

# Researching a New Professional Writing Major: Miami University

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**Abstract.** In 2011 Miami University combined an undergraduate major in Scientific and Technical Communication and an undergraduate minor in Rhetoric and Writing to create a new Professional Writing major that now enrolls approximately 200 students. This profile details how research into institutional enrollment data, student perceptions, and direct assessment of student writing contributed to the development and ongoing growth of the major. Program curriculum is shared in Appendix A.

**Keywords:** enrollment data, new major, professional writing, program research, survey research

Research is essential for any program in order to design and build the best program, to meet program goals, to engage in program promotion, and to argue for more resources. For new programs, research is even more essential because of the greater need for data to promote the program to many stakeholders including faculty colleagues, prospective students (and their parents), potential employers, community partners, and university administrators. In this profile, I will discuss the design, deployment, and result reporting of survey, assessment, and enrollment research that colleagues and I conducted on a new Professional Writing major at Miami University. I will then reflect on the areas of research we yet need to pursue.

## **Background: Program Origins and Overview**

In 2011, rhetoric and writing faculty at Miami University substantially revised our BA in Scientific and Technical Communication (STC) into a BA in Professional Writing (PW), integrating the curriculum and faculty resources from what had been—at the undergraduate level—the separate programs of STC and Composition and Rhetoric. The key drivers for the change were

the declining enrollments of the STC degree coupled with recognition of the changing dynamic of the broad field of professional writing studies.

As I have discussed elsewhere, (McKee, in press; Johnson, Zemliansky, & McKee, 2014), the STC degree was a rigorous degree that required, in part, that students take 18 hours of specialization in environmental science, biological science, or computer science. While this science requirement produced really strong technical writers (STC's job placement was 100 percent), given enrollments (our only data point), it seemed likely that the major was too narrow to appeal to a larger portion of Miami's undergraduate population. Miami has around 16,000 undergraduates on the Oxford campus, and in 2010 the STC major had 16 majors, whereas majors such as Journalism and Strategic Communication had over 900 students enrolled. Clearly, Miami students were interested in forms of professional communication, but just not STC as it was currently configured.

In addition, in 2010, given the "great recession" in the U.S. economy and its impact on the university budget, campus administrators were looking for any and all cost-cutting measures, including cutting low-enrolled programs. Already, in 2009, Miami's MS in STC had been cut because of low enrollments. Facing these issues, in Fall 2010, colleagues and I in rhetoric and writing—our new umbrella term for what had been interrelated but separate programs: a major in STC and a minor in Rhetoric and Writing—proposed revising STC into a new major in PW that would expand the curricular offerings of STC and that would bring all rhetoric and writing faculty in the department together to teach in one major.

We chose the name for the revised major after much discussion (see also McKee, in press; Johnson, Zemliansky, & McKee, 2014). Writing as part of the title was easy—decided in just a few minutes—because that is what united all the areas of study we wanted to offer in the new degree, including areas we are currently developing. We decided that technical communication would be a track within the major. We also knew we wanted to make it clear to students that the focus of the degree was on various professional communication outcomes, and we decided that professional encompassed STC but also included other areas. We chose not to put rhetoric in the title for purely marketing purposes. Given that we were starting a major with an enrollment of zero and would be under incredible pressure to deliver results, we didn't want to risk scaring off even one student given how misunderstood rhetoric is by so many. We surmised, correctly as I will show, that *Professional Writing* would resonate well with students.

Our PW major is housed in an English department that has three primary majors (English-Literature, English-Creative Writing, Professional Writing) and one interdisciplinary major (Linguistics). Notice that our degree program is a BA in Professional Writing, not a BA in English-Professional Writing. This is a significant difference in terms of curriculum because it enabled and continues to enable us to argue for courses and requirements that are best practices for a *writing* major rather than an English (read literature) major. Literature and professional writing are separate fields, and while they share many synergistic connections, these connections are no more paramount than, say, the connections we share with interactive media studies, marketing, strategic communication, creative writing, linguistics, and journalism. Thus, rather than having any required literature courses in our major, we have open electives in English.

Specifically, the curriculum of the new 42-credit hour degree (see Appendix A) is built with a 15-hour core, 15 hours of track courses, and 12 hours of open electives in English that can be courses from any program at the 200-level and above. Importantly for a BA in Professional Writing, the required core courses in the major are all writing courses. The four track options are as follows:

- Digital and Technical Communication
- Editing
- Public Writing and Rhetoric
- Self-Designed

These tracks are anchored by required rhetoric and writing courses (e.g., Technical Writing, Print and Digital Editing, Grant Writing) and include elective options drawn from rhetoric and writing and from other fields. Depending on their goals and interests and how they design their major, students may choose to take all rhetoric and writing courses or anywhere from 3–18 hours in a number of other related areas including creative writing, interactive media studies, journalism, linguistics, and literature. In addition students may petition up to six hours from other departments in the university to count in the major, an especially popular option for students pursuing self-designed tracks, such as Writing for the Arts or Writing for Marketing (the latter being a popular self-designed track for double majors with marketing).

Our PW curriculum is continually evolving as our program grows and as we seek to keep the program responsive to changes in the field. In addition to revisions to curricula within specific courses, in the past few years we have added many new courses (e.g., Rhetoric of Information and

Data Visualization, Legal Writing, Digital Publishing, Medical Writing, Writing for Global Audiences), and we are working on designing a new track in Intercultural Rhetoric and Global Writing. The focused but flexible curriculum of our major has been essential for building a robust degree program and for increasing enrollments so now we are on the verge of being the largest major in the department—as I will discuss below.

When we proposed the revised degree, many of our colleagues in English (those not in rhetoric and writing) were skeptical that the program would succeed given the years of low enrollments in STC, so they asked that a third-year review be conducted of the major to ensure that, in their words, the department was not saddled with a “low-performing program.”

We understood our colleagues’ concern, and we welcomed the opportunity to review and report on the major. We also recognized that although our degree is not an English degree, we are in an English department, and all program budget decisions—faculty lines, lab expenditures, etc.—were English decisions. So for the good of both the major and our relations within English, it behooved us to build the strongest possible major so our program would not be perceived as “low-performing.” Ironically, now that we’ve designed a vibrant and growing major and now that PW is one of the largest majors in the department, suddenly our strong performance is viewed—by some in English—as a threat, but that’s a topic for an entirely different article.

As the founding director of the major for its first three years (the program is now directed by Gabriele Bechtel), I worked closely with colleagues to develop the major. We first met frequently as rhetoric and writing faculty to draft out a framework; then we met with colleagues in other programs to design the major. After the initial curriculum was designed and approved, our top priority was recruiting students, with other high priorities being to build new curriculum, to hire and support well-qualified faculty, to foster community and corporate partnerships for client-based coursework (a key component of the curriculum), and to connect students with internships and job opportunities in for-profit and non-profit organizations.

We also prioritized communicating and publicizing results of the major, placing articles about the program with various university communications teams and writing annual reports for the department and the dean. As some of our data will show, we have laid the foundation for a successful major, and as a young major (about to begin its sixth year), it is doing well. But there is, as always, much room for improvement and still so much research to do.

## Researching a New Major

As program administrators our definition of *research* necessarily needs to be broad. In their review of writing program administration (WPA) research in the introduction to *The Writing Program Administrator as Researcher*, Shirley Rose & Irwin Weiser (1999) offer a list of the elements of WPA research, which I quote and paraphrase here. Program research is defined by the following characteristics:

- Developed from local needs and questions but connects with broader field questions
- Informed by current theory and previous research
- Engaged with WPA discourse
- Worthwhile and ethical
- Circulated within the institution and perhaps more broadly
- Multi-methodological
- Documented in program records
- Used to make decisions about whether and how to change programs

Too often a lot of what we do as program administrators *is* research, but sometimes we don't see it or frame it that way. This failure to position our work as research stems in part, I think because so much of WPA work is focused inward—building and sustaining a program for local contexts—that we can forget how the local connects to the broader field. But a lot of small-n studies pulled together weave an important fabric of where we are as a field and where we could be. For this reason, I firmly believe that program research *is* research. Work that we do such as outcomes assessment, institutional data reporting, and surveying employers about our interns' performance is all research, and we need to be sure to acknowledge and draw from that. Fortunately, in many publication venues, including in *Programmatic Perspectives*, we have a lot of program profiles and articles on program research that are especially helpful for thinking about ways to use research to build programs.

In my discussion for this profile, I focus on some key areas that colleagues and I have researched: institutional enrollment and staffing data, qualitative surveys of students, and curricular assessment. In the end, I reflect on all the research areas we have not yet begun to pursue, including researching key stakeholders such as employers and program graduates.

## Institutional Research: Enrollments

Administrators of programs need to know historical, current, and projected enrollments (both numbers of majors and enrollments per course) so as to share that information for various purposes with various audiences and to gain insights into trends in the broader university population. Table 1 shows our PW enrollments over the first five years of the program.

**Table 1. Enrollment Growth of Miami University’s Professional Writing (PW) Major**

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016 (Feb)
<b>Number of Majors</b>	0	48	91	126	158	176

For a new major at a mid-size school (Miami’s undergraduate enrollment is just over 16,000), these increasing enrollments are a key measure of program success to show various stakeholders. For example, do you need to explain to the chair and dean why your program needs more faculty? Is a potential employer wondering if it is worth recruiting students from your program? Is a prospective student wondering whether to pursue this new major? In all these cases, pointing to enrollments as at least one part of the argument is tremendously helpful. Enrollment numbers do not tell the whole story, but they are an essential part of the story.

For our track-based major, it is also helpful to gather information on track-enrollments because we need to know how many students select each track. It varies from year-to-year but generally averages between 25–30% in Digital & Technical Communication, Editing, and Public Writing and Rhetoric respectively and about 10–15% in Self-Designed.

When we proposed the tracks, some colleagues in the department, including writing colleagues, did not want to have tracks; they wanted to have a major with a giant list of elective options. But as those of us who advocated for tracks argued—and as has been borne out in part by student enrollments and student perspectives shared in surveys—the tracks are a key part of the curriculum design because they enable students to identify a clear area of specialization in the broad and diverse field of professional writing studies. Tracks help students understand the major better, their location in the major; and their own distinct emphasis area. The tracks offer an important part of teaching them about the major, showing them that the major has a clear identity with clear specialties within it. Showing that students are distributing across the tracks has been helpful in arguing for keeping tracks.

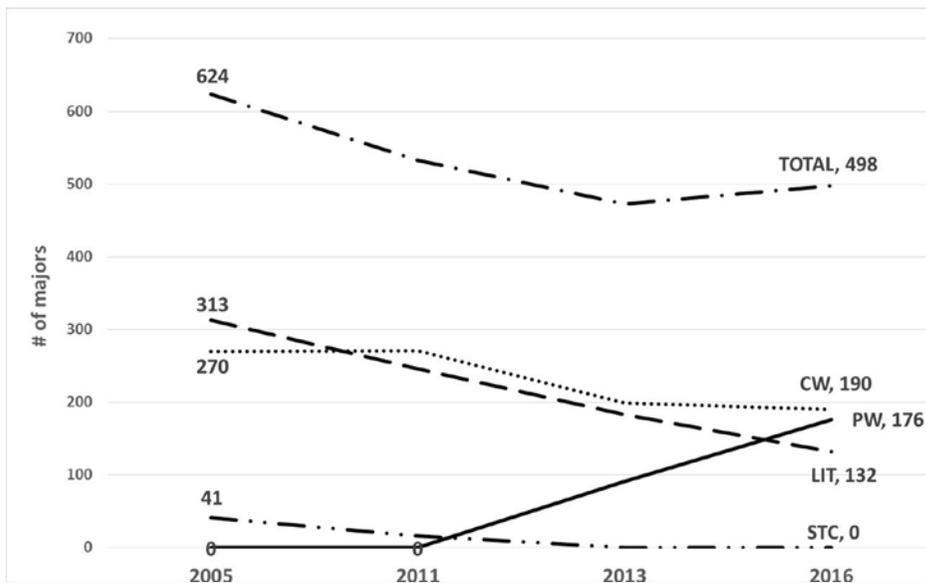
It has also been useful to gather data on the number of double majors. At Miami University, approximately 25% of students double major. We tracked the number of double majors in the PW program, particularly the number of double majors across divisions to show the range and draw of the major. As of 2016, approximately 32% of our PW majors are double majors with most of those double majors coming from within the College of Arts and Sciences (Journalism, Strategic Communication, Creative Writing, Literature), and some coming from other divisions, especially the College of Education and the Farmer School of Business.

At the same time that the PW major has grown, the majors in Literature in particular have declined, leading some to argue that having a PW major hurts Literature (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Enrollments in Certain Majors, 2005-2016**

	2005	2011	2013	2016
<b>Creative Writing (CW)</b>	270	271	199	190
<b>Literature (LIT)</b>	313	246	183	132
<b>Professional Writing (PW)</b>	n/a	0	91	176
<b>Scientific and Technical (STC)</b>	41	16	n/a	n/a
<b>Total Across Programs</b>	<b>624</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>473</b>	<b>498</b>

When we surveyed students in 2014 and asked them what major they would be if the PW major were not available, 10% (5 of 48 respondents) said Literature, 8% said Creative Writing and the other 82% said other degrees such as Marketing, Strategic Communication, Interactive Media Studies, Political Science, etc. While certainly the creation of the PW major did attract some students who would otherwise be Literature majors, this number is small (fewer than 10 students) when compared to the enrollment drop in Literature of over 100 students since the creation of the PW major. PW at Miami has also drawn a lot more students to be majors into the department overall. And in an era of tight budgets and the accompanying scrutiny of department enrollments overall, the addition of PW to the English department has had a net positive effect on enrollments as shown in Table 2 and Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Number of majors in Creative Writing (CW), Literature, (LIT), Professional Writing (PW), and Scientific and Technical Communication (STC), 2005-2016**

And, finally, it's useful to track course enrollments. At Miami University any course not enrolling at capacity (20–23 for our writing courses) is looked at closely and courses with fewer than 12 students are cancelled. Fortunately in our program, except for the first year offering a new course, we have not had any under-enrolled courses. But we still watch enrollments carefully because under-enrollment can point to a number of issues, including problems with the course scheduling time (the Friday late afternoon death knell), a disconnect between the course focus and curricular needs of students, or even an instructor who may be struggling a bit with the curriculum of that particular course and needs more mentoring and support. It can also simply point to a failure in marketing a course effectively. Not many students come into the university knowing what usability is or with a burning desire to study the rhetoric of data visualization, but with robust marketing that emphasizes that if you're going to be a professional writer in any field, you want to develop knowledge in these areas, all courses can be fully enrolled or close to it. Keeping a close eye on enrollments is another important form of administrative research, especially if your upper administration is concerned about revenue generation.

Collecting precise enrollment data is directly relevant to revenue and budget concerns. At Miami University, our budget model is now responsibility-centered management (RCM), which has many components,

but the basic premise, as I understand it, is that money is allocated to programs that are generating revenue versus programs that are “underperforming” and require subsidies. When a student signs up for a course, 25% of the revenue for their credit hours goes to the division of the students’ primary major, and 75% goes to the division that is providing the instructor of record. For revenue concerns, it matters where a student comes from in the university.

Thus, in addition to keeping close track of PW majors in our classes, we also track non-PW majors who come from outside the College of Arts and Science. All of the College of Engineering students taking Technical Writing, all of the College of Creative Arts students taking Digital Writing and Rhetoric, and all of the Farmer School of Business students taking Business Communication are important, not just for curricular planning, but for budgeting concerns. Knowing how much gross and net revenue a course generates under various staffing models is another helpful bit of data to have, especially when arguing for more hires and resources.

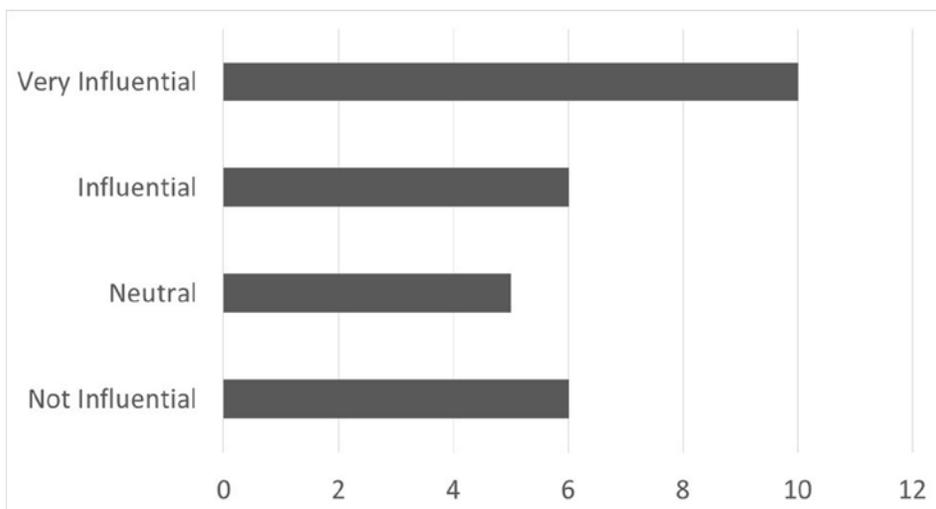
Thank goodness, however, the most important work we do in our programs is not tracking revenue-generation, but actually teaching and working with students. Thus, from my perspective, it is the research into student experiences and learning that is most important.

### **Student Perspectives**

In order to build the best possible teaching and learning environments for students, we absolutely need their perspectives. They, more than anyone else, know the program and what, for them, has been its strengths, its weaknesses, and its areas of omission, etc.

In our third year, once we had enough majors, some who had been in the program a year or two, we surveyed majors about their experiences in the program (early Spring 2014, n=51). We surveyed students again in the fifth year (mid-Fall 2015, n=71). The surveys were administered anonymously using an online survey program (Qualtrics), and students consented to allow their anonymous responses to be quoted and reported.

One question we asked students was if they knew about the PW major before applying to Miami University. If the answer was yes, they were asked another question: How influential was the PW major on your decision to come to Miami? In the 2014 survey, nine of 51 respondents said they knew of the major before applying, and four said the major was “very influential” and two said “influential” on their decision to come to Miami. However, in just the next year, in the 2015 survey, 27 of 71 respondents knew of the major, and of those 10 said the major was “very influential” and six said “influential” on their decision to come to Miami (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2. The impact of the PW major on student university enrollment decisions**

Data such as that seen in Figure 2 helps us show the positive impact our major is having on broader university admissions. This set of data also points to ways we could increase information distribution to admissions. In the first two years of the major, we sent information about the new major to all 200+ first-year advisors, so they could tell their advisees about it. But what we haven't done and we could certainly do more of, is reach out to admissions to tell them about the major. As one of the few BAs in PW at a public university in Ohio, we have a lot to market to prospective students.

In response to an open-ended question, why did you choose PW?, students identified a number of reasons: their love of writing (coupled often with how other areas of writing, such as creative writing, and journalism, wasn't what they were seeking); their particular professional goals; and their appreciation of the focused flexibility of the major. Here are a few representative examples (drawn from the most recent survey):

- I chose the Professional Writing major because it fit well with my interests in writing and allowed for a lot of versatility and flexibility in my course of study.
- I wanted to do business, and professional writing let me mesh together my business goals and love for writing.
- I wouldn't have chosen Miami without the PW program—the likes of which was not replicated at the other schools I was looking at.
- This program is incredible because it has allowed me to build a real-world skill set as a writer/artist/creative that is extremely valuable in

many professional contexts. I love the flexibility of the PW major and its ability to prepare you for a huge variety of career tracks, especially because I see myself changing job titles frequently.

- It was the closest match to what I want to do in a career
- Because I like to write and I want to be able to write a variety of genres in a variety of platforms
- I love to write and knew I wanted to major in something related to this. I first tried Media Studies/Strategic Communication, but realized this wasn't exactly the path I wanted to take. Then I switched to journalism but decided that that major was too narrow for me. With PW, I get the best of everything!
- I wanted to learn more about the business/technical aspects of writing.

We also asked students what they see as the strengths of the major based on their experiences so far in the program. In addition to the overwhelming response in favor of the flexibility, students noted the strengths of the interdisciplinarity, of the experiential learning gained in community-based projects, and of the value of learning rhetoric.

- The diversity of the professional writing program. While at Miami, I had the opportunity to take creative writing, journalism, communications, and marketing-based courses. Jobs I have interviewed and applied for love the diversity of the major.
- I like how flexible the major is. I've taken many courses in different departments that also counted toward my Professional Writing major
- The rhetoric program is very phenomenal
- COMMUNITY PARTNERS/CLIENTS IN CLASS PROJECTS!
- Its versatility. To date, I have held jobs/internships in journalism, marketing, advertising, and PR. All of the companies were impressed with my Professional Writing major and IMS [Interactive Media Studies] minor and felt it was a unique strength that I had not only accumulated a great deal of project experience, but also came in with stellar writing skills. Both of these things I can fully attribute to my major.
- I very much enjoy this major. I find the majority of my courses to contain highly valuable information that I feel adds to my overall skill as a writer, critical thinker, and intelligent contributor in the

modern world. I like that my classes teach me the skills I need to get by in this profession. I have discovered several paths that I never knew were open to me. I like that this is a broad and inclusive major while still offering very specific options to specialize in one or a few interests.

- Based on my experience to date, the strengths I see of the major are an effective presentation of the theories of classical rhetoric.

Having these student voices to share with all the stakeholders in program building has been very helpful. Every year when I directed the program, I wrote a short report to the department chair and division dean about the major, and I always included some student quotes. Given how doubtful upper administration is when faculty in their own program tout the strengths of their program, it is helpful to also have the student perspectives. What students have to say about the major is, as it should be, far more important, ultimately, than anything we as faculty have to say.

Students also have excellent insights into what could be better in the major. In our third-year survey, students noted a number of areas for improvement, including that they would like to see more course work in editing and publishing. In the editing track we only had three classes specifically focused on editing and publishing—a rhetoric and writing editing and journalism editing course and a creative writing course on the “literary marketplace.” Based on student feedback, my colleague, Tim Lockridge, developed a new course in digital publishing where students work with non-profit academic presses to create e-book versions of either print or web-delivered publications.

## **Curriculum and Student Learning Assessment**

**Informal assessment.** Assessment is an important form of research and absolutely essential for program building. But not all assessments need to be formal. Sometimes, especially when building a new program, informal assessments are also crucial. At Miami, the PW faculty will periodically get together and discuss the curriculum, considering courses and assignments and looking informally at where and how and even if various program outcomes are being taught. From these discussions we have created a number of new courses, revised the content of others, and we are now in the midst of revising our core courses and adding a fifth track to our major because we realize we aren’t doing enough to address an important outcome for the major.

One outcome we have always had in the program is to “Write effectively in a variety of professional genres for specific purposes, contexts, and audiences, *including multicultural and global contexts and*

*audiences.*" While we have the first half of that outcome well covered, we haven't done so well in the latter half. Some courses in the core have integrated course outcomes around intercultural communication, and we do have an elective course, Writing for Global Audiences, but what we realized in our informal reviews is that our approach to teaching global writing and intercultural rhetoric is hit-or-miss; we can't say with confidence that every student is gaining enough in that area.

This omission is a problem we recognized for a number of reasons including broader changes occurring at the university, in professional workplaces, and in civic communities. In 2013, Miami revised its general liberal education program into the new Global Miami Plan requiring that all students have global experiences, either through six hours of coursework on campus or through study abroad programs. In addition, Miami's international student population has been steadily increasing from less than 1% in 2005 to about 12% in 2015. In the PW major, as of 2016, fewer than 3% of majors are international students whereas in majors such as accountancy and finance the numbers are over 10%. This low number reflects how international students at Miami are drawn to STEM and business areas of study, but it also points, we think, to limitations in our own program. In terms of the workplace, global competencies and intercultural communication have always been important, but they are even more so with digital, networked technologies. And, finally, as evidenced by distressing and long-standing issues around intercultural miscommunication in the U.S. (and the world), as educators we need to do all that we can to promote greater understanding and communications across cultural differences.

To that end, then, we are making changes in two areas. First, we are revisiting the courses in the PW core to more systematically identify where and how global writing and intercultural rhetoric can and will be woven into the courses, changes that don't require running through all the curriculum committees but that do require a lot of meetings and discussions to ensure that all instructors—tenure-line, visiting, and doctoral students—are prepared to and are including this focus when teaching the core courses. Second, we are working on building a new track in the major on Intercultural Rhetoric and Global Writing. The preliminary proposal in this track has already shaped our hiring, and with new faculty in place specializing in this area, we hope to soon begin the curriculum approval process.

I realize that this example may not look like formal research—and it is certainly not an empirical study—but it is an important type of informal research, critical and self-reflective research that programs must continually engage in—call it continuous quality improvement. Getting together to share and map out what is taught where and tracing a

particular outcome through the major is helpful. Of course, this is from the faculty perspective, and what is important as well is to trace student learning from direct assessment of student work, both longitudinally (which we haven't done, a point I discuss in the closing) and snapshot points in time.

**Formal assessment.** Ideally we would be assessing student learning throughout our major, but with all that we have had to do building the major, we have not been able to engage in such in-depth assessment, but we have engaged in some. For the past three years we have collected two major writing projects from every PW senior enrolled in our required senior capstones. As shown in their writing to specialist and non-specialist audiences, we asked, What can our senior students do well? Where do they need more support?

Because of the diversity of our two capstone options and the requirements of the CAS writing assessment, we did not aim to assess every outcome of our major, but rather we focused on some foundational outcomes that could be assessed in a direct assessment of writing. At the senior-level, when writing for various audiences, can students organize their writing, make an effective argument, address audience(s), meet genre conventions, and demonstrate effective copyediting of their work appropriately for audience(s), purpose(s), and context(s)?

The capstones are also taken by Rhetoric and Writing minors, but our assessment focused on the PW majors. We collected two writing samples from every PW major in the class—for team projects, we collected the single team product. Community projects in the capstones have included creating a web site for a local YWCA, a brochure for a nature sanctuary, signage and displays for a museum, and a video for the county Special Olympics. Where possible, we de-identified the writing (including media) for student names, but in our record keeping we did label the writing so we could track student 1 for both sample A (specialist) and sample B (non-specialist). Because we still have a relatively small number of seniors each year (nine in 2012–13, 27 in 2014–15), every artifact was read by two faculty members who were not the instructors of the capstones. They had one criteria-based rubric for the specialist writing and one for the non-specialist writing. For team projects, we read and scored the team writing and then entered the score in the spreadsheet for each criterion per each individual. Scores were on a 4-point scale, meets to the highest level, meets, minimally meets, and fails to meet.

In the first year, we were distressed at how low the scores were—all in the low 2s and some in the 1s. Because the students had only been in the major two years (transferring in as juniors and then taking 42 hours of the major in a whirlwind two or three semesters), we looked at the enrollment in the capstones that year and found that most of the majors were taking

the capstone before taking or while simultaneously taking foundational core courses. So one change we made from this assessment was to put some prerequisites on our capstones, requiring students to take foundational core courses before enrolling in the senior level course. We didn't put prerequisites in place at first because we knew we had to make the major as easy as possible to complete in order to gain enrollments in those first years. Since making that change and since gaining more majors who have started the major from their first or second year, and have more time to immerse themselves in PW studies, the scores have gone up to the 3s in most areas.

This senior-level assessment has had a number of other benefits for our major in identifying areas where students need more support and helping us change curricula, but what we also need is more fine-grained assessment to track student learning more directly through the courses in the major. We also need to do more research on placement and career selection for our majors because the research we have done to date has been good, but certainly not enough.

## **Avenues for Further Program Research**

Readers with well-established majors will, at this point, be shaking their heads at all we have not done for program research. But it is important to recognize that when building a new program there is only so much that can be done, so prioritizing research is key. For programs that are strapped for resources, as ours has increasingly become because the number of majors outpaces the number of permanent faculty, it is especially important to prioritize because faculty members only have so much time, and there is only so much that can be done. Given that we started with zero majors, our first and primary goal was to get students; find out about their experiences in the program; identify any significant gaps in the curriculum and address them through revisions to existing courses; the creation of new courses, or even more significant changes, such as the creation of a new track; and finally to make a start on assessing student learning more formally. Our next avenues for program research are many.

Working with Miami's Career Services, we need to do a better job of collecting data on job placement and career selection for our majors. We did ask students in the surveys if they held an internship or if they have graduated and have a job, to list the name of the organization and their position title. But even with a relatively strong response rate (>50%), many students are still not accounted for. Unfortunately, Career Services only tracks graduating seniors, thus we need to figure out a more systematic system for tracking internships and jobs held by students during their

years of study. We need this data for a number of reasons: (1) to continue to be able to showcase the program to administrators, colleagues, prospective students, and potential employers; (2) to consider placement in relation to our curricular offerings; and (3) to build stronger community and corporate partnerships—including alumni networks—so as to extend the profile of our program and to provide more opportunities for students. In terms of curricular offerings, we found that many of our students are getting positions in social media marketing. In addition to the courses we already list as electives in the major from Marketing and Interactive Media Studies (Social Media Marketing and Digital Branding), we are in the process of developing, in collaboration with Creative Writing and Marketing, a possible new course on copywriting for Marketing and a new client-based, study abroad program for Marketing and PW students that we hope to launch in 2018.

We also need to conduct research with our community class partners and with organizations that have hired PW students as interns or employees. What strengths do our majors bring? In what areas do they need to develop more knowledge and skills? Having this information from corporate and community organizations will be especially helpful for providing students with a robust curriculum that they can transfer to other contexts.

And we need more assessment of the major. We need more direct assessments of student projects at more points in the major, particularly in the core foundation courses, and we need a longitudinal assessment to follow a cohort of majors through their years of study. We also need to conduct assessments of some of the outcomes of the major that cannot be assessed in a direct assessment of writing. For example, one of our outcomes is that students will develop effective team communication and collaboration competencies—while a stellar class client project might indirectly indicate success in those areas—more and different assessment measures would be helpful.

We also need to research, including benchmarking with peer institutions and peer programs, in order to advocate for more support. We are fortunate at Miami to be in a relatively well resourced program. But because of the growth of the PW major and because of various turf struggles in the English Department (too numerous to go into here), our program is increasingly under staffed and under resourced. Without more faculty hires and without other forms of institutional support, such as greater budget allocation, we will be hard-pressed to do significantly more research than what we are doing now.

But even with the challenges of growth and the complexities of university resource struggles, we need to continue to pursue as many pathways of research as we can in order to showcase our program to all of our stakeholders and, more importantly, in order to build and sustain the best possible teaching and learning opportunities for students.

## References

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## Appendix A: Professional Writing Curriculum

<http://www.miamioh.edu/pw>

Professional Writing is an ideal first or second major for students seeking to enter a wide range of public and professional careers. As a Professional Writing major, you will learn to write using digital and print media to make effective arguments and persuade audiences in business, law, government, education, and non-profit organizations. This 42-credit hour major includes the following emphases: (1) Digital and Technical Communication, (2) Editing, (3) Public Writing and Rhetoric, and (4) Self-Designed. The major prepares you to

- Work as a writer or editor in business, government, medical, education, or nonprofit organizations.
- Publish effective print and digital communications in a wide variety of genres and styles.
- Develop strong persuasive skills ideal for future studies in law school or other graduate studies.
- Participate in community and corporate writing projects that provide valuable career preparation.
- Develop personal and public expression for active citizenship in local and global communities.

You may take courses in a number of other programs, including Communication, Creative Writing, Interactive Media Studies, Journalism, Linguistics, and Literature. This variety makes it easy for you to tailor your studies to match your interests and aspirations.

### 1. Core courses: Choose all five.

ENG 223 Rhetorical Strategies for Writers

ENG/IMS 224 Digital Writing and Rhetoric: Composing with Text, Images, and Sound

JRN 201 Reporting and News Writing

ENG 411/511 Visual Rhetoric

ENG Capstone (take one) ENG 415, Capstone in Professional Writing, **OR**

ENG 495R: Capstone in Rhetoric and Writing

### 2. Track Courses: Choose one of four possible tracks

## **Digital and Technical Communication**

### **One required course; select**

ENG 313 Technical Writing

### **Four elective courses; select from the following list**

ENG/IMS 171 Humanities and Technology

ENG 172 Rhetoric, Persuasion, and Culture

ENG 222 Rhetoric of Information and Data Visualization

ENG/IMS 238 Narrative and Digital Technology

ENG 310 Special Topics in Rhetoric and Persuasion

ENG 340 Internship

ENG/IMS 407/507 Interactive Business Communication

ENG 412/512 Print and Digital Editing

ENG 413/513 Grant and Proposal Writing

ENG 414/514 Usability and User Experience

ENG/IMS 416/516 Writing for Global Audiences

ENG/JRN/IMS 424 Ethics and Digital Media

ENG/IMS 426 Digital Publishing

IMS 222 Web and Interaction Design

IMS 413 Usability and Digital Media

IMS 418 Social Media Marketing

IMS 422 Advanced Web Design

IMS 440 Armstrong Interactive Capstone

JRN 303 Online Journalism

## **Editing in Professional Contexts**

### **One required course; select from**

ENG 412/512, Print and Digital Editing OR

JRN 316, Editing and Design

### **Four elective courses; select from the following list.**

ENG/IMS 171 Humanities and Technology

ENG 172 Rhetoric, Persuasion, and Culture

ENG 202 Varieties of English

ENG 222 Rhetoric of Information and Data Visualization  
ENG 225 Advanced Composition  
ENG 226 Introduction to Creative Writing  
ENG 302 Structure of Modern English  
ENG 315 Business Writing  
ENG 321 Literary Marketplace  
ENG 323 Nonfiction Workshop  
ENG 310 Special Topics in Rhetoric and Persuasion  
ENG 340 Internship  
ENG 359 Writing Center Consulting  
ENG 413/513 Grant and Proposal Writing  
ENG/IMS 416/516 Writing for Global Audiences  
ENG/IMS 426 Digital Publishing  
JRN 350 Journalism Topics Course

**Public Writing and Rhetoric**

**One required course; select from**

ENG 310 Special Topics in Rhetoric and Persuasion; OR  
ENG 413/513 Grant and Proposal Writing

**Four elective courses; select from the following list.**

ENG 172 Rhetoric, Persuasion, and Culture  
ENG 201 Special Topics in Language Awareness  
ENG/COM 213 Writing for Media  
ENG 222 Rhetoric of Information and Data Visualization  
ENG 225 Advanced Composition  
ENG 245/ COM/DST 247 Rhetoric of Disability Rights  
ENG 315 Business Writing  
ENG 316 Legal Writing  
ENG/COM/IMS 324 Ethics and Digital Media  
ENG 340 Internship  
ENG 359 Writing Center Consulting  
ENG 407/507 Interactive Business Communication

ENG 409/AAA 410 Asian/Asian-American Rhetorics

ENG 412/512 Print and Digital Editing

ENG/IMS 416/516 Writing for Global Audiences

ENG/JRN 429/529 Environmental Communication

AAA/AMS/BWS/LAS/WGS 211 Writing with a Purpose

JRN 312/412 Public Affairs Reporting

JRN 318 Advanced Storytelling in Journalism

### ***Self-Designed***

***Any one required course and four elective courses selected from the three tracks above.***

In consultation with your adviser, you may design your own track.

### **3. Open Electives**

Four open electives from any 200-level or above course in the English Department.

This may include 200-level and above ENG courses from the tracks above.

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### **Author Information**

Heidi A. McKee is the Roger and Joyce L. Howe Professor of Writing and an associate professor of English. She is Director of the Howe Writing Initiative in the Farmer School of Business, and former founding director of the Professional Writing major. She has co-authored and co-edited a number of books, including: *Digital Writing Research: Technologies, Methodologies, and Ethical Issues* (winner of the Computers and Composition Distinguished Book Award); *The Ethics of Internet Research: A Rhetorical, Case-Based Process* (2009); *Technological Ecologies and Sustainability* (2009); and *Digital Writing Assessment and Evaluation* (2013). Her current co-authored book project is *Business Communication in a Digital Age*.