Why Have So Many MS Graduates Continued Their Studies at Clemson?

Alumni Point to Faculty, Curriculum, and Shared Ethos

The Department of English and Technical Communication (ETC) has been offering a Master of Science in Technical Communication since 2005. Most of the program's 112 graduates to date have taken jobs in industry, and only about 10 have gone on for doctoral study—to schools such as Texas Tech, Virginia Tech, and Georgia State. A recent pattern has emerged: a notable concentration at one East Coast school.

Five alumni are now pursuing advanced degrees at Clemson University: Oluwafemi ("Femi") Osho (MS SP21), Acheme "Chris" Acheme (MS FS21), Joy Amponsah (MS FS21), Jude Enete (MS SP24), and Felix Nyikwagh (MS SP24). Their convergence at one institution raises an intriguing question: What motivated so many S&T-trained communicators to continue their education at Clemson?

One factor, of course, is Clemson's willingness to admit and fund our MS graduates, creating a pipeline that strengthens as those students thrive and share their experiences with peers. But the alumni themselves point to other influences: mentorship from ETC faculty, an MS curriculum that balances theory and practice, and a shared ethos between the two schools that values technology, culture, and ethics in human-centered communication.

Faculty Mentorship That Inspires Further Study

Every one of the interviewed alumni points to the Missouri S&T faculty as a defining influence on their academic trajectory. For them, the program's professors were not only instructors but models of careful inquiry, clear communication, and openness to others' perspectives.

Nyikwagh, now pursuing a Ph.D. in Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design, describes how "faculty like Dr. Edward Malone, Dr. Carleigh Davis, Dr. David Wright, and Dr. Kathryn Northcut encouraged independent thinking and intellectual rigor." Their mentorship, he says, "was the reason I transitioned smoothly into doctoral study." He added that success in graduate school depends on taking initiative outside of coursework, something he practiced as an active member and later president of S&T's student chapter of the Society for Technical Communication.

Enete, also a Ph.D. student in Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design, entered the master's program expecting a focus on practical writing but found more theoretical depth than he anticipated. He pointed to Dr. Ed Malone's History of Technical Communication course as an example, noting that it explored "how historical knowledge informs practice."

Felix Nyikwagh

Jude Enete

Femi Osho working in his Clemson office

Although the course was online, it remained interactive. "Dr. Malone's mentorship was one of the reasons I pursued dual master's degrees, completing both Geology & Geophysics and Technical Communication at S&T," he said.

Osho, now pursuing a Ph.D. in Human-Centered Computing, recalls that instructors like Dr. Wright and Dr. Hercula "emphasized that communication should never be detached from the audience or purpose." They "instilled in me the habit of thinking across disciplines." Those values continue to shape his research in human-centered computing at Clemson. He also noted that balancing doctoral research with raising four children, while his spouse pursues a Ph.D. of her own, has required the adaptability and resilience he began developing at S&T.

A Curriculum That Balances Praxis and Theory

If mentorship lit the spark, the Missouri S&T curriculum provided the kindle. Alumni consistently describe their S&T coursework as an ideal balance between theoretical inquiry and hands-on design.

For Nyikwagh, "Theoretical Approaches to Technical Communication was transformative" because "it exposed me to the breadth of rhetorical theory, from classical to feminist and actor-network approaches, helping me analyze how meaning circulates through texts, visuals, and technologies." At the more applied end of the curriculum, he cited Advanced Layout and Design, in which students merged "creativity with usability" through the *Panoply* newsletter project, learning to use InDesign to produce a real-world publication. Enete also praised the *Panoply* project in similar terms.

For Acheme, now completing an M.S. in Computer Engineering at Clemson, Dr. Hercula's Advanced Writing for Science and Engineering was pivotal. "It was in her class that I began to see writing as a process of inquiry rather than a task of translation," he recalled. Under Dr. David Wright's guidance, Acheme conducted a usability analysis for a Nigerian start-up's mobile app, work that the company later implemented. The experience, he says, showed that "academic work could have real-world impact."

This integration of theory and practice showed alumni that technical communication is not merely a service skill but a field of research in its own right. Clemson's programs, with their strong research culture and interdisciplinary openness, provided a natural next step. Several alumni also remarked that the intellectual independence they developed at S&T helped them adapt to the expectations of doctoral study, which include heavier reading loads, greater demands for originality, and more responsibility for shaping their own research paths.

A Shared Ethos of Human-Centered Communication

Perhaps the most striking through line between Missouri S&T and Clemson is a shared philosophy: both institutions emphasize communication as a human-centered activity informed by technology, ethics, and culture. Moreover, Clemson's strengths in areas such as Human-Centered Computing and Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design aligned well with the alumni's developing research interests.

Osho's research, funded through two NSF projects, explores inclusive computing education and AI-related cybersecurity training. A certified ethical hacker and former cybersecurity lecturer, he brings significant professional experience to this work.

Femi Osho and his daughter

His focus on human-centered computing reflects lessons from S&T about "how to humanize data and systems," a theme that also runs through Clemson's Human-Centered Computing program. His work exemplifies one way S&T alumni carry human-centered thinking into advanced research.

Before graduate school, Enete co-founded Nestuge, a Nigerian digital-product platform, and he has played an active role in the startup ever since. That work showed him how cultural expectations affect user experience—an insight that led him to Missouri S&T, where he first practiced the principles that now guide his doctoral research. "Technology design must adapt to local contexts rather than imitate Western frameworks," he explained. His commitment to culturally responsive design reflects another dimension of the shared ethos: attention to ethics, context, and global awareness.

With BA and MA degrees in theatre arts from universities in Nigeria, Nyikwagh brings a humanities-inflected perspective to his work, exploring how digital storytelling and rhetorical design can foster social well-being. His transition from usability studies at S&T to cultural rhetoric at Clemson illustrates how both programs value communication as civic engagement, not simply a professional skill but a moral practice. Where Enete emphasizes cultural design, Nyikwagh highlights the social responsibilities of communicators.

Even Acheme, whose work sits closer to engineering, sees continuity between his two academic homes. With a background in electrical and electronic engineering and now pursuing an MS in Computer Engineering at Clemson, he continues to build on his technical foundation as a

Felix Nyikwagh teaches multiple sections of ENGL 1030 Composition and Rhetoric

"The professors at S&T genuinely cared about our growth," he says. "Their quick responses, constructive feedback, and encouragement went beyond the classroom. That supportive culture taught me that effective communication is not just about clarity but about connection." His studies at Clemson require a similar culture of collaboration, especially when navigating the uncertainties of a self-directed research program.

Continuity of Mission

Taken together, these alumni stories suggest a continuum between Missouri S&T and Clemson University, one built on shared values rather than coincidence. Both programs treat communication as a space where writing, design, and technology come together to serve human needs.

Missouri S&T provided the foundation through faculty mentorship, rigorous coursework, and a philosophy of ethical design. Clemson offers the opportunity to extend that foundation through interdisciplinary research. The result is a growing network of S&T-trained scholars who are contributing to the future of communication studies. For many, Clemson's alignment with their interests in cultural rhetoric, UX, and human-centered computing made it the best fit, even as they acknowledged the challenges that accompany the transition to doctoral work.

As Nyikwagh puts it, "The Ph.D. journey demands more than academic intelligence, it requires resilience, curiosity, and self-direction." Those qualities, cultivated at Missouri S&T, continue to thrive at Clemson and show that good communication education does more than prepare students for the next job. It prepares them for a lifetime of learning, leadership, and impact.