

Writing and Communication QuickTakes

Case Studies and the Archives: Teaching Research Skills for Technical Communicators

Brittain Postdoctoral Fellows lead the way in the Writing and Communication Program by designing rhetorically based courses with a *WOVEN (written–oral–visual–electronic–nonverbal)* emphasis. Students use multimodality to explore cultural studies of science and technology in various communities and periods. This poster spotlights a classroom project designed by Brittain Fellow and WCP Assistant Director for Assessment Dr. Rebekah Greene.

Technical Communication in Practice. This SLS-affiliated course required students to explore issues relating to sustainability in the Atlanta community. A group-authored case study project allowed students to look at social equity, economic sustainability, or the environment utilizing the SLS Case Study Teaching Tool. This project emphasizes awareness of historical context, collaborative communication, audience assessment, information design, data collection and interpretation, and communication with community stakeholders and campus clients. Student groups focused on gentrification and green infrastructure, emphasizing the importance of improved partnerships among neighborhoods, governmental agencies, and developers who recognize and respect historic and continuing contributions of Westside Atlanta community members who work to improve their neighborhoods.

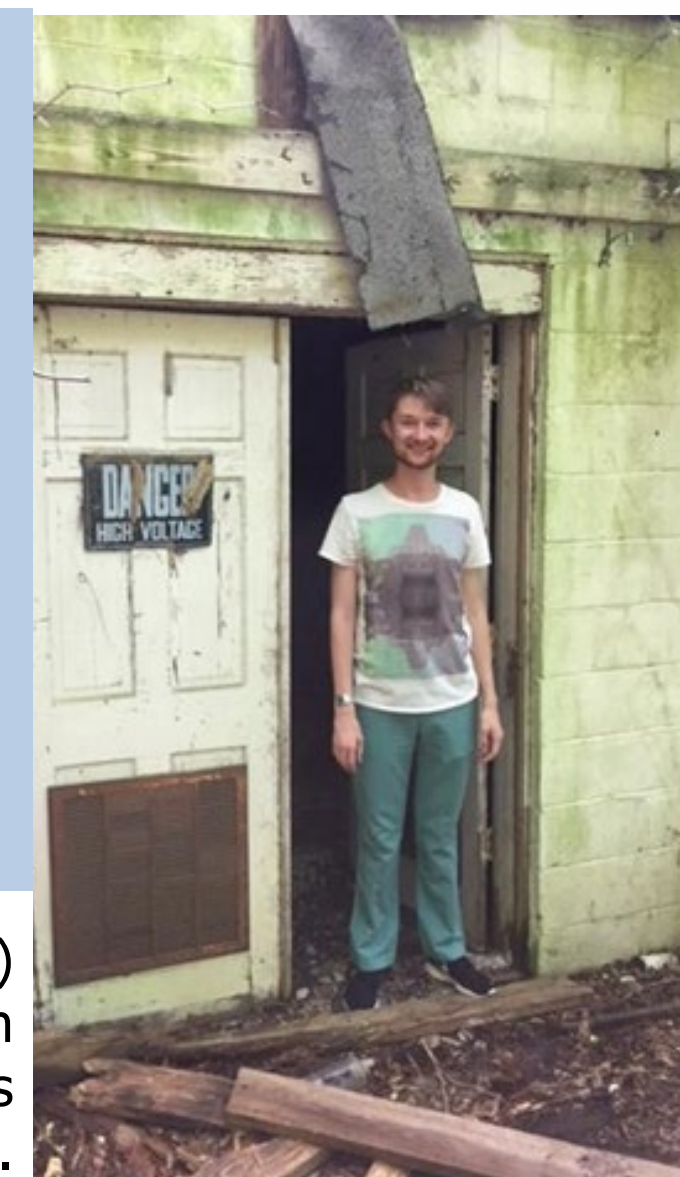


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My research interests include technical communication, Victorian literature, material culture, and sustainability education.

Project Highlights. After learning ways to research historical news-papers, ledgers, and other archival materials, one specific student group chose to personally engage with Blandtown, the site that they were studying. They began interviewing local community activists to find where area church records (a valuable archival aide for tracing neighborhood development and decline) are housed. Now, the student team continues, post-course, to work with others to document the rich history of this once-thriving, important African-American neighborhood before final physical remains are permanently lost to gentrification.

Students Co-authors in the Community: Georgia Tech student Nick Anderson (**right**) stands at the entrance of the historic, now-abandoned WERD broadcasting station in Blandtown, discussed in the SLS Case Study (**far right**) he co-authored with students Tanner Shearer and Kendall Wilson. Photograph by Gregor Turk.



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Skipping forward several decades, this is where the history of Blandtown becomes sad; for this is the time Blandtown becomes 'ill.' In the 1950s, government officials of the city of Atlanta were making efforts to segregate Atlanta. Author Larry Keating, in his book *Race, Class, and Urban Expansion*, says leaders of Atlanta were trying to remove "black residential clusters" from areas that were predominantly white in efforts to minimize black's voting influence in local elections. In other words, they were attempting to segregate Atlanta. And, unfortunately, it happened that Blandtown sat within an area that was mostly white. Thus, in 1956 the decision to rezone Blandtown from residential to heavy industrial was made, a move which Keating considered a "death sentence" for the neighborhood.

Key Takeaway: Atlanta's decision to rezone Blandtown to Heavy Industrial in 1956 was racist in its intentions. It was part of a larger scheme to remove black residential clusters.

And yet, despite these racist, antagonistic decisions made by the city of Atlanta, residents of Blandtown were still hopeful for their land. They even felt confident enough in its future to build a new school – The Atlanta Whittaker School – three years after the rezoning occurred (Torres). And indeed, Blandtown continued to prosper as a town and a black community for a short time after the rezoning. In fact, the first black-owned radio station in the country, WERD radio station, built a broadcasting tower in Blandtown. WERD played an



Serve-Learn Sustain interprets sustainable communities as integrated systems, wherein environmental, economic, and social factors all inform each other. With the case of Blandtown, consider the lack of integration between society and economy.

integral part in the Civil Rights Movement in the 60s.

My **philosophy of teaching technical communication** prompts students to consider ways they can be better educated participants in sustainable communities. I want students to take risks, to confidently pose research questions, and to express what they've learned in projects that address issues relating to social equity. In thinking more deeply about the communities that they are a part of, even temporarily, students learn to be more observant about rhetorical choices and the impact those choices can have on community stakeholders and clients.