Jamal-Jared Alexander, a third-year Presidential Doctoral Research Fellow in the Technical Communication and Rhetoric program at Utah State University, recently presented the results of a summer research internship on Zoom. The project investigated the application processes for graduate Technical & Professional Communication (TPC) programs, examining the ways in which those processes exclude minority applicants. For each university in his study, Alexander performed a mixed-methods approach, pulling data from the university’s website and also interviewing enrolled students. Through his work, he found institutions often lacked the necessary information and guidance that would otherwise allow students from diverse backgrounds to apply and be accepted. In his presentation, Alexander recommended that programs seeking greater inclusive practices in application procedures should consider 1) conducting applicant interviews as a way to allow students to speak and show their brilliance; 2) allowing students to put together a multimodality project in terms of spoken word, research, and visual elements; 3) taking a holistic approach with every applicant; and 4) providing a Q&A section on the website. The data collected from this research study should encourage TPC graduate program administrators to change their ways of thinking when dealing with the graduate application process. Moreover, each participant in his study took pride in sharing insider knowledge that will hopefully help applicants of color who are in need of tools to successfully navigate academic institutions since many lack that knowledge as first-generation college students.

In his effort to combat the rigidity of traditional application processes that limit potential applicants, Jamal-Jared targets his research to TPC administrators who are looking to diversify their student cohorts, to minority students of color who tend to lack insider knowledge about graduate school, and to predominantly white institutions and historically black universities and colleges that are looking to enact inclusive strategies. Additionally, he hopes that his research can open new doors of possibilities for recruitment and retention strategies, not just for universities but for corporations as well. His presentation and promise for future research are timely and present actionable recommendations that programs can take. Jamal-Jared also plans to use this project as a part of his dissertation research where he will look to place this information in one of what he calls his two buckets: Recruitment and Retention.