*Special Brownbag event:  
Tuesday October 10 // 11am-12pm EB 107  
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Combining Corpus Linguistics and Qualitative Interviews to Research and Teach Writing in the Disciplines

In this brown bag session, I will use examples from the Civil Engineering Writing Project to demonstrate the usefulness of integrating large-scale, quantitative corpus analyses and intensive, qualitative interviews when investigating writing in the disciplines. In the project we use corpus linguistics techniques to identify differences between writing by practitioners in the workplace and students in undergraduate courses. We conduct interviews of students, practitioners, and faculty to understand reasons behind those differences and to identify how we can help students be better prepared for writing in engineering workplaces. The quantitative analyses have exposed some unexpected, systematic differences, and the interviews have revealed some surprising beliefs and practices underlying those differences. The combined perspectives help us design more effective teaching materials than would either approach alone, allowing us to tie language and organizational choices explicitly to the discipline and to professional practice.

Susan Conrad is a professor of applied linguistics at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. She originally became interested in corpus linguistics from being an English as a Second Language teacher in Africa and seeing books that taught students ineffective, decontextualized language. For many years now she has used corpus linguistics in studies of English grammar and discourse, including in the co-authored books Register, Genre, and Style; the Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English; and Corpus Linguistics: Investigation Language Structure and Use. In 2009, she began the Civil Engineering Writing Project, in which engineering faculty, workplace practitioners and applied linguists collaborate to improve the preparation of students to write in the workplace. Her work on engineering writing has appeared in the Journal of Engineering Education and the Journal of Business and Technical Communication.