

The entirety of human existence is based on communication. Without it, we are merely lost souls, void of purpose, community, and most importantly, identity.

Communication is a significant part of what makes up who we are as individuals. We draw upon shared ideas and develop our own opinions, mindsets, and ideologies based on our reactions to other people's personal beliefs. Conversing with both people who share in our belief systems, and those who have that of differing mindsets provides an outlet of creativity, discovery, and serendipity. The curiosity of the human mind fuels our ambition and the acquisition of knowledge; without the efforts of communication, human life would be bleak, unimpactful, and unfulfilling, with little advancements in any field of exploration or research. Community is essential to the livelihood of human existence, and has therefore provided numerous platforms for such sharing of ideas.

Technology has equipped those with access an endless amount of tools to connect with people around the world. Broadening not only the transfer of ideas, but it has also exponentially increased the exposure to different cultures and societies that would have previously been undiscovered. As a result, the prevention of ignorance has been a powerful unconscious movement taking more strides with each word exchanged between individuals. With the extensive use of social media outlets, email, and cellular communication, networking is perpetually expanding, and populations must learn to utilize these tools through the use of genre, to function effectively in society.

Genre is defined as "a site for the exchange of language within which participants influence one another and identify their discourse communities" (Anis Bawarshi 549). As a crucial aspect in the establishment of social action and connection with an organization and its members, genre is the primary means of communication between

these two entities. Therefore, it must be practical and unique to the individual community of practice for its current and prospective members in its delivery, purpose, and method of retrieval.

As Ann Johns defines them, communities of practice are “complex collections of individuals who share genres, language, values, concepts, and ‘ways of being’” (322). One community of practice that I am especially interested in learning more about is the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, more commonly referred to as the AIAA. This organization exemplifies the meaning of effectively utilizing different genres to communicate with its members the important information of past, current, and upcoming projects and events. As described on the AIAA website, the purpose of the club is “to ignite and celebrate aerospace ingenuity and collaboration, and its importance to our way of life”. With over 30,000 individual members in its national branch, and about 350 in the UCF chapter, the club reaches a broad variety of individuals from different backgrounds and walks of life. The club must accurately and efficiently provide information to its subscribers to achieve its objectives and keep them passionate and motivated; like many other organizations like it, AIAA uses multiple genres to accomplish this goal.

Elected officers play a vital role in making the executive decisions of the organization, collaborating with one another to ensure that all aspects of the club run smoothly and without disarray. One individual that was interviewed about her position was Janna Moses, vice president for AIAA UCF. Joining the club in 2016 through mutual friends, Janna was encouraged to take a leadership position in the spring of 2018, and decided to nominate herself as a candidate for vice president of the

upcoming calendar year at a general body meeting. The election process consisted of her own nomination, which then had to be supported by two or more members. Following her nomination, Janna was obligated to compose a speech prior to the polls opening. In order to accomplish this, she enlisted the help of a former president of the club. She began by writing bullet points on the broader topics and issues of the organization, expanded upon the ones she felt would be most important to the current and upcoming members, and then addressed her plan of action to remedy any problems that the club was facing. Once completed, she brought her speech to the Writing Center to be analyzed and reviewed by fresh eyes. Some of the critiques that the students in the Writing Center noted were to separate some of her longer sentences into two shorter ones to make the speech sound like more of a conversation and less like a book. Similarly, the students suggested that Janna take a more informal approach in her vocabulary and grammar choices, adding contractions and using more casual and everyday diction. After making the advised revisions, Janna executed her speech with ease and composure to gain support for her campaign. Subsequently, elections were held, and votes were tallied.

The votes were done through a Google Form, collaborative with Google Sheets, giving a spreadsheet view of the data collected, making the election process painless and simple. Although the form provides an efficient methodology for counting votes, it is not as professional as the officers would like, but they settle for its less sophisticated layout because it is not utilized enough for it to be a major issue.

One genre used to achieve successful communication is the creation of the Weekly Launch, the newsletter sent out to the mailing subscribers through the software

MailChimp. The club's secretary, Alyssa Sabina, composes the newsletter on a weekly basis, and mentioned that about 1,200 subscribers receive the newsletter in their inbox, however, because it is delivered through this third-party system, most email service providers direct MailChimp into their spam mailbox. Due to this issue, the AIAA is unsatisfied with the system, but continue its use because of its capability to send to a mass medium of subscribers, as compared to other software, such as Gmail, that only allows around 500 on a list at a time.

Contained in the Weekly Launch are member information, current updates, flyers of upcoming projects and events, and one story out of the AIAA National Newsletter that fits their guidelines of new happenings in the aerospace community. The newsletter layout contains a main heading banner with the name of the club and a combination of images including a space shuttle take off and two fighter jets in the air. Immediately below this are sections separated by a main heading enclosed in a blue text box. Some examples of the content are a highlight of an upcoming AIAA UCF social event, important dates in the future, local competitions, outside news in the aviation community, and a promotional paragraph for fundraising, along with a closing logo graphic, and links to the different social media outlets to which the club is affiliated. The tone of the publication is informative and inviting, hoping to inspire and encourage members of the community to remain active and passionate about their activities involved with the club. The officers remove any subject or comment that may be seen as politically, religiously, or otherwise ethically controversial. To decide what content is to be put into the weekly newsletter, the officers discuss what information the members need to be aware of, and combine their ideas into one collective outline.

One of the main genres used by AIAA UCF to more successfully communicate is Slack, a cloud-based proprietary set of communication and collaboration tools. The computer software is also available in a mobile version, and is used by all members of the organization. The Vice President mentioned that one disadvantage of Slack is that the program has to be downloaded by each individual member for them to receive the messages, meaning that if a student is unwilling to add the application to their device, they will go uninformed and uninvolved. However, the program is instrumental in its other aspects of allowing different projects and groups to be organized into separate channels of students involved in those particular factions, as well as the leading general body channel, and officer channel. Janna noted that she finds the separation of personal and school life beneficial in keeping herself organized. She also commented on her tone in the app, recognizing that her tone in Slack is more formal when sending out announcements to the group as opposed to messaging an individual directly.

After conducting an interview with Jethro Suarez, yet another genre was discovered to be used in the overall running of the organization. As Fundraising Coordinator, Jethro is responsible for ensuring that AIAA UCF has as many opportunities to raise funds throughout the year as possible. Whether those opportunities are partial proceed events with local restaurants, or even working UCF related events, Jethro is in constant communication with those he is seeking sponsorship from. He indicates that he first calls to ask if the corporation is interested in working with them, and then confirms their interest with a very formally written email. The approval process for these companies and events includes communicating with the officer team through the aforementioned Slack program, if they think the idea will

provide profit for the organization, the executive board members permit him to go through with it. Although he is not personally responsible for communicating these events to the members of the club, he does disclose that he shares posts on his personal social media accounts to inform his friends.

Through my interview with Jethro, he divulged his use of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to organize data from each fundraiser. The use of Excel helps to separate each fundraising event and its earnings, providing a useful tool when comparing each year's fundraising events to the last to determine which were the most successful and that should be repeated in upcoming years. Another usage of the spreadsheets are in the projects executed by the club members. Specifically, for the project leads, they can separate each team member by their status, position, and assigned tasks within the particular project they are participating in. Inventory of the materials used in the projects are kept organized by spreadsheets as well, and are used for future teams to decide which materials are most effective mechanically and financially.

When first approaching a new organization, club, sport, or other community of practice, one is not always aware of the numerous genres that are used within these communities, and without them, the fluidity and arrangement can fall into complete chaos. That is why this research was so entertaining and eye-opening to approach the organization from an outsider's perspective. Genres provide outlets for the essential transfer of ideas and beliefs that shape the principles and purposes of each association that they are utilized in. Any and all forms of communication play a major role in ensuring that all members of the community are informed, involved, and aware of all events and procedures so they are able to play their part as an active member in

society. Through my interviews and research, I was able to not only develop a deeper understanding of the word “genre”, and of the club itself, but I refined my comprehension of the importance of communication in this fast-paced, ever-changing, world that we live in today.

Works Cited

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