How is your present career related/unrelated to International Professional Communication (IPC), which means communication between different countries, nations, and nationalities?

Thanks, that's a good question to start with. I just completed a three-year run as the president of the Plain Language Association International [http://plainlanguagenetwork.org/], and that is an organization—an international organization—made up of twenty-five different countries where members who focus on Plain language—and I do have to say that my answers are going to really be a little more specific to technical writing and Plain language. But in any case, so I was
president of this organization. Every two years we would have an international conference, so we were in Germany, we've been in France, we’ve been in Mexico... South America. The upcoming one, we're going back to Germany, so there's a lot of interest internationally around issues of professional communication as it relates specifically to Plain language. And I think the focus … and the reason we use the words "Plain language" is because those tend to be words that are reflective of government laws that require information to be easy to understand regulations. The government of Sweden, for example, requires that laws be written in a manner that makes it easy for citizens to understand. So my work internationally is really a function of belonging to this organization.

**How have your past experiences in IPC prepared you for the work you do today?**

I think it's made me much more aware of two things. Number 1: That not all readers read in English, of course. And, secondly, that as we prepare information, I think we have to always keep in mind the likelihood—if we're working for a large Fortune-1, or Fortune-500 company—the high likelihood that that information is going to be translated. So, therefore, as we create information—or as, what I do primarily is take all the existing information and rewrite it to make it clearer—I have to constantly keep in mind the likelihood that it will be translated, which means eliminating metaphors, making sure that analogies are not particularly based in any one culture. So, I think, even though primarily... well, exclusively, I write in English, my past research and my relationship with this organization, Plain, has just simply made me aware that other cultures do not all speak English... and we have to constantly remind ourselves that our culture—even though we think it is the most dominant around the world, really isn't. So, I think it just has opened up my awareness to cultures beyond our own. You know, we're a very ego... ego-centric nation, and I think my interest in International Professional Communication started many, many years ago when I read an article about collaboration and what teamwork means in other countries than our own. So... my research as an academic, which I was for twenty-five years, prepared me in many ways to now have this company—I have The Plain Language Group
And that international awareness, I think, has continued throughout my career.

**What main challenges does IPC face today?**

I think I’m going to talk about that a little bit in terms of… academia. I think that the universities and the tech-writing programs themselves are not preparing students for an international context. I know the university I came from does not have a course in International Professional Communication or even International Technical Communication. So… I think students are not being prepared, within these technical or professional communication courses, to think globally. So… I think that’s a challenge. Again, I think the dominance of English worldwide does make things easier for us in some ways, but I think … maybe not enough communicators are spending time abroad. When I was a visiting professor in the University of Paris for three weeks, and I'll never forget a conversation I had with French faculty who said to me, "We really respect your work in Plain language, but you have to understand that the French write to impress, not to express. And so I thought, "Alright, well here's a challenge!" Because as we're trying to get people to communicate more clearly and more effectively, in their culture your intellect is noted by the complexity of your writing rather than the simplicity of it. But, what I want to say is it's not a criticism of France. It was an expansion in my mind of understanding that not every culture comes to writing in the same way, and not every culture will expect a report or a proposal or a document to be written in the same organizational structure that… that we might teach our students to write. So, I think, the main challenge for us as communicators is really not taking the way we do it and putting that on top of another culture, but going the opposite direction—understanding the conventions of that culture when it comes to professional communication. And, then, if we're working in or with that culture, being prepared to give up some of the ways we approach things so that we can approach them in their context. So, I think those would be the main challenges. We have to be willing to learn and change and grow… relative to other cultures.
What challenges and rewards can people expect from working in IPC?

Well, I think one of the challenges is just what I said… about the… understanding the context, but I'd rather talk about the rewards. It is fascinating to become a global person. As a communicator… we have things to offer, and we have things to learn from other countries. I've spent years participating in organizations around the world… meeting people. I have friends in many countries worldwide. I learn from them, they learn from me. And if you look at, you know, I look at communication now because of my work… in a little narrower focus, in terms of what I always, you know, we call Plain language, of course. But, even if you just look at communication in a wider model, what you can learn from other people is extraordinary. And the more global we are as people—frankly just in general—is a plus. And I think that we bring that multi-context to what we teach, what we write, what we read, and how we are citizens of the world.

How has technology affected practice, research, and teaching of IPC in your region of the world or elsewhere?

Well, I think the greatest contribution technology has made is the ability for people to take online courses from all over the world, from almost any person… that they would like to take courses from… whether it's a private company that is offering online courses in professional communication or whether it's an academic university. But, we now have a global reach, so everything that we do around International Professional Communication can be touched by people outside of the United States. So, I think technology, the Internet, use of online courses, even the ability for us to pick up—I pick up my iPhone® and call someone in Australia. So… the world has shrunk, or maybe we've grown but… I think that… I don't think that International Professional Communication would be where it is today if it weren't for technology. I mean… even something as simple as the vid—I saw a wonderful video… Well, actually, I'll give you an even better example—when I was teaching a technical writing course. A friend of mine who was teaching in Paris… we did a collaboration between our two classes, so her masters' students in Tech-Com and, who all spoke English, so that made it easier. Her students were working on the same project my students were working on, and we would have video conferencing back and forth between the two classes so that the students—both the French students and the American students—were not only
learning technical communication, but they were also learning… interaction with students from another country. So, I think that technology has completely changed and broadened our ability to truly be international.

**How well has higher education prepared students to work in IPC, and what else can higher education do to prepare students for IPC work in industry?**

I think that higher education is not doing enough. So… we have organization like STC, of course, and ProComm… and conferences where—at least when I was a professor, I would encourage and often take my students to these conferences. But I don’t think the academic curriculum has really kept up with the explosion of interest in professional communication internationally. So, I think higher education needs to—one, consider international internships for students… so there are a number of different curricula where students go abroad as part of their training. Well, I think that technical communication or professional communication courses in the United States could take that as a model. And why not send a student to Spain to work… in either an industry or an academic environment. So, it’s sort of, you know, I think about as study abroad, but study abroad in professional communication. So, we had an internship program at UNC Charlotte, but all of our students were placed in the Charlotte area—maybe someone might go to New York or Washington, but we were not placing students internationally. I will say that may become more difficult as… as we move forward with some of the political situations that are occurring, nevertheless. So, international experiences I think would be helpful. I think broadening the curriculum. I think, even within the university, getting speakers from, you know, foreign languages department or speakers from other cultures who are in your university could come and give talks about communication from their country. So, I think we can do a better job of that. … industry? I don’t know how much of a responsibility there is for industry to prepare students to do much of anything. I mean, they can train them when they come in… but, in general, unless you’re working for an international company that is going to send you abroad, or maybe if you’re working for a translation company, I’m not sure what industry is really doing to support that. And I’ve worked for major companies across the United States, and I have not particularly seen preparation. I’ve seen… what I have seen—maybe I should put it this way. For instance, when I was on Google’s
campus, they did offer sort of a cross-cultural training, or they did make the writers—the content writers—aware of how to write for translation, so those might be a couple of ways they’re preparing them for international experiences.

**How has industry helped higher education prepare students for IPC work, and what else can industry do to help higher education prepare graduates for IPC work in industry?**

Well, the first thing they could do is hire our students! That would be really good! I think industry is not going to reach out to Higher-Ed. I think it has to go the other direction. So, I think that, really, the question should be is *How can Higher Education get industry more involved in helping to prepare our students?* And, again, I think I'd go back to what I said before … internships that… with international companies—even if the company is stationed here in the United States—or international internships. So sending students to another country with maybe an American-based company that has a presence, let's say, in England or Ireland or Asia or... I think would be really helpful. I think that the... the number one focus for me that professional communication courses should have—other than teaching students how to communicate effectively—is to reach out to get industry involved in our programs. And, traditionally, English departments have been very slow to understand that our responsibility also is not just to teach students but also to help them get jobs when they graduate. I'm really... it’s like a passion of mine to think—that is part—as an academic, that is part of our responsibility. So, I think it goes the other direction. I think, *How can Higher Education reach out to industry?* … so you bring in speakers who have international experience, or you bring in international citizens who are working in industry, who can come and talk to students about the chang... the different contexts in which they've worked... So, internships, speakers, getting out in the community yourself as a faculty person, meeting these people in industry. Industry is not going to come and knock on our door... and when they do, what they really... is to tell us what our curriculum should be. So, we don't... we don't respond well to that, so I think it's our responsibility to reach out to industry.