Student-Centered Assessment Design in a Professional Writing Minor

Denise Tillery
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Ed Nagelhout
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Abstract.   This article describes an approach to student-centered assessment design for a new minor in Professional Writing at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. This approach creates seamless connections among courses, breaking down course barriers to promote broader community engagement in learning networks and correlating competencies, student activities, digital assets, and program assessments. To enhance both short-term and long-term course and program assessment strategies, we take a more ethnographic approach by identifying what types of texts to analyze, what features to consider within those texts, and how those features typically evolve as students acquire, use, and eventually master the variety of skills involved. Moreover, the student-centered assessment encourages a more open and process-oriented approach among students and teachers that increases learner control, learner choice, and learner independence.

Keywords.   program assessment, personal learning, project development, strategies

In many departments and programs across the country, course development follows a traditional "knowing what" approach (especially in English departments). This means courses are distinguished by "how much you know," with pathways to knowledge approved from the top down and enforced through a series of prerequisites and program-approved gateways. In direct opposition to this traditional approach, this commentary describes our long-term plans for the Professional Writing Minor at UNLV to extend beyond "knowing what," or even "knowing how," and into "knowing why." We advocate a programmatic approach and student-centered assessment that develops seamless connections among courses and emphasizes what the National Writing Project refers to as "habits of mind": creativity, persistence, risk-taking, mindfulness, and engagement (NWP).

Our Professional Writing Minor is a seven-course program open to all majors, and while the majority of students come from the College of Liberal Arts, we have had students representing nearly every school and college on campus. A basic tenet for our program acknowledges that "writing" is no longer limited to the individual writer simply placing words on a page, but instead, it encompasses all manner of digital production and delivery. As such, we promote five primary literacies: rhetorical, visual, information, critical, and digital (see Ed Nagelhout, 1999; Kelli Cargile Cook, 2002). These literacies encompass the core competencies required of the professional writer in the 21st Century, and, therefore, serve as the basis of our program design.

For overall guidance on program assessment, and especially our emphasis on digital production and delivery, we examined various national assessment models. While the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) both have comprehensive statements about the importance of digital literacies, we chose the NWP's model because it offers some specific guidance about how to assess invention, drafting, and revision strategies in multi-modal environments. The five domains include context, artifact, substance, processes, and habits of mind; although we consider all the domains when we evaluate and assess, we consider "habits of mind" of primary importance, because it specifically addresses the principle of "knowing why" that we consider our most significant goal. We will address the NWP's five domains more extensively when we discuss how we assess students' activities and artifacts.

Because our minor has relevance to majors across campus, and we can't force students down a single linear path, developing the program, for us, means that course design, project design, student competencies, and our program assessment plan must account for different students with different skill sets and different experiences when they enter (see Nancy Coppola and Norbert Elliott, 2010, for similar thinking at the graduate level). This means, also, that our assessment design must be student-centered. We want students in a particular course to be successful and feel confident in their learning when completing a particular project, no matter their digital experience or previous coursework. We build to them.

This does not mean, however, that we do not also understand the demands of the corporate university in ways similar to those described historically by Elliott (2005) and Kathleen Yancey (1999). This understanding requires that a program account for its practices and, more importantly, expects proof that the program, as on our campus, is meeting

university retention, progression, and completion goals. But plans to quantify, to more accurately collect, analyze, measure, and report the data of our learners in each of our various courses is merely a seduction of simplicity. We want to offer more than just content limited to a single course at a time, seeking instead to support efficient learning, collaboration, decision-making, and student self-monitoring across a learning environment, as well as to enhance both short-term and long-term course and program assessment strategies. Our course, project, and pedagogical goals remain grounded in the principles we are establishing for our program because we build to the students, not from the university. In other words, we want to avoid the "knowing what" approach to course development and program assessment and avoid a simple accounting in order to break down the walls between course and administrative assessment as much as possible; and while this may be messy, we want our methods to be accessible to everyone.

In order to promote broader community engagement in learning networks and correlate competencies, digital assets, student activities, and program assessments, our program development begins with two guiding questions:

- How can we evaluate a project effectively when each student has very different experiences and very different skills when they walk in the door?

- In turn, how can we assess student progress programmatically based on these differences and report their progress consistently to meet larger university goals and expectations?

In this commentary, we offer our own answers to these questions by articulating our programmatic perspective, which includes strategies that transparently connect program assessment, course assessment, and project evaluation through holistic, process-based, and programmatic practices.

Student-Centered Assessment Design: Programmatic Starting Points

Assessment for our writing program has been informed by our reading of the work of Edward White (1985) and a range of program guides, such as the one written by Peggy O'Neill, Cindy Moore, and Brian Huot (2009). Historically, assessment means comparing and contrasting key features of a program, then evaluating the relationships of these key features to determine whether or not the program is "successful." The "successful" program would exhibit reliability and validity. As Huot (1996) describes,

traditional writing assessment practices assume that student writing ability is a "fixed, consistent, and acontextual trait" that can be compared across different times and locations (p. 550); reliability would be measured statistically according to interrater consistency, and validity would be assumed by observing seemingly objective, recognizable features of "quality" writing. Huot's model calls for validation procedures that are sensitive to the local and contextual nature of the writing. Susan Delagrange, Ben McCorkle, and Catherine Braun (2013) argue that assessment of multi-media work should involve flexibility (sensitivity to context), transparency (letting students understand the process), and encouragement of critical thinking. At this point in our program development, we associate reliability with transparency; rather than striving for statistical or inter-rater accuracy, we want students to understand that they are always being evaluated according to the same standards, but we are looking at far more than just a final project. We include all aspects of their work, processes, contributions, and effort.

When we first considered program assessment, our model could be represented on a spreadsheet with the key features represented as cells on the x-and the y-axis, then compared with larger, programmatic goals. In this respect, our thinking about student-centered assessment in our professional writing program might begin with a simple spreadsheet representation (see Figure 1), where we might assume a specific project in a Document Design course that rates, say, a 4.5 out of 5, will demonstrate that the student has achieved a particular course outcome:
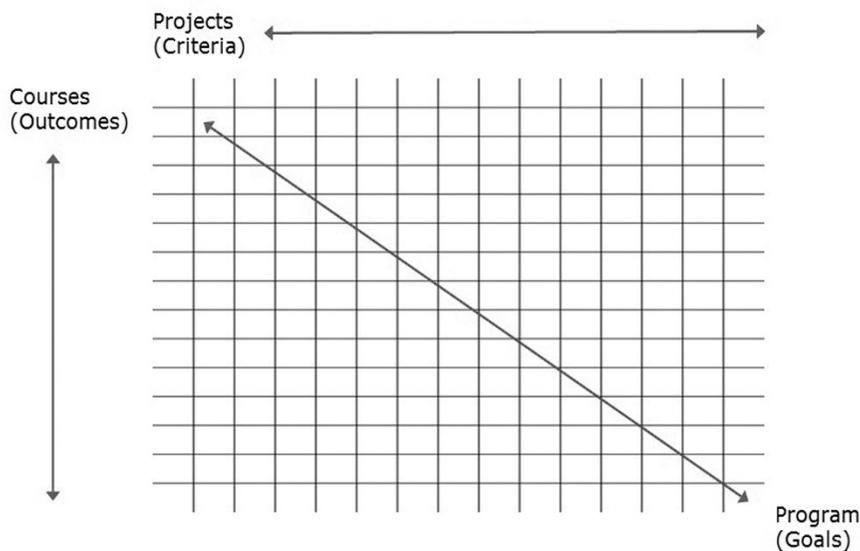

Figure 1: Traditional Assessment Spreadsheet

In order to put Figure 1 into perspective, we want to describe our program by offering examples for each of these key features: program goals, course outcomes, and project criteria.

Considering our emphasis on rhetorical, visual, information, critical, and digital literacies, and also considering the diversity of our professional writing students, our program seeks six primary goals that students will demonstrate upon completion:

1. Proficiency in designing, writing, revising, and editing print and digital texts for a variety of audiences and purposes in professional contexts

2. An understanding of discourse conventions for common professional writing genres

3. An ability to manage large and small writing projects and collaborate effectively at all stages of a writing project

4. An awareness and acuity of visual design

5. A broad repertoire of research and critical-thinking skills that reflect an awareness of social and cultural contexts

6. Strategies for learning digital and software applications and acquiring expertise

In order to meet these goals, we begin with consistent outcomes for teachers in the required and core courses. Our programmatic approach assumes that teachers adopt the same outcomes and approaches for a given course so that our curriculum is robust and applied consistently across all sections of that course. Outcomes for our three required courses include the following:

ENG 400 - Document Design

1. Define document design principles and processes

2. Analyze and describe the visual design of documents

3. Recognize important document design concepts in particular rhetorical contexts

4. Make effective document design choices for particular genre

ENG 406B - Electronic Documents and Publications

1. Work individually and collaboratively to plan, produce, format, and edit digital media that effectively respond to particular rhetorical situations

2. Create digital media that circulate in ethically and socially responsible ways

3. Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information

4. Analyze and evaluate digital media based on sound criteria

5. Exhibit responsible social networking skills

ENG 407C - Advanced Professional Communication

1. Analyze and understand rhetorically different digital and professional communication contexts

2. Recognize, learn, and employ appropriate digital and software applications for professional communication

3. Design, draft, revise, edit, and present professional materials based on genre, purpose, and audience

4. Perform effective research and incorporate source materials into professional materials

5. Work collaboratively and productively at all stages of textual production

Similarly, we start with consistent criteria for evaluating student work. Again, consistency means that all courses start with the same criteria and that students understand and are able to adapt and apply these criteria at their own level of expertise. As examples, we offer here one project from each of the courses listed above:

ENG 400 - Document Design

Brochure Revision Project

The final deliverable will be evaluated based on criteria negotiated as a class starting with the following:

- Exhibits effective design principles
- Meets genre requirements
- Focuses on one big idea
- Provides eye magnet on front
- Image(s) a priority
- Guided reading experience
- Articulation

ENG 406B - Electronic Documents and Publications
Personal Learning Network Project

The final deliverable will be evaluated based on criteria negotiated as a class starting with the following:

- Visual representation

- Explanation of PLN features

- Explanation of personal application

- Explanation of personal value

- Explanation of sustainability

- Usability

ENG 407C - Advanced Professional Communication

Usability Screencast Project

The final deliverable will be evaluated based on criteria negotiated as a class starting with the following:

- Presents information clearly and effectively

- Limits to a specific task

- Shows a complete understanding of the task

- Articulates potential difficulties for users

- Makes recommendations based on walkthrough

- Shows effective revision and editing

Each of the criteria for each of the projects and each of the outcomes for each of the courses are meant to connect programmatically with each other and with our six program goals (for a detailed description of our program objectives, see Denise Tillery and Nagelhout, 2014). And we do present these criteria, these outcomes, and these program goals consistently to our teachers and to our students, not as end points for our courses and our projects, but the places where we all begin. This is not standardization, but starting points for open conversations with our students about their writing. Traditionally, if they are end points, program assessments that connect project criteria, course outcomes, and program goals are presented on a spreadsheet (see Figure 1 as an example), where each of the boxes represents a particular feature, or unit of work, quantifying the connections and showing the "success" of the program.

In other words, if the program goal we are assessing is "Exhibit an awareness and acuity of visual design," for example, we might compare

and contrast how well a particular artifact, like a brochure created in ENG 400 – Document Design, has met the project evaluation criteria, whether that shows completion of a course outcome, and if that, in turn, meets this particular program goal. Traditionally, when using a spreadsheet for program assessment, the comparison and contrast focuses primarily on numerical scores for each criterion for each of the projects, which creates a very clean, seemingly objective overview of the program. And while we certainly understand the value of using data as a lens into our program practices, we also know that numbers cannot tell the whole story. The problem with this approach is that these numbers only represent the connections of features (criteria, outcomes, goals) based on the evaluation of final products. This approach is insufficient because it represents only one part of the work that students do over the course of a semester (or over the course of a program), and we want to be mindful and reflective of our program and project design in order to promote appropriate *learning practices*. (This for us is an important theme throughout the collection, *Writing Assessment in the 21ˢᵗ Century*, 2012.) We want to be conscious of our assessment choices (see Jeffrey Jablonski and Nagelhout, 2010), thereby understanding *how* and *why* we made the choices we made for assessing our program.

And, besides, sometimes learning is messy. That competency isn't always so clear-cut, and that benchmark may not accurately reflect the learning for all of our students, or the learning that **they** want to do in the course. While one student might be comfortable finding and using templates, which allows her to design products competently but not creatively, another student might be learning a new software application and be much more experimental but perhaps less successful in the short term. So what happens when student learning varies on a particular project, and even in that variation, what happens when their learning splashes over into different columns on the spreadsheet? How do we represent that?

Our goal is to somehow capture the different ways that students learn in our program (in our learning network), and the different ways their learning connects to the learning of other students in the program. We want insight into the students' processes, habits of minds, and understanding of their context (including constraints and affordances, which we stress as part of their planning and reflecting). A student-centered assessment, then, needs to be holistic and contextual, more ethnographic; we can look for particular features expressed within planning documents, reflections, and artifacts together, but we can't just rank each criterion and come up with an easily recorded number. Instead,

our representations look more like splotches and splatters: a student might turn in a draft project that represents a devotion to mastering HTML but misses the mark in terms of rhetorical choices. (See Figure 2.)
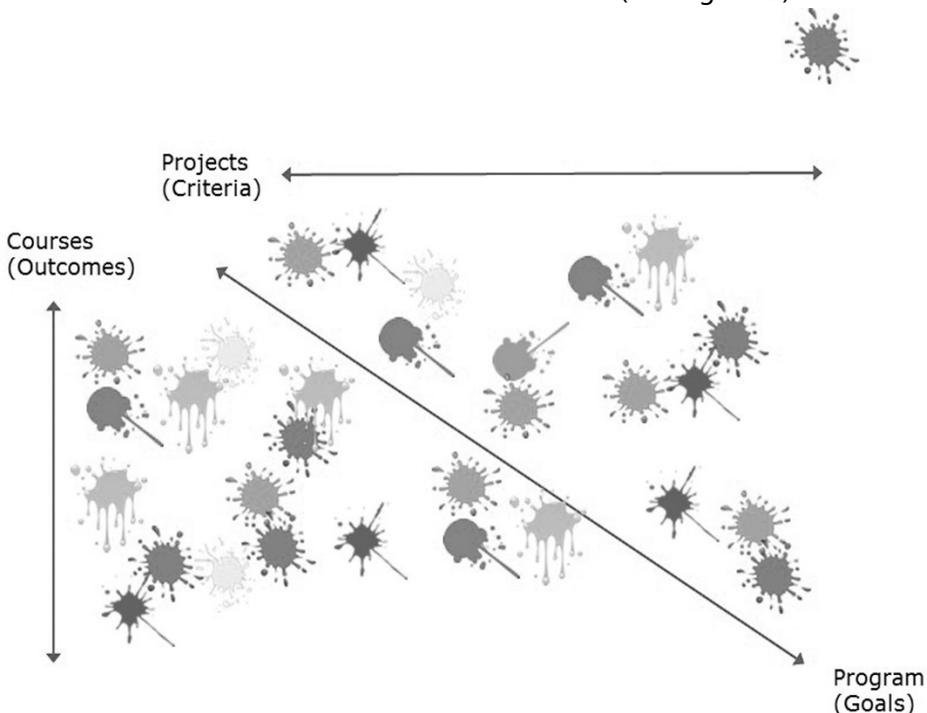

Figure 2: Splotches and Splatters

We want our program to be a free space where students can learn at different paces and in different ways, to hear alternative voices and to consider alternative perspectives. UNLV was recently ranked the second most diverse campus in the country. We want to take advantage of that so that students can not only create knowledge in their own way but also create that knowledge among alternative voices and alternative perspectives, to build internally while always engaging externally. As Stephen Downes (2003) states, "In the design of any educational system, you have to make room for people to know different (and contradictory) things, use words differently, and to create their own knowledge their own way. Not because it's better. But because that's how knowledge works" (para. 1). More importantly, we want our program to encourage marginal thinking, to account for that learning that occurs outside the boundaries of a spreadsheet and to reward those who care enough to share those insights with the rest of us.

One of our biggest challenges with assessment (and we would argue

this is true of most professional and technical writing programs) stems from the fact that our students are all over the map when it comes to literate skills and practices: rhetorical, visual, information, critical, and digital. For example, our class might range from students whose only familiarity with digital resources is Pinterest to students who have run their own servers. It's a challenge to teach, let alone to assess meaningfully. Additionally, as teachers in a small, marginalized program within a larger traditional English department, we ourselves don't have the expertise and resources to keep up with the latest technologies, or even keep our own digital skills honed as much as we would like.

Given the diversity of our students, in terms of experience as well as background, we must create an assessment strategy that accounts for varieties of experience. In "Making digital writing assessment fair for diverse writers," Mya Poe (2013) argues that fairness can't be separated from accessibility in digital writing. She suggests that we collect information about frequency and conditions of access, type and place of access, prior experiences, and kinds of devices individuals use—we do this explicitly, in at least two of the courses in our program.

In contrast to traditional assessment that focuses primarily on final products, our approach requires project development in all of our courses that personalizes student learning, empowers student practices, and provides strategies and opportunities for both. We want students to leave our courses with a variety of strategies for moving confidently in and out of learning situations in all their courses as well as beyond the university setting. Again, we are much less interested in "what" they learn, and much more interested in how and why they are learning the information and skills they will be applying to future rhetorical situations. To illustrate our approaches to integrating student-centered assessment and project development, we will turn to a description of sample courses and projects.

Student-Centered Assessment Design: Student Starting Points

One key idea for us is that each course starts with a project and each project starts with an activity that asks students **to articulate their own point of entry**. They need to tell us not only what their starting point is but also what their goals are. In that way, we can consider both grading and assessing them in terms of

- How they've progressed from their starting point, and

- How well they are articulating and achieving their own goals

In our courses, this articulation occurs most explicitly in the planning

stage and the reflecting stage, a time when students can describe what they want to learn and how they will do it. This means our projects need to be purposeful, have meaning to the students so they engage with the work (even if it's purely for their own reasons), so they feel like they are accomplishing something concrete. When we ask them to select and review an online reading, or find a piece of software that will help them create a color palette more effectively (for example), they make choices for each for their own reasons and share those reasons with the class. This helps them plan for the application component of the project but also allows them to reflect on the choices they are making. This means, for us, that their work is not just limited to the deliverables (the product). In our experience, a focus primarily on deliverables creates merely artifacts for evaluation, rather than participation on multiple levels in an active constructive process and models for lifelong learning.

To encourage student ownership of the projects, as part of our student-centered pedagogy, we seek to minimize programmatic authority over the projects by limiting initial materials to simple directions, a set of project aims, a framework for completion, and initial readings/resources. From the very beginning, we expect students to take control of each project and develop them to fit their learning goals. In all of the projects, every student contributes resources; they use and review software or apps that are relevant to a particular project and share their experiences with the rest of the class, and they define and construct deliverables that build their competencies for professional writing, as well as meet the project aims.

For example, two assignments that we use are the Personal Learning Network and the Digital Identity Project (see Appendix A for an example of an assignment sheet). The first assignment asks students to use electronic resources to develop their own network of resources for life-long learning by using tools like Twitter or other social media platforms relevant to their future disciplinary practices. The second assignment asks students to write a series of blog posts describing the types of digital activities they engage in, their purposes, and the extent to which they make use of social media in personal and professional settings. These assignments familiarize students with digital media, and they also start forcing our students (most of whom primarily use social media for personal reasons) to think of these electronic formats as places where professional development can happen. They define their own resources and deliverables: a student whose interest is in marketing, for example, will be drawn to different resources than a student whose focus is technical communication. These assignments also provide starting places

for us to understand our students' points of entry, which helps us when we consider what we look for when the time comes for evaluation.

A focus on planning and reflecting and students articulating their points of entry forces us as a program to build in the time necessary for students to work, to play, to make mistakes, to share, to collaborate—to learn. We especially want to promote informal learning opportunities by not only giving students that time but also giving them credit for just participating in the class, contributing whatever they can to the course's success, and for just showing up (physically or electronically). It is through these informal activities, including discussion posts, contributions to course blogs, and locating and posting resources, that we cultivate habits of mind such as engagement, persistence, and risk-taking. In addition, the activities are meant to help students work through an analysis of purpose, audience, constraints, and affordances of their chosen platform and application.

Student-Centered Assessment Design: Points of Process, Artifact, Habits of Mind

When we accommodate our evaluation and assessment activities to our students' multiple entry points, we are faced with the problem of what exactly we are considering in our evaluations. As we suggested earlier, we are committed to transparency in that we want students to know exactly how they are being evaluated. Our courses are truly student-centered; we want students to set their own goals and create their own pathways. But when you are faced with a set of final projects at the end of the semester, and in the bigger picture, when you're faced with the task of assessing how well your program is doing what it's supposed to do, you face the challenge of what student-centered education really means. Students in a recent course titled "Electronic Documents and Publications," for example, presented their final projects using a variety of platforms ranging from the relatively simple Storify, which offers ease of use for inexperienced students but very few options for customization, to the fully customizable version of WordPress.com, which some students used in order to be able to demonstrate their HTML skills.

Earlier, we discussed the NWP Multimodal Assessment Project Committee's (2010) five domains to help guide assessment for multimodal texts. A more complete description of the domains includes

1. **Context:** genres, constraints, affordances, opportunities, purpose, audience, composing environment and delivery mode

2. **Artifact**: appropriate use of structure, medium, and technique

3. **Substance**: quality and significance of ideas

4. **Process:** management, growth, and development of skills and understanding in a particular time frame

5. **Habits of mind:** creativity, persistence, risk-taking, mindfulness, engagement (quoted in Moran and Herrington, 2013, General Guidelines on Digital Assessment section, para. 2)

With regard to these domains, only the second (the artifact) and the third (substance, quality of ideas) can be seen by analyzing the project deliverable by itself. (See Figure 3.)
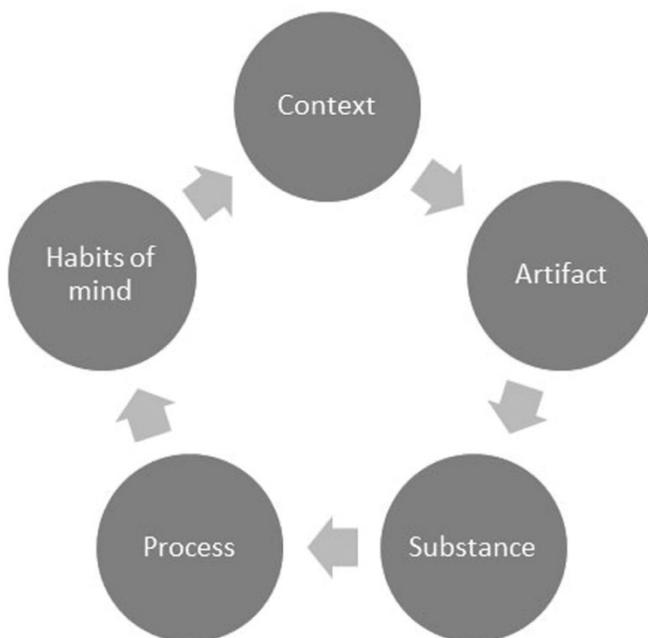

Figure 3: Domains for Assessing Multi-Modal Writing (our original visual)

This complete set of domains affirms that we need to evaluate and assess the project deliverable together with the students' own reflections and descriptions of their processes. We can capture information about context, habits of mind, and process management, for example, in the students' online reading reviews; and their software or application analysis helps reveal their creativity, persistence, and risk-taking. If the students all review the applications most readily available in our computer labs, for instance, it suggests a resistance to risk or lack of persistence. Students who are unfamiliar with technology are often resistant to exploring unfamiliar applications, but one of the most important skills we can impart

is the ability to look beyond the dominant, often expensive, software applications, and find free open-source applications that will serve their needs and actually be more accessible. We also ask students to write individual final reflection papers at the end of the semester for every class. We can't assess the final projects, or how they might have met the course outcomes, without also considering these reflections, which give us insight into the students' processes, habits of minds, and understanding of their context (including constraints and affordances, which we stress as part of selecting and learning tools). So between reflection papers, process-based activities, and artifacts, student-centered assessment looks primarily at how thoughtfully the students selected tools that they were able to learn on their own and how well these tools worked to create the project deliverables the students were required to develop.

As we evaluate final projects, we look for traces of processes, not only as each student describes them after the fact in a final reflection but as they are captured throughout the semester in required blog posts, discussion posts, course messages, and other affordances captured by the learning management system. For us this is much less a data analytics approach, an accounting on a spreadsheet, or big data enumeration; and much more a "thick data" or ethnographic approach to program assessment where student traces—what Tricia Wang (2016) calls "the sticky stuff that's difficult to quantify" (para. 6)—look more like splotches and spatters on a spreadsheet. As we evaluate processes, we might look at how many examples students analyzed and how many sources they considered before deciding on their final choices. These traces also provide us with insight into the students' habits of mind**,** as we can see evidence of how many different tools a student considered when choosing a platform for a project, how long the student spent trying to learn the tool, and how students engaged in various alternatives to solve their problems.

Student-Centered Assessment Design: Project Processes and Domains

When we look at all the students' activities together with the artifacts, then we can assess students fairly based on their level of effort and commitment to achieving goals we've set for them as well as goals they have set for themselves. Figure 4 shows the various elements we consider (sites of assessment) and how we map them onto the five domains.
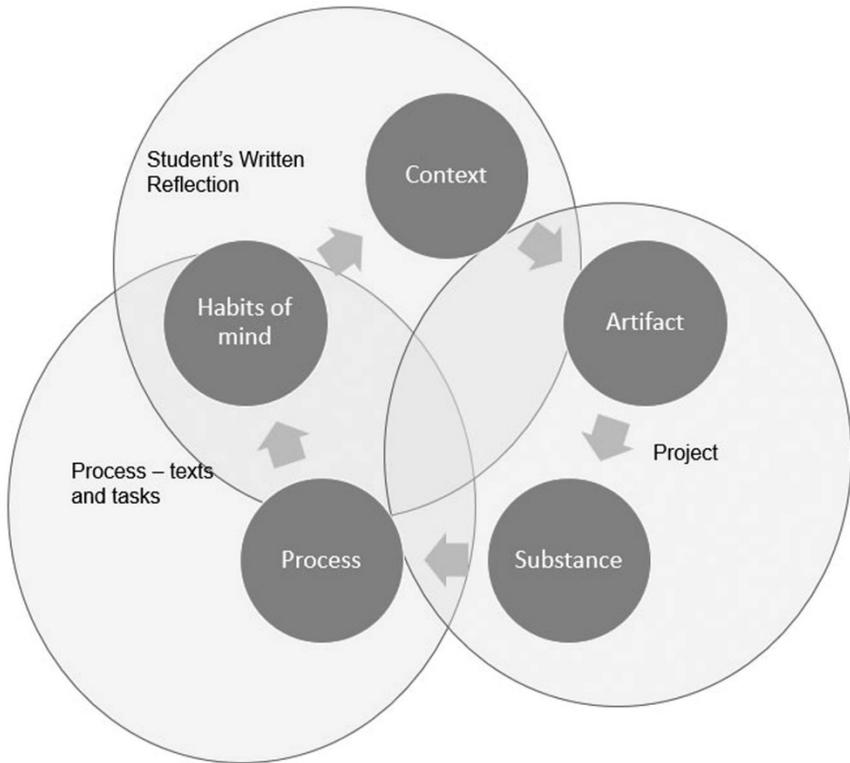
Figure 4: Mapping Domains onto Sites of Assessment

Thus, our student-centered assessment is meant to be holistic and contextual. We can look for particular features expressed within reflective memos and artifacts together, but we can't just rank each criterion and come up with an easily recorded number, as we used to do when we limited our program assessment activities to final portfolios (artifacts only, with limited reflective text).

To address the issue of validity, we consider these questions:

- How well does the student articulate their own goals for each project?
- How does each artifact make the best use of its tool, given all applicable constraints?
- How do artifacts show a progression throughout the program (as measured against what initial projects/first drafts look like)?
- How well are our own sets of tools and resources developing (as instructors and administrators)?

The first two questions are captured at an individual and course level,

reflecting the varying points of entry and how well the students have progressed throughout the semester. The third and fourth questions are programmatic, and as we gather that data, we'll be able to reflect on our program design as a whole and see how well we're achieving our program objectives.

To capture student-centered assessment effectively at the program level, however, we need to develop "thick data" through the projects. This means that we try to capture all aspects of a project: all activities, all collaborations, all drafts, and all deliverables. To achieve this, we think of our projects as cognitive process and social practice. As cognitive process, our projects (like students' learning) are developmental and recursive. Considered developmentally, we can describe our projects as evolving through these stages, but we expect it to be recursive, not linear: learners move back and forth among the stages as they work toward submission of project deliverables. As social practice, we want students to engage with the class, to share knowledge and ask questions, to be sensitive to their own learning needs while, at the same time, contributing to the larger ongoing conversations. This open atmosphere helps students learn about and learn how to choose and use a wide range of strategies that will aid in their critical learning and reflective practices. We want students to personalize their experience with the project, to develop from where they are at currently in their thinking and skill levels.

While this project could be the "Brochure Revision" project or the "Personal and Professional Leaning Network" project or the "Transmedia Project," for this article we want to offer a specific, yet brief example to illustrate the ways that students engage early in a course. In our Document Design course, we ask students to complete a series of concept mini-projects. Each one helps students explore a key concept of document design from their own perspective. For example, one of these mini-projects focuses on color theory, and the framework for the project includes six introductory readings on color theory and one link to tools for choosing a color scheme, as well as prompts for three primary activities: review of an online reading, summary of appropriate software or app, and an application of the concept.

These mini-projects occur early in the semester and are designed to help students gauge their understanding of key concepts for document design and to articulate their own starting points through discussion and activity. While we want students to look inward for their learning goals, we also expect outward participation. At the early stages of any project, students are gathering resources for understanding concepts more fully and for completing the work. They are exploring and reviewing uses for

different software or apps that will help them construct more effective deliverables. Our prompts in the color theory mini-project offer initial guidance:

Online Reading Review

Introduce the reading by summarizing the content and explain what you liked or didn't like about it.

What is the main point?

What are the article's strengths and/or weaknesses?

Why do you trust their advice?

Is the writer an expert? How do you know?

What reasons does the author use to support their position?

Software/App Analysis

What is it? What does it do/enable?

What are its list of hardware and/or software requirements (and versions of software)? Are there costs?

Describe a single feature or aspect (brief summary plus step-by-step).

What are its advantages and disadvantages compared with similar products?

What resources are available for further study of the software/app?

Application of the Concept

Following the analysis performed by Present and Correct at http://wesandersonpalettes.tumblr.com/, find three stills from a movie or television show and describe the color palette used (maybe using an app like http://www.pictaculous.com/).

Then, offer a description of the ways that the color palette enhances (or fails to enhance) the overall themes of the program. Your analysis can be a textual post (with a link to the stills), or you can create a separate document (PPT slides, for example) and post as an attachment on the discussion board. (Some features of this project are adapted from Julia Romberger and Rochelle Rodrigo, 2015.)

Based on these prompts, students post reviews of readings and software applications. As an example, one student offered a review of Coolors for the class:

So I know the cool tools we played with in class were all about how to generate color pallettes from images, but I struggle to create good color pallettes, sometimes without an image to reference or start with. Coolors is perfect for that since it literally just generates five colors at random side by side. On a computer you can just go to https://coolors.co/ and it'll bring you to a page that asks you to either start the generator or watch the tutorial. The app is also available on Android and iOS.

The colors are always complementary, but they start with a range. You can type the "#XXXXXX" signifiers to start with a certain color, and you can adjust colors individually with RGB sliders. By locking a color, you can get it to stay while the others will continue to randomize. They will start to match the colors you lock in. So for example, you might be given two shades of yellow, a blue, an orange, and a green as your first pallette. If you were to lock in the blue, you might get green, purple, gray, black, more cool colors, since the app will try to guess what you're going for. If you lock in a blue and a grey, you can be sure you're going to get relaxing colors, an orange and a red will encourage it to generate warmer colors.

I really liked this app because it becomes an easy way to create and save lots of different color pallettes. You can stumble across a single color you like and create a pallette around that color, or you might find a few that go together well and just want to change one or two colors from the set. Also, the phone app makes it nice for random inspiration. If you think of something really quickly, you can pull out your phone and save it, then go back to your computer later and play around with it.

I'm sure there are more and more color apps like this one, some that might even work better or serve specific purposes more effectively, but I hope this one can help you guys with your projects. I'm sure there are more and more color apps like this one, some that might even work better or serve specific purposes more effectively, but I hope this one can help you guys with your projects.

 Posts like this are typical, as well as posts from students who express uncertainty with a concept or frustration with an app, and other students regularly respond, offering feedback, providing support, and generating conversations that can't be predicted or enumerated. Through activities like these, students explore and establish context for a project, their own understanding of the project, and their own goals for completing the

project. While our mini-project example does not extend to major deliverables for evaluation, it depicts the ways that students situate their learning and their own point of entry in the context of all of our projects. This work makes evident the traces that we might capture for assessment.

This work, more importantly, helps students understand the projects well enough to discuss how their deliverables should be evaluated because effective evaluation in our courses can only occur after students situate their learning and their own point of entry. As a class we negotiate the evaluation criteria for every project, beginning with an initial set of criteria (see the sample lists of criteria that we described earlier). We do this both for transparency and for helping students connect their starting points with their learning goals.

Recall this list, for example:

Brochure Revision Project

The final deliverable will be evaluated based on criteria negotiated as a class starting with the following:

- Exhibits effective design principles
- Meets genre requirements
- Focuses on one big idea
- Provides eye magnet on front
- Image(s) a priority
- Guided reading experience
- Articulation

The negotiation of criteria can sometimes be easy with students accepting the criteria as written. Other times the negotiation can be quite contested, with students arguing over terms, or clarifying the range of quality that might be expected. They see more clearly how abstract a word like "effective" can be in different rhetorical contexts or for different deliverables; they articulate more and less important "requirements"; they ask and answer questions of "priority" and "guided."

In every case, however, the negotiation is imperative, especially for a student-centered assessment because as students soon understand, the negotiation is much less about the evaluation of their deliverables and much more about their understanding of **how** they will be evaluated and that they should have a voice in how they will be evaluated. In other words, our program assessment includes the deliverables that students create, but it also includes their reflections, which should address the ways that they met the criteria relative to their own learning goals for the

project. Once the evaluation criteria are negotiated and agreed upon, drafts of the deliverables can be completed, for the first time. Student-generated deliverables go through multiple drafts, with time set aside for peer review and teacher review before the deliverables are submitted for evaluation.

All in all, every aspect of our projects seek to model recursivity, to encourage trust in multiple perspectives, and to allow for the time necessary to submit quality materials. We talk about performing higher-order revisions and lower-order edits before they submit a deliverable for evaluation. And the deliverables are the only items evaluated. As we stated earlier, the majority of the work is participatory, a contribution to their own learning and to the learning of their classmates, so our program assessment should reflect this emphasis. As you can imagine, the key to all of this is **time**. We have to be patient and provide the time for students to explore, the time to experiment, the time to fail, before they make the move to the final submission of deliverables.

We are hoping that this commentary clarifies how our projects, with the help of our students, create and maintain flexible curricula and relevant assets within a networked learning environment that encourages a more student-centered and personalized approach to assessment that increases learner control, learner choice, and learner independence. By promoting an open and process-oriented environment, one that encourages and rewards sharing, experimentation, and personalization, we find our students are genuinely interested in helping one another. Less experienced students ask questions; more advanced students ask questions. When they set personal goals for learning, everyone looks for ways to enhance their skills and help others do the same.

References

Cargile Cook, Kelli. (2002). Layered literacies: A theoretical frame for technical communication pedagogy. *Technical Communication Quarterly, 11* (1), 5-29.

Coppola, Nancy W., & Elliott, Norbert. (2010). Assessment of graduate programs in technical communication: A relational model. In Jo Allen & Margaret Hundleby (Eds.), *Assessment in technical and professional communication* (127-160). Amityville, NY: Baywood Press.

Delagrange, Susan. H.; McCorkle, Ben; & Braun, Catherine. C. (2013). Shaken, not stirred: An assessment remixology. In Heidi A. McKee & Danielle N. DeVoss (Eds.), *Digital writing assessment and evaluation*. Retrieved from <http://ccdigitalpress.org/dwae/06_mccorkle.html>

Downes, Stephen. (2003). PEGGasus opens for business. Retrieved from <http://www.downes.ca/cgi-bin/page.cgi?post=6452>

Elliot, Norbert. (2005). *On a scale: A social history of writing assessment in America*. Studies in Composition and Rhetoric 3. New York: Lang.

Elliot, Norbert, & Perelman, Les. (Eds.) (2012). *Writing assessment in the 21st century: Essays in honor of Edward M. White.* New York, NY: Hampton Press.

Huot, Brian. (1996). Towards a new theory of writing assessment. *College Composition and Communication, 47*(4), 549-566.

Jablonski, Jeffrey, & Nagelhout, Ed. (2010). Assessing professional writing programs using technology as a site of praxis. In Jo Allen & Margaret Hundleby (Eds.), *Assessment in technical and professional communication* (171-187). Amityville, NY: Baywood Press.

Moran, Charles, & Herrington, Anne. (2013). Seeking guidance for assessing digital compositions/composing. In Heidi A. McKee & Danielle N. DeVoss (Eds.), *Digital writing assessment and evaluation*. Retrieved from <http://ccdigitalpress.org/dwae/03_moran.html>

Nagelhout, Ed. (1999). Pre-professional practices in the technical writing classroom: Promoting multiple literacies through research. *Technical Communication Quarterly, 8*(3), 285-299.

National Writing Project Multimodal Assessment Project. Cross-walking between frameworks and student work. Retrieved from <http://digitalis.nwp.org/resource/2118>

O'Neill, Peggy; Moore, Cindy; & Huot, Brian. (2009). *A guide to college writing assessment*. Logan: Utah State UP.

Poe, Mya. (2013). Making digital writing assessment fair for diverse writers. In Heidi A. McKee & Danielle N. DeVoss (Eds.), *Digital writing assessment and evaluation*. Retrieved from <http://ccdigitalpress.org/dwae/01_poe.html>

Romberger, Julia, & Rodrigo, Rochelle. (2015). Frugal realities: Hacker pedagogy and scrappy students in an online program. In Denise Tillery & Ed Nagelhout (Eds.), *The new normal: Pressures on technical communication programs in the age of austerity* (89-106). Technical Communication Series. Amityville, NY: Baywood Press.

Tillery, Denise, & Nagelhout, Ed. (2014). Program review: Digital composing and the invention of a program: Overcoming history and starting over, Part 1. *Present Tense 3*(2). Retrieved from <http://www.presenttensejournal.org/volume-3/digital-composing-and-the-invention-of-a-program-overcoming-history-and-starting-over-part-1/>

Wang, Tricia. (2016). Why big data needs thick data. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/ethnography-matters/why-big-data-needs-thick-data-b4b3e75e3d7#.h1dwl2ecc>

White, Edward M. (1985). *Teaching and assessing writing*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Yancey, Kathleen B. (1999.) Looking back as we look forward: Historicizing writing assessment. *College Composition and Communication*, *50*, 483-503.

APPENDIX A – Instructions for Digital Identity Project

Digital Inventory

The digital inventory project is our first project of the semester, and it will take place over the next two weeks.

Make each post to the Digital Inventory course blog.

First Post: Offer a brief, general introduction to yourself and your electronic media use (due by August 28)

Second Post: Describe your typical 2-way electronic media you use (cell phone and email): when you got your first account, how you typically use it, and your typical communication practices (purpose, audience) (due by August 31)

Third Post: How does your social media use reveal your interests or construct your online identity? Discuss any social media you use: Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr, Google+, or other social media programs. If possible, list the dates (approximate month and year) you created your accounts. Analyze your use: count your last 20 or so most recent posts, sort them by topic and medium, discuss any links, retweets, and discuss any of your own original content, including status updates, tweets, photos posted, or other items shared. (due by September 2)

Fourth Post: Discuss any blogs or more open electronic media you may have used. What are the topics you are willing to share with a broader public? (due by September 3)

Fifth Post: Reflect on the distinction between social and academic/professional uses of these media. Do you have a separate academic or professional profile? How do you keep it separate? If not, why not? (due by September 4)

***

Alternative Post: If you don't have any social media accounts, or if you had them in the past and then deleted them, describe that decision, how you think it might affect your other communication patterns, and why having an online identity is not a priority for you. (due by September 4)

Author Information

Denise Tillery is an Associate Professor of Rhetoric and Writing at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She co-edited The New Normal: Pressures on Technical Communication Programs in the Age of Austerity (Baywood, 2015), and has published sixteen articles or book chapters on topics including environmental rhetoric, risk communication, gender and science, and technical communication pedagogy and program design.

Ed Nagelhout is a Professor of Rhetoric and Writing at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He has co-edited three collections (The New Normal: Pressures on Technical Communication Programs in the Age of Austerity, 2015; Contrastive Rhetoric: Reaching to Intercultural Rhetoric, 2008; Classroom Spaces and Writing Instruction, 2004), published twenty-three articles or book chapters, and presented more than ninety professional papers on a variety of topics, including writing program administration, teaching in digital environments, technical communication, and writing in the disciplines.