books from reading list and refining the pre-proposal.
February 2009	I begin creating field trend summaries for my committee to use in the development of qualification exam questions.
March 2009	I submit field trend summaries to my committee.
April 2009	I sit for the PhD qualification exam.
May 2009	I work with my committee to refine the research agenda and develop a case study methodology.
June 2009	I prepare Institution Review Board (IRB) Human Subjects forms and documentation and submit (to Texas Tech).
July 2009	IRB approves my research plan and human subjects form (HSF) request.
August 2009	I begin research with the deployment of a survey to project participants.

Grey area shows the actual sabbatical period.