You would be hard pressed to find a communicative problem in the workplace—broadly defined—that would fall outside of the scope of interest or relevance to those in professional and technical communication (P&TC). The scope of the field is so broad, as it is in rhetoric, that some think it more useful to consider the questions driving the research in the field than it is to think about identifying the contours of its academic existence. For this, we have Carolyn Rude, who asserts that research in technical communication asks questions that are variations of this central one:

> How do texts (print, digital, multimedia, visual, verbal) and related communication practices mediate knowledge, values, and action in a variety of social and professional contexts?

Great—we have a question! (And that's a great way to start.) Mind you, this question is encompassing, which is almost a necessity in such an interdisciplinary field that borrows methods from various fields such as education, psychology, computer science, rhetoric and composition, design communication, and speech communication. Rude also asserts that such a question must be *suggestive* about the nature of the field without being *constraining*; she further claims that questions are a strong way to start to think about disciplinary identity, as it adds legitimacy and consensus to the field.

But, this is just one way to think about how the field is understood. Rude is an academic researcher, and as such her approach to making sense of the field might not translate to the other side of the spectrum—practitioners. While its coherent academic existence might seem elusive, those employed in workplaces with a P&TC-related title might feel more certain about their existence: their job is to make workplace communication streams more efficient and clear and their communicative infrastructures more facilitative, whatever the context. Practitioners might not define themselves by what they *ask*, but what they *do*: "I improve communicative practices in my workplace."

This brief introduction has hinted at three core issues that shape much of the scholarship in P&TC and that will drive my presentation tonight; let's use alliteration, because mnemonics:

1) **Definitions**: why P&TC and not technical writing?
2) **Disciplinarity**: where does such an interdisciplinary field "belong"?
3) **Doings**: how do academics and practitioners work together?

This alliterative list, like Rude's question, is suggestive but inevitably constraining: there exists ample literature in the field outside of these considerations. But these issues shaped—*and continue to shape*—the field and are useful as a heuristic for understanding just what the heck gets done in the equal parts productive and amorphous field of P&TC.