

Interview with David Young

Dr. David Young is a successful Missouri S&T alumnus who has worked in both academia (at Georgia Tech University) and industry (at Amazon). He began his journey in Rolla as a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering (2006–2010) and left as a Master of Science in Technical Communication (2010–2013). During his master’s program, he taught English 160 Technical Writing (now English 3560) as a GTA, and he combined his knowledge of technical communication, classical rhetoric, and chemical engineering in his thesis “Lexis in Chemical Engineering Discourse.”

After his studies at S&T, Young moved to Texas Tech University, where he obtained a PhD in Technical Communication and Rhetoric (2017). From there, he went to Georgia Tech as an assistant professor (2018–2021). He was the only tech com faculty member in the School of Literature, Media, and Communication for about three years. It was up to him to develop the tech com program he envisioned for Georgia Tech. His aim was to equip students with necessary rhetorical skills before they graduated. As a junior faculty, he helped define and support the goals of the program, until the second year of COVID-19 pandemic.

**David Young in his home office,
September 2022**



“Follow wherever your curiosity leads. . . . Be relentless in your advocacy for audiences/end users; that is what we do.”

Young made the decision to move to Amazon as a Senior Technical Editor for Amazon Diagnostics. “It was the right time, the right place,” he said. Amazon hired him for this remote job within 2 to 3 weeks of application. His primary function was “to edit documents to align with the standards and purpose of the company before sending them out the door.” With his knowledge of XML and Python, he also provided IT support to his team.

Curiosity, passion, and smart work led to his current role: As a Senior Program Manager, Young manages a team of three technical writers, supporting the documentation efforts of Amazon Pharmaceuticals. He is charged with removing any obstacles to the team’s work and ensuring a smooth working environment for the team.

Because of his study of rhetoric, Young is now “very deliberate in how he delivers messages,” and this skill has helped him handle challenges in the industry. “As a technical writing team, we have certain priorities that are important to us: efficiency and scale, but these are not priorities to some other stakeholders.” When facing this

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recurring problem, Young seeks the right moment to speak to each stakeholder individually and puts rhetorical appeals into practice. For him, this method has always worked like magic, and he recommends it to others.

Even as an industry practitioner, Young still has the passion to teach and help students who wish to improve their technical writing skills. He may one day return to academia. A guiding principle for him through his education and career has been “to follow wherever your curiosity leads.”

For students who might be interested in internships at Amazon, Young noted how competitive it is. He advised students to apply, but not to limit their applications or hopes to Amazon alone because there is a very large world outside Amazon also available to them. He also mentioned that “to prepare for success, treat all your works, even in school, as portfolio materials.”

For technical communication students, Young offers the following advice: “Be relentless in your advocacy for audiences/end users. That is what we do.”



David Young, Melissa Wampler, and Shubashini Gamagedara prepare for their presentations at the Springfield regional STC conference in April 2013.

The Switch Up: Noah Hayes on His Change to ETC

“I’m from Florissant, Missouri, born and raised there, a suburban kid,” ETC major **Noah Hayes** said. “Rolla is not such a different place, in that it’s almost like an extended neighborhood.”

Noah graduated from St. Louis University High School in May 2020 and began his education at Missouri S&T a few months later as a major in metallurgical engineering. After three semesters, he had to make a decision: “I stopped at Chem 2 and said, ‘I need to rethink.’ I looked at what I could do that fit my skillset and would get me where I wished to go. English and technical communication seemed like a good fit.”

Noah officially switched to ETC in the middle of his sophomore year and has been in the department for more than a year now. He was drawn to the ETC major because of his love of language and writing. Noah writes something every day—from stories of his own creation to comments on current topics and events.

“I’d like to use my degree to work internationally, somewhere in the Middle East. I started learning Arabic on my own and then took courses in Arabic at another institution. I want to live in the Middle East and integrate with the people and teach or serve there.”

Noah is on track to graduate in December 2023. He gave the following advice to students starting out in ETC: “Be prepared to truly write and express yourself. In math and science courses, people don’t have to get into their thoughts and feelings. In English and technical communication, there is an emphasis on expressing yourself, and that is a more personally challenging journey.”

