The Liberal Arts Program presents

Liberal Arts Guest Speaker Series 13-14

“Erasive Rhetoric and Communities at Risk”

Dr. Sam Dragga

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ABSTRACT INFO:
The risk to the safety, identity, and vitality of a community is important for every citizen with a dangerous neighbor, be it military installations, oil refineries, nuclear power facilities, fertilizer factories, airports, or train stations. The historical case of Port Chicago, California—a failed relationship of a military facility and its neighboring civilian community—offers important lessons regarding the nefarious practice of erasive rhetoric and the missed opportunities for cultivating cooperation and communication. Using discourse analysis to review pertinent written communications across a 25-year period, this presentation will identify a series of rhetorical techniques damaging to the safety, identity, and vitality of a community: name-changing, dismissive and derogatory descriptions, passive voice, negative claims, tactical omissions, and elaborate detail, separately and collectively, serve to fortify the source of danger while erasing the object of danger. This provocative and still timely case challenges us to do better—to bring together officials from military, industrial, and transportation facilities with the residents of neighboring cities for instructive and productive interactions that generate trust, save lives, and preserve communities.

BIO:
Sam Dragga is professor of technical communication at Texas Tech University (Lubbock, Texas). He is co-author of Essentials of Technical Communication (Oxford University Press, 2010, 2012); A Writer’s Repertoire 1, 2, and 3 (Cengage Learning, 2010); Reporting Technical Information (Oxford University Press, 2006, 2002); and Editing: The Design of Rhetoric (Baywood, 1989) as well as editor of two special issues of Technical Communication Quarterly and series editor of the Allyn & Bacon Series in Technical Communication (19 titles). He has also authored or co-authored a score of journal articles on such topics as professional ethics and intercultural communication. He is a Fellow of the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing and a recipient of the Society for Technical Communication’s Award for Excellence in Teaching Technical Communication and the National Council of Teachers of English Award for Best Book in Technical and Scientific Communication.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Khadija ElCadi
Khadija.elcadi@qatar.tamu.edu
Phone: 4423.0145