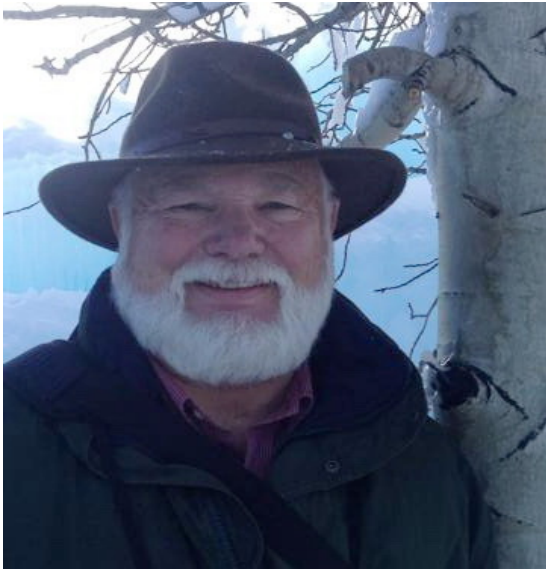




BIG energy seminar series

Addressing the scale and complexity of the global energy challenge.



Enhancing the Study of Renewable Energy Through Communication Scholarship

David E. Hicks, Ph.D.

National Renewable Energy Laboratory

Date: Wednesday, April 2, 2014 at 12:30 pm

Location: Center for Community (C4C), Flatirons Room

Abstract:

In 2012, the Department of Communication at the University of Colorado at Boulder (CU-Boulder) was presented with the opportunity to directly contribute to the work of the Renewable and Sustainable Energy Institute (RASEI), a partnership between CU-Boulder and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL). RASEI is an internationally-known and respected site of research into renewable energy science, technology, economics, social issues, and education. Within this context, a study was commissioned by the communication department to identify distinctive contributions that communication scholars can make to the study of topics and issues associated with renewable and alternative energy.

As the principal investigator for this study, I employed a broad survey approach using selected literature in renewable energy and communication studies. This work was further informed by autoethnographic insights I gained through my twenty-year career in technical communication at NREL. I suggest that significant contributions can be made by scholars interrogating selected points of nexus between the fields of communication studies and renewable energy that offer the potential for particularly meaningful interactions.

Specifically, communication scholars can enhance renewable energy studies by

- exploring scientific and technical knowledge creation within this research setting using theories of constitutive communication;
- probing boundaries among and within scientific, technical, and nontechnical fields to seek definitional understanding of science and non-science and how arguments translate across fields to influence knowledge and behavior;
- and by employing critical theory in studying the interplay of power and participation within renewable energy and particularly in areas of behavioral change and policy setting.

A formal field of “energy communication” does not exist at present, nor is there a significant body of work in this area; so I further suggest that scholars investigating these areas can come from existing academic specialties such as the rhetoric of science and technology, critical theory, and organizational communication, particularly those who have worked with high-technology organizational cultures and who are highly motivated to become engaged in the complex and vital world of renewable energy.

Bio:

David Hicks is recently retired from his twenty-year career at the U.S. Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) in Golden, Colorado. As Senior Technical Communicator, and in previous leadership positions with NREL's Office of Technical Communication, Dr. Hicks has provided project leadership, web development, video production, and writing skills for many communication projects within the Energy Department's various renewable energy and energy efficient programs.

Prior to joining NREL, he worked for eight years as a communication consultant, producing industry research studies, business plans, and marketing/business development materials. He has over 20 years of experience in line and staff positions in the environmental, energy, and construction industries. While at NREL, David earned a Ph.D. in communication from the University of Colorado at Boulder, and he holds a Masters in Business Administration degree from Southern Methodist University and a Bachelor of Science degree in geology from San Diego State University.

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