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### Introduction to “Social Justice Matters in Technical and Professional Writing”

Claire Carly-Miles, Ph.D.

Texas A&M University

#### TEACHING WRITING NOW:

#### DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

A virtual symposium hosted by the Texas A&M Department of English throughout the spring of 2021 that featured a series of talks and workshops on the topic of how practitioners can better teach writing now by addressing diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the writing classroom. The event was aimed at bringing together scholars doing research in social justice pedagogies, cultural rhetorics, and composition/professional writing in our rapidly changing media landscapes. Events were free and open to the public.

#### Social Justice Matters in Technical and Professional Writing

Sue Hum, “Advocating for Social Justice: Knowledge Telling and Knowledge Construction in an Infographic Assignment.”

Natasha N. Jones, “Citational Practices: Shifting Paradigms.”

Jennifer Sano-Franchini, “Programmatic Efforts to Address Anti-Blackness in Technical and Professional Writing.”

Delivered Monday, February 22, 2021, from 2:30 pm – 4:30 pm.

“Social Justice Matters in Technical and Professional Writing” took place initially as a panel on February 22, 2021. From there, the following essays emerged, each

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examining why and how matters of social justice may be addressed in technical and professional writing programs, from assignments to citation practices to working groups.

In the first piece, “Advocating for Social Justice: Knowledge Telling and Knowledge Construction in an Infographic Assignment,” Dr. Sue Hum identifies “the unmediated, ahistorical, apolitical tendency in technical communication [that] continues to embrace a utilitarian, pragmatic approach,” and she argues, “It is in these approaches that racism hides, in the cracks and crevices of local contexts and utilitarian approaches.” Hum observes, “Any success in integrating inclusive approaches to curriculum requires an antiracist treatment of knowledge construction,” and she shares with us the efforts that she and four doctoral instructors have made to create an infographic assignment designed to combat the racism inherent in infographics, originating as they have to serve racist, imperialistic purposes.

In “Citation Practices: Shifting Paradigms,” Dr. Natasha Jones argues for the importance of citation practice focused on the recovery of the origins and the amplification of the work of marginalized critics, as opposed to listing citations simply as the performance of a quantitative exercise. Jones discusses “citation practices and what this means in regard to knowledge legitimization and meaning-making,” and she “draw[s] on Black Feminist scholars to reframe how we think about citation practices and how we engage in citation practices.” Jones urges us to consider a “move toward coalitional engagement in citational practices” as a critical part of working towards social justice in writing and in teaching writing.

In “Programmatic Efforts to Redress Anti-Blackness in Technical and Professional Writing,” Dr. Jennifer Sano-Franchini recounts how she was galvanized in 2020 by a series of critical events—the murder of George Floyd, the “wave of worldwide Black Lives Matter protests that followed,” and first one call to action issued by ATTW President Angela Haas and then another by ATTW Vice President Natasha N. Jones and ATTW Fellow Miriam F. Williams—to issue her own calls to action. In the following piece, Sano-Franchini encourages us to consider what we can and should undertake in our own spheres to combat racism and white supremacy, as well as how we might go about doing so. She provides readers with a detailed account of what, where, and how white supremacy is; conversations about how programs may begin to address it; and her own first-hand experiences as an organizer of and participant in these conversations.

In these pieces, Hum, Jones, and Sano-Franchini call attention to the ways in which technical and professional writing is neither neutral nor objective, as has been

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assumed in the past. Each of these scholars focuses our attention on the ways that assumptions about and in this field have perpetuated white supremacy, and they offer their critical reflections on what those who would address racism and upset hegemonic systems in writing classrooms and writing centers should seriously consider in order to begin to do so effectively.

### About the Author

**Claire Carly-Miles** is an instructional assistant professor in the English Department at Texas A&M University. She is the coordinator of Technical and Professional Writing and the co-coordinator of Introduction to Writing about Literature, and she has worked collaboratively since 2019 to create open educational resource (OER) textbooks for both of these multi-section writing courses. Currently, she continues to participate in the revision of these OER as well as in the writing of a new OER for the department's Science Fiction and Fantasy minor.

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