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CPTSC

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# Issue Preview

## 2013 – A Time of Change

**Tracy Bridgeford**
*University of Nebraska at Omaha*

This issue marks the fifth year of publication for *Programmatic Perspectives*, and with this new year comes a number of changes. To begin, the editorial staffing of the journal has changed as Bill Williamson, one of the founding editors of *Programmatic Perspectives*, has decided to step down from his position as Editor in order to pursue other interests. From the very start, Bill was instrumental in shaping *Programmatic Perspectives* to be a publication that would serve as a "step along a path that will invigorate and sustain scholarly discussions of program administration" (Williams, 209, p. 90). Having been on that path with Bill from the beginning, I can say that his conscientiousness and good humor made the trip a pleasure. From the very beginning, Bill's enthusiasm kept us all going, especially his insight on the scholarly dimension of administration. I and others who have been involved with the journal over the years will miss Bill, and we wish him well.

With this first issue of 2013, I would also like to welcome Kirk St.Amant to the editorship of *Programmatic Perspectives*. A previous Associate Editor for Program Showcases, Kirk will be joining me in serving as Editor of the journal, and I look forward to our future collaborations.

Additionally, this year marks the inaugural use of the *Programmatic Perspectives*' recently issued International Standard Serial Number (ISSN): 2326-1412. This ISSN will play a central role in how organizations, such as libraries, identify, catalog, and archive the journal in the future. This new ISSN can also help individuals interested in programmatic issues in technical and scientific communication identify the journal as a key resource on this topic.

Such changes, however, have not affected the central focus of the *Programmatic Perspectives*, which continues to seek submissions focusing on all areas of programmatic development and program administration. Within this context, I would encourage readers to consider developing pre-

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sentations from previous Annual Meetings of CPTSC into manuscripts for future volumes of the journal. I would also be happy to chat with individuals about how they might develop proposed presentations for the 2013 Annual Meeting into manuscripts for consideration with the journal. As always, any and all commentary on this or previous issues is invited if you wish to respond. With these ideas in mind, let's take a quick look at the contents of the first issue of 2013.

## An Overview of This Issue

The issue begins with "Technology and Technical and Professional Communication through the Lens of the MLA Job Information List 1990–2011," which presents the results of a study the author, Claire Lauer, conducted on the role technology has played in position descriptions from the MLA job list. In the article, Lauer identifies ways professional and technical communication programs have described technologies and textual practices as they relate to what constitutes an "ideal" candidate for a particular job. In examining these approaches, Lauer provides readers with important ideas relating to how programs identify themselves through job postings. She also touches upon how such postings reveal the ways in which the field is evolving in relation to various trends and topics affecting classes, curricula, and programs.

In the issue's second entry, "A Survey of Technical Communication Certificate Programs," Jim Nugent reports on the results of his survey of certificate programs offered through different institutions of higher education in the U.S. In examining these programs, Nugent compared them to different undergraduate programs in order to determine where and how such certificate and degree programs overlap and where they differ. In examining this topic, Nugent gathered information on a variety of key areas including the age and size of different certificate programs as well as other factors such as graduation dates, departmental location, curricular requirements, online offerings, and the qualifications and status of instructors teaching in these programs. In examining these items, Nugent provides members of the field with methodological consideration for future research on programs. He also provides a foundation for engaging in more focused, future discussions about certificate programs in the field.

The issue's third entry is Kristin Pickering's examination of the processes used to assess oral communication within the context of professional communication classes. In her article, "Oral Communication Assessment in a General Education Professional Communication Course: Politics and a Proposal," Pickering reviews both the assessment practices involved in this particular case and the underlying politics that can influence such pro-

cesses. Pickering then uses her review of this situation as a foundation for re-considering how to undertake assessment in relation to such classes. In so doing, she provides readers with a framework for balancing outside factors affecting assessment practices with creating effective courses.

I am thrilled to note that this issue of *Programmatic Perspectives* also contains the keynote address Mariam Williams gave at the 2012 Annual Meeting of CPTSC in Houghton, MI. The theme of the 2012 Annual Meeting was "Communities, Workplaces, and Technologies," and Williams's keynote presentation, "A Survey of Emerging Research: Debunking the Fallacy of Colorblind Technical Communication," focused on issues of race and ethnicity in the field of technical and scientific communication. In examining these issues, Williams draws on both her own professional experiences and on her research to note developments that have affected how we think about and discuss such topics as a community of educators and scholars.

This topic of community also plays a central role in this issue's Program Showcase in which Alex Ilyasova describes the sense of community engagement that is so much a part of the Professional and Technical Writing program at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. The ideas, information, and perspective Ilyasova brings effectively complement the first Curriculum Showcase, which was introduced in an editorial last spring, and continues to establish such program showcases as a mechanism for sharing information and ideas on programs in our field.

This notion of mutual understanding is also at the heart of the guest editorial that appears in this issue. In this editorial, Dale Sullivan calls for a reaffirmation of a humanist understanding of technology. Such an approach, Sullivan notes, helps us (and our students) understand—and critically consider—how we relate to the technologies we use every day.

Finally, Joanna Schrieber reviews *Assessment in Technical and Professional Communication* edited by Margaret Hundleby and Jo Allen. In so doing, Schrieber provides us not only with an effective summary of the various essays that appear in the text but also with ideas for how we might consider them within programmatic contexts.

As with all previous issues of *Programmatic Perspectives*, I encourage you, the reader, to view these entries as the first stage in a series of ongoing discussions in our field. Moreover, I encourage you to participate in these discussions by contributing your own research, ideas, and opinions to the journal.

Happy Spring!
Tracy

# Technology and Technical Communication Through the Lens of the MLA Job Information List 1990–2011

**Claire Lauer**
*Arizona State University*

**Abstract.** This article tracks the evolving relationship between technology and technical communication through the lens of the academic job market. It identifies the changing ways in which members of the field have talked about the kinds of technologies and composing practices they are looking for in the teaching and research of new hires. The study at the heart of this article catalogued the ways in which seventeen technology and design-related keywords have been used in MLA job advertisements over the past two decades. Looking specifically at the popularity of keywords such as "design" and "new media," it suggests that program administrators should be aware of these trends and take ownership over the way we name and define the technological advances in our field. Doing so will allow administrators to more strategically discuss the values and practices of our field to those in our departments, universities, and workplace and funding environments.

**Keywords.** MLA; JIL; Job Information List; technology; design; new media; trends; job; market; program; strategy; field; definition

Technical communication programs prepare students to construct rhetorically sensitive "information products" (Pringle & Williams, 2005) that bridge the gap between technologies, information, and users. In the past, that bridge was largely constructed of words in print, but in the last two decades a variety of composing and communicating technologies have given technical communicators vastly expanded modes (verbal, visual, aural) for interfacing with users across multiple media and platforms. New texts incorporate web, visual, and multimodal elements. They are composed to be circulated over a wide variety of delivery screens and devices.

*Programmatic Perspectives*, *5*(1), Spring 2013: 4-33. Contact author: ‹Claire.Lauer@asu.edu›.

Technology will always be essential to the work of technical communicators (Albers, 2005; Pringle & Williams, 2005). Although it is easy to establish that such a relationship exists, it is more difficult to determine precisely what that relationship has looked like and how it will evolve as both the technological and programmatic landscapes evolve. In 2004, Michael Albers (2005) solicited articles for a special issue of *Technical Communication* that would speak to "how technology is changing the technical communication field and how those changes will affect the profession" (p. 267). In fact, he hoped the special issue would "help with what Shirk called the 'developing awareness of transition from old skills and concepts to new ones' by considering both how the field will be affected based on the new roles, and which jobs and skill sets will expand and which will shrink or be rendered obsolete" (p. 268). Considering that the iPhone and other mobile technologies and Internet applications did not arrive on the scene until 2007, whatever we thought we might have answered in 2005 is once again in need of examination.

Tracing the changing nature of the technical communication field has been an ongoing focus of research, largely conducted through surveys of students, alumni, teachers, professionals, and managers about their perceptions of coursework (Coon & Scanlon, 1997; Cox, 1976), of job skills (Bednar & Olney, 1987; Halpern, 1981; Sapp & Zhang, 2009; Whiteside, 2003), of industry job postings (Lanier, 2009), and of current practice (Brumberger, 2007; Dawley & Anthony, 2003; Dayton & Hopper 2010; Moss, 1995). This research was intended primarily to shed light on what was happening in classrooms, internships, and industry to inform how we should design our pedagogies and administer our programs. However, considering the symbiotic relationship between technical communication and technology, it is also imperative for faculty and program administrators to examine trends in technological change so they can be more informed in their efforts to shape the evolution of the field and to acquire a greater awareness of the ways they discuss technology.

The study I present in this article tracks the evolving relationship between technology and technical communication through the lens of the academic job market. I examined over twenty years of a well-known field resource, the *MLA Job Information List* (*JIL*), to identify the changing ways in which those looking to hire in the field of professional and technical communication have described the technologies and textual practices they are looking for in the teaching and research of new hires. This examination is important because the positions programs develop and the faculty they hire to fill those positions shape professional and technical communication

programs, in terms of both the research faculty conduct that informs workplace practice, and the ways programs prepare undergraduate students to participate in the field and prepare graduate students to help shape the field in the future. My results show that two terms are of particular relevance to technical communication today: the field's evolving understanding of *design*, and the field's emerging preference for *new media* as a concept for both research and teaching. Specifically, program administrators can use these results to be proactive in defining how these terms and technologies should be understood in our field and what role they should play in our work.

## The Academic Job Market

Staying abreast of patterns in technical communication enables program administrators to make strong cases for the importance of professional and technical communication researchers and teachers in informing the workplace and educating new students. Research conducted thus far on the academic job market (Rude & Cargile Cook, 2004; Sun & Hourigan, 2000) has been limited in scope, in part because jobs were not tagged by field emphasis until 2000. Additionally, until 2012, the MLA *JIL* was not archived digitally, thus requiring a researcher to accumulate paper copies of the *JIL* or to travel to the MLA headquarters in New York to access archived paper copies stored there.

Carolyn Rude and Kelli Cargile Cook's (2004) study focused on technical and professional communication specifically. They examined a single year of job advertisements, using the MLA *JIL*, and interviews with hiring committee chairs as their primary resources. Rude and Cargile Cook observed a number of trends, but were especially concerned that only 25% of jobs with a primary or secondary emphasis in technical communication were being filled by candidates with degrees in technical communication and that few jobs requested a particular specialization. A lack of specialization, the authors feared, would ensure that the "field remains amorphously defined to department chairs and deans, with the particular areas of expertise unrecognized" (p. 55). Of the ads that did ask for specialization, 84% asked for "some variation of technology (Web design, multimedia, digital rhetoric)" (p. 56). A technological specialization is not surprising considering the field's long relationship with technology. This relationship deserves much closer examination because we can use it to help articulate our importance as a field and establish new avenues for research and development.

## About the MLA's *Job Information List*

The MLA's *JIL* is central to the field and its hiring practices. The *JIL* is published five times annually, in October, December, February, April, and in the summer. It was digitized in 1997, and made keywords and disciplines searchable in 2000. In 2010, the *JIL* was distributed primarily online, with paper copies available to departments rather than individual subscribers. The MLA is the "recognized professional source" of advertising for and finding out about full-time jobs in English studies in North America (mla.org/*JIL*). "In 2010–11 the *JIL* carried more than 1,800 ads from over 1,100 departments and 725 institutions in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Canada, and overseas" (http://www.mla.org/*JIL*_about).

According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the *JIL* is "seen as a reliable indicator of the job market" (Flaherty, 2012). Although increasing numbers of programs also advertise on listervs and websites of programs and professional organizations, the most consistent, stable venue of job advertising has been the MLA's *JIL*, in part because the majority of technical communication programs (almost 64%) are still housed in English departments (Yeats & Thompson, 2010). Additionally, the rate of advertising for technical communication jobs in the MLA *JIL* appears to have remained stable over the past decade. According to the MLA Office of Research (2012), 8.5% of jobs advertised in 2011–12 were tagged as technical and business writing. This is the same percentage as in 2003-2004 despite the fact that new categories of "technology and digital media" (added in 2004) and "interdisciplinary" (added in 2005) were used to tag 14.3% and 14.9% of jobs respectively in 2011–12 (jobs can be tagged as more than one category so the total exceeds 100%). The highest percentages in the past ten cycles were 10.4% in 2004–2005 and 10.3% in 2009–10. And, although some programs no longer interview at the MLA conference (as Rude and Cargile Cook also note), it is still the case that almost all professional and technical communication jobs are advertised in the *JIL*, in addition to websites and listservs, in an attempt to reach as many potential applicants as possible.

## The Genre of the Job Advertisement

Academic job advertisements, as a genre, tend to follow a pattern. The MLA *JIL* currently asks submitters to include a variety of information in their job advertisements, such as the job title, starting date and term of appointment; areas and subsidiary areas of expertise; teaching load; other departmental duties; salary range; degree, publications, and teaching experience required; and information about how applicants should apply,

as well as any statements of compliance with EEOC and affirmative action regulations. Job ads may also include information about the major, department, and/or campus environment (mla.org/*JIL*_submit). The relative stability and consistency of the job ad genre throughout the decades makes comparing keywords a reliable indicator of changes in the field.

It is important to acknowledge that job ads are written by a variety of people and committees, so they may not accurately and completely represent the knowledge and values of a particular program or department, or of the field as a whole. Ads may be written by deans (especially for positions in newly-developed programs and majors); department chairs (who may or may not affiliate with professional and technical communication); hiring committees comprised of scholars from both inside and outside the field; and even human resources personnel, who often vet job ads to make sure they comply with university policy. More often, however, ads are written by those who will be working most closely with the new hire and who are intimately aware of the field and of the needs of the particular program. The range of personnel involved makes it essential to collect a large sample of ads and to examine each ad closely so a complete picture can be ascertained.

## Methods

I conducted keyword searches of 17 terms throughout 20 years of the *JIL* to identify trends in keywords compared to position title and rank and to contextualize the way certain keywords are used over time.

Initially, this research required that I travel to the MLA headquarters in New York because the *JIL* back-issues were not yet available in digital form. In the summer of 2010, I photographed all twenty years of *JIL* issues. During my visit, I found that not all of the summer issues could be located, and, because summer issues have historically included significantly fewer job ads than other issues, I decided to focus instead on the four primary issues released during the school year (in October, December, February, and April). To keep the scope of the project manageable, fellowships and non-US institutions were also excluded from the study.

In the year that followed this initial stage of inquiry, the MLA developed pdfs of the *JIL* and provided me access to those in addition to making them available on the MLA *JIL* website. This development was important for providing a more accurate keyword search. The archives have also opened up an important avenue for additional research into our field's hiring history.

## Selected Keywords

The keywords included in this study were determined by examining the *JIL* for terms that referenced modes, media, and technologies that emphasized the design and delivery of information in new ways. The choice in terms was also influenced by my observations of terms used in journals, listserv discussions, program materials, course syllabi, and conversations with scholars in our field. Seventeen keywords (and their variant forms) were identified including:

- *Computer* (e.g., computers and writing, computer technology, computer-mediated-communication (CMC), computer-aided instruction (CAI), computer-based writing)
- *Design* (document design, information design)
- *Desktop publishing*
- *Digital* (media, text, technology, studies)
- *Electronic* (media, text, technology)
- *Emerging/Emergent* (media, technology)
- *Graphic/Graphics* (design, communication)
- *Hyper* (text, media)
- *Media* (studies, mass)
- *Multimedia* (or *multi-media)* (text, lab, design, technology)
- *Multimodal* (text, production)
- *New media* (text, technology, studies)
- *Technology* (instructional technology, teaching with technology)
- *Visual* (design, communication)
- *Web/WWW* (text, technology, publishing, editing,)
- *Internet* (technology)
- *Online* (text, technology, teaching, education

These keywords are descriptive of *technologies* rather than particular *tools*. Albers (2005) suggests that we often mistake one for the other. For instance, "DreamWeaver is a tool, but all the various Web design tools and how we use them to construct a Web site comprise a technology" (p. 267). Similarly, I included the term *web* in my search, but not particular tool names, such as Dreamweaver, Adobe, and so forth, though I can attest that specific tool names rarely, if ever, showed up in academic job ads.

The keywords on this list often stand on their own as nouns (*media* or *multimedia*) or they may be part of a compound phrase (*electronic media*). To reduce redundancy, phrases were catalogued by the first term in the phrase (so *electronic media* would count for *electronic* but not also for *media*). Terms such as *media* or *design* were only counted individually when they did not follow another of the selected keywords.

Strings of three or more keywords did count as more than one keyword, because they read as lists of several terms rather than as single terms. For instance: *new electronic media* counts for both *new media* and *electronic*, and *new digital media* counts for both *new media* and *digital*.

Only selected keywords that described the desired applicant qualifications or job/program attributes and titles were included. That is, keywords were not included when they described benefits (e.g., faculty are given a *computer*), the name of a university (e.g., Massachusetts Institute of *Technology*), or other incidentals (e.g., applicants should apply *online*).

Selected keywords were color-coded as they were located throughout the *JIL*. They were then recorded in a spreadsheet that also included the *JIL* publication date, the language and phrasing that surrounded the keywords (for context), the name and location of the institution, the title and rank of the position (e.g., non-tenure, assistant professor, associate professor), the department, and the sub-field (e.g., literature, professional and technical communication, creative writing, rhetoric and composition, and so on). The number of times each keyword appeared in each ad was also recorded.

## Results and Discussion

A total of 2690 jobs advertised in the September through April issues of the English *JIL* from 1990–1991 to 2011–2012 were found to use at least one of the selected keywords in their job ads. Of those, 516 positions had an emphasis or shared emphasis in professional or technical communication. Other sub-field designations used to characterize jobs included English (which generally applied to kitchen sink-type jobs or jobs at smaller schools that tend to hire generalists), rhetoric and composition, creative writing, literature, journalism, English education, film and media studies, and interdisciplinary. Jobs were sometimes characterized as having more than one emphasis because of both ambiguities or mixed emphases in the job ads (e.g., the job ad described the successful hire as contributing to both the technical communication and rhetoric and composition majors). There was no way of knowing how jobs were tagged by the original submitters because MLA only started having submitters self-

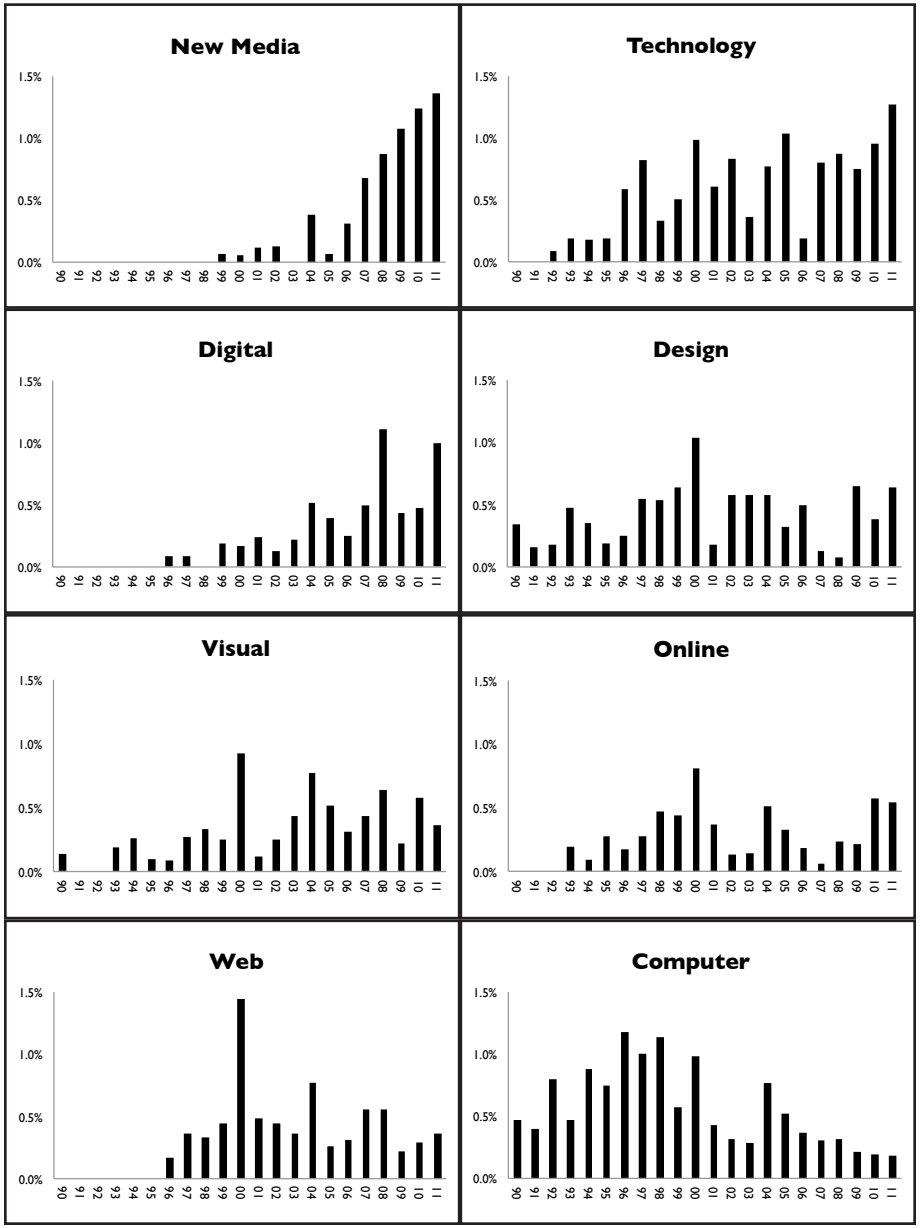
tag their posts in 2001, and information on how specific ads were tagged has not been kept. Thus, I determined sub-field classification after a careful reading of every job ad. I considered a variety of factors, including job title, degree required, hiring department or program, classes requested, research emphasis, and other descriptors. Of the 516 positions with an emphasis or shared emphasis in professional or technical communication, 345 were classified as professional or technical communication, and 171 were classified as technical and professional communication with a shared emphasis in one or more sub-fields, the most common being rhetoric and composition

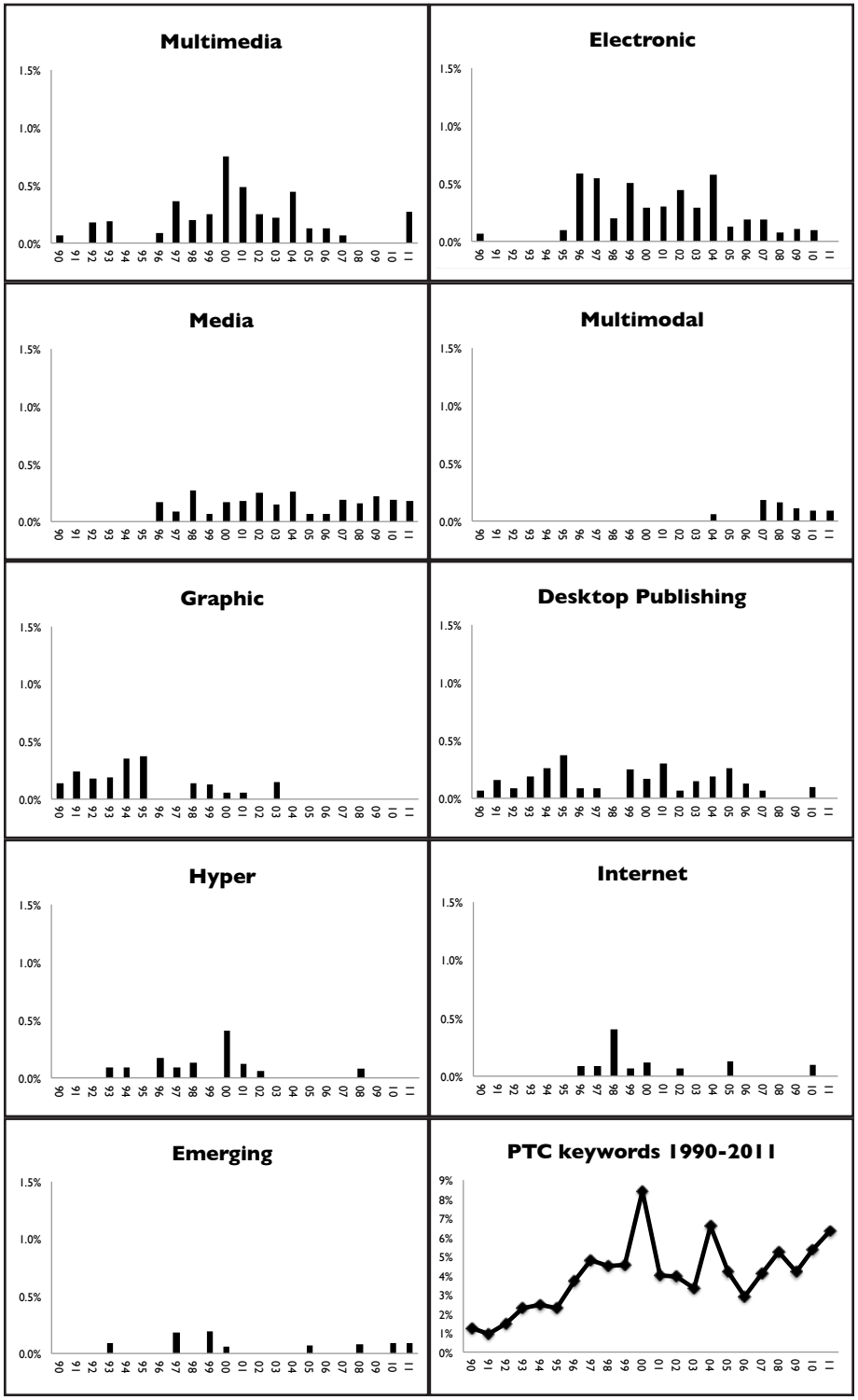
## Trends in Selected Keywords

Figures 1–18 chart the frequency with which the selected keywords appear from 1990–91 to 2011–12. To control for fluctuations in the number of total jobs advertised each year, frequency is displayed as a percentage, derived by dividing the number of ads that included a keyword each year by the number of total ads in the English *JIL* for the four issues that spanned September to April of each year. This adjustment is important in determining the trending of terms over time because of substantial fluctuation in the total number of job ads throughout the past two decades. For instance, in 2007–08 there were 1826 total ads but in 2009–10 there were only 1100. Total ad numbers were provided by the MLA (2012).

*Computer* was the most commonly used of the selected keywords in the early 1990s; but not surprisingly, as technologies expanded and began to have a greater presence in our composing practices, *computer* no longer sufficed as a term that could describe the variety of new and emerging technologies. *Technology* established itself in 1996 and has maintained a strong presence in ads ever since. *Design* and *visual* have maintained strong and steady use throughout the past two decades, along with *online* and *web* to a slightly lesser extent. *Electronic* and *multimedia* came and went from the mid 1990s to the mid 2000s, while *digital* and, most dramatically, *new media*, surged from about 2004 to the present. These last two keywords in particular seem to describe not a singular device (i.e., computer), but a wide range of technologies, delivery mechanisms, access points, and theoretical perspectives that arose as the iPhone and other mobile devices and social networking practices emerged in the last six or so years. Overall, the number of ads that used at least one of the keywords has steadily increased over the past 20 years, indicating the increasing role that communication technologies have in shaping the nature of technical communication research and teaching.

**Figures 1–17. Column graphs showing the number of professional and technical communication job ads in the MLA *JIL* that included various keywords from 1990 to 2011. Trends shown as percentages to adjust for variations in total job ads for each year.**
**Figure 18. Line graph that shows the increase in the number of job ads that contain at least 1 keyword from 1990 to 2011. Trend shown as a percentage to adjust for variations in total job ads for each year.**




Multimedia
Electronic
Media
Multimodal
Graphic
Desktop Publishing
Hyper
Internet
Emerging
PTC keywords 1990-2011

## Number of Keywords per Ad

As Figure 19 shows, of all ads that contain at least one of the selected keywords, professional and technical communication ads have consistently included more distinct keywords per ad than the average for all other sub-fields combined (including rhetoric and composition, literature, and creative writing)

The gap began to close in 2005. Spikes notwithstanding, the number of ads containing at least one of the selected keywords has remained relatively steady in professional and technical communication. The other fields' ads used substantially fewer of the selected keywords at the beginning of the period studied (a reflection of a slower adoption rate of various composing technologies), but the recent increase for those fields is, in part, because of a spike in the use of the phrase *digital humanities*, which has become popular in the past few years. Professional and technical communication will likely continue to exceed other fields in the number of the selected keywords per ad because of our close ties to industry and our unique work developing content to assist users understand and implement emerging technologies. As Pringle and Williams (2005) and others have noted, "technical communicators will continue to be heavy users of technology" (p. 368). No matter how technologies change, programs will always need qualified faculty to research and teach these technologies to new classes of students.

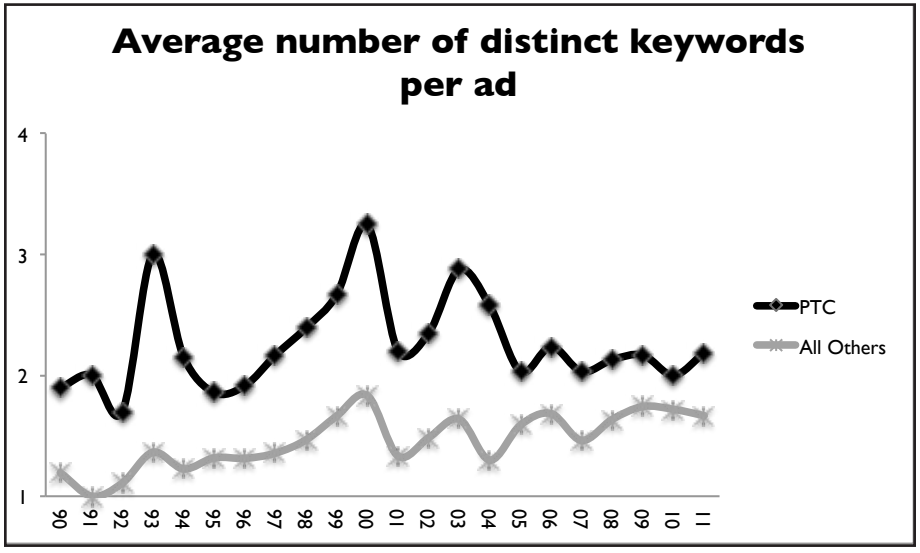



**Figure 19. Line graph that compares the average number of distinct keywords per ad between professional and technical communication and all other sub-fields in ads that contain at least one keyword in the MLA *JIL* from 1990–2011.**

It does appear that the year 2000 was significant in professional and technical communication (and in all fields) with regard to the variety of selected keywords that see spikes in their appearance in job ads (including *web*, *visual*, *design*, *multimedia*, and others). This spike likely occurred because the field was still using keywords that would soon fall out of favor (such as *computer* and *hyper*) while ushering in new keywords (such as *digital*, *new media*, *web*, and *online*). Interestingly, 2000 was also the year that saw the highest number of job ads in the MLA *JIL* during the 20-year period of this study (1848 total ads for English, 40% more than in 2011). Clearly the economy was strong, enabling programs to both hire and possibly invest in new technologies as well.

## Position Titles

Figure 20 shows the trend over the past two decades of position titles that have included at least one of the selected keywords. Position titles are worth examining apart from keywords in the job descriptions because titles indicate that a program has an interest in hiring a candidate with technology-related research and teaching interests. In professional and technical communication, the number of position titles that use a selected keyword has increased overall, though the increase has not been consistent. I attribute this inconsistency to the fact that the word *technical*, already in standard job titles (e.g., assistant professor of technical communication), suggests a level of technological engagement that some may assume makes it unnecessary to specify any particular proficiency.

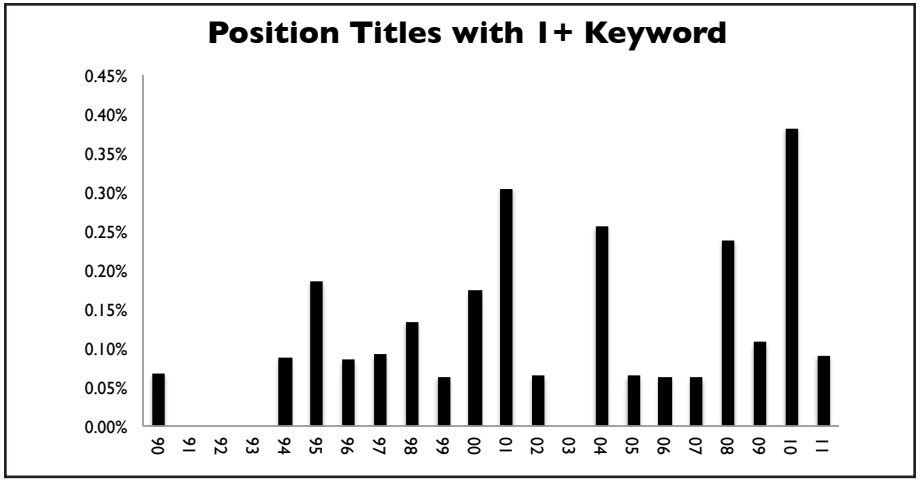



**Figure 20. Column graph that indicates the trend in number of position titles that contain at least one of the selected keywords (shown as a percentage to adjust for variations in total job ads) in each year of the MLA *JIL*.**

Although Figure 20 shows the trend adjusted for variations in number of job ads throughout this period, the actual position titles that contain at least one of the selected keywords also provide useful comparisons. Table 1 lists the actual job titles from each year.

**Table 1. List of position titles that contain at least one keyword from 1990–2011**

| Year | Job Title |
|---|---|
| 1990 | Graphics |
| 1994 | Computers in Writing |
| 1995 | Graphics<br>Writing for the Computer Industry |
| 1996 | Computer-Mediated Communication |
| 1997 | Writing and Technology |
| 1998 | Instruction & Research Technology<br>Writing & Electronic Communication |
| 1999 | Technical Communications & Information Design |
| 2000 | Computers & Writing<br>Graphics/Multimedia<br>Writing and Technology |
| 2001 | Digital Communications<br>Digital Technology<br>New Media Studies<br>Rhetoric and Information Design<br>Texts and Technologies |
| 2002 | Computer-Assisted Writing Center (Director) |
| 2004 | Computers & Writing/Professional Writing<br>Digital Media Studies<br>Electronic Literacies<br>Professional & Media Writing Specialist |
| 2005 | Multimedia Writing |
| 2006 | Digital Media and Communication |
| 2007 | Media Studies |
| 2008 | English: Professional Writing/Critical Media<br>Computers and Writing<br>Professional/New Media Writing |
| 2009 | Professional/New Media Writing |
| 2010 | New Media and Digital Writing<br>English Comp/Visual Rhetoric & Technical/Professional Writing<br>English/Professional Writing/Critical Media<br>New Media, Rhetoric, and Professional Writing |
| 2011 | Digital Media |

The last decade, from 2001–2011, has seen almost a doubling of job titles that include a selected keyword (12 from 1990–2000 and 22 from 2001–2011) with spikes in 2001, 2004, 2008, and 2010. *Computer*, *graphics*, *multimedia*, and *technology* dominated job titles that include selected keywords from 1990–2000. *Digital* and *new media* emerge for the first time in 2001. Interestingly, job titles that use selected keywords have gotten longer throughout the years, especially in 2010, as schools have packed more into job titles rather than leaving specifics to the job descriptions. Through 2007, job titles seemed limited to a single keyword (e.g., Graphics) or two words or phrases separated by "and" (e.g., Writing and Technology). But from 2008 forward, the number of almost list-like job titles using slashes (/) increased, such as those in 2010:

**English Comp/Visual Rhetoric & Technical/Professional Writing**

**English/Professional Writing/Critical Media**

**New Media, Rhetoric, and Professional Writing**

This trend in more complex position titles may indicate that *professional writing* has recently emerged as a less "restrictive" (Rude & Cargile Cook, 2004) iteration of technical writing generally associated with English and the advancement of a humanities, rather than science and engineering, perspective (Sullivan & Porter, 1993). Professional writing may also be seen as more inclusive of some of the web 2.0, single-sourced, and social media writing that is now happening in our classrooms and the workplace.

The fact that more job titles include one or more of the selected keywords also appears to be evidence that the field is developing specializations that will ultimately help stabilize and legitimize the work we do. Although administrators run the risk of excluding potential applicants when using a more specific job title in an ad, such specialization of titles may reflect that programs are building their identities more fully.

## Rank

Starting in 2004, the MLA started keeping data on the rank sought in job ads. Figure 21 shows the breakdown between tenure and non-tenure jobs in ads that used at least one selected keyword compared to the rank in all ads for English in the MLA *JIL*.

From 2004–2010, tenure positions accounted for 95% of all ads that contained at least one of the keywords. Conversely, of all ads for English in the *JIL*, only 75% are for tenure-track positions. The higher proportion of tenure-track jobs that contain the selected keywords (which is also the case for rhetoric and composition) may suggest that having experience with technology is considered a specialized skill representative of

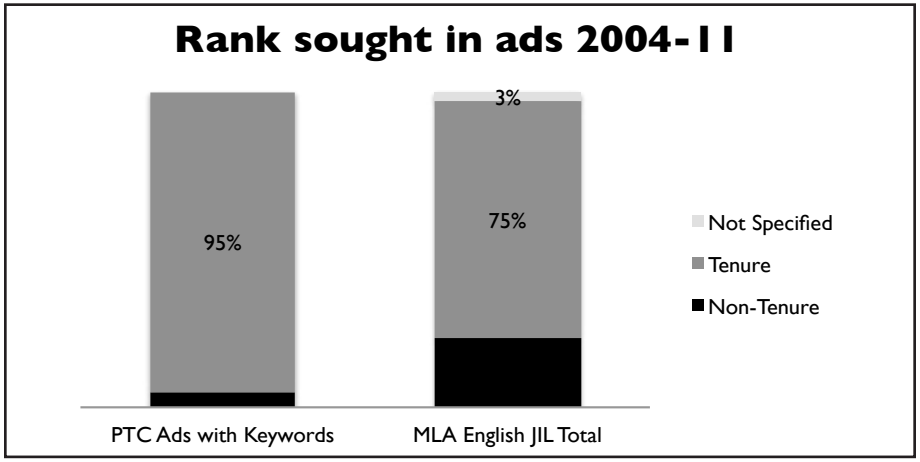



**Figure 21. Column graph that shows the breakdown by hiring rank for ads that used at least one keyword in the MLA *JIL***

highly trained candidates. Positions that ask for specialized familiarity with technology are also positions that require research as part of the job, indicating that programs may want hires to research and theorize the use of technologies as well as teach them. Knowing that proportionately higher numbers of ads for tenure-track jobs include at least one of the keywords may provide incentive for graduate students and others on the market to become more knowledgeable in technology-related areas. More likely, the trend will encourage job seekers to attach keywords valued in the current technological contexts of universities and workplaces to the skills and theoretical perspectives they already have. For instance, a candidate describing her skills in 2011 as "new media" or "digital" may suggest more advanced expertise than "computers" or "technology."

## Selected Keywords in Context

At this point, I examine a few keywords, such as *design* and *new media*, in greater depth. Each of these two keywords in particular deserve attention from program administrators either because it appeared with frequency over the past two decades (e.g., design) or its appearance increased dramatically in the past few years (e.g., new media).

### Design in Professional and Technical Communication

*Design* is a term that is uniquely associated with professional and technical communication. Design appears in professional and technical communication job ads to a greater extent than it appears in job ads for any of the other sub-fields in English. It ranks third of the 17 selected keywords used

in professional and technical communication ads in total instances from 1990–2011 (behind only *computer* and *technology*). It ranks ninth of the 17 in rhetoric and composition, 14th of the 17 in literature, and 16th of the 17 in creative writing. However, the number of instances that design appears in job ads actually could be considered undercounted because I only counted design if it wasn't paired with another of the selected keywords to avoid counting keywords more than once. So, for example, *visual design* counted as *visual* and *web design* counted as *web*. Despite counting design only if it was paired with words other than selected keywords—for example, "information" or "document"—design still ended up as the third most used of the selected keywords in ads since 1990.

To get a better sense of how design was used overall, I identified all instances of design, no matter which selected keyword or other word it appeared with, to see when and how it has been used over the past 20 years. In all, I found 21 different phrases that include design. Two dominate, *document design* and *web design*, with *information design* rounding out the top three. Table 2 lists the myriad iterations of *design* in professional and technical communication ads.

Figure 22 shows the frequency with which the top three instances of design appear in professional and technical communication job ads (adjusted for overall annual ad numbers). The data for frequency of web design and information design are displayed in bars and data for uses of

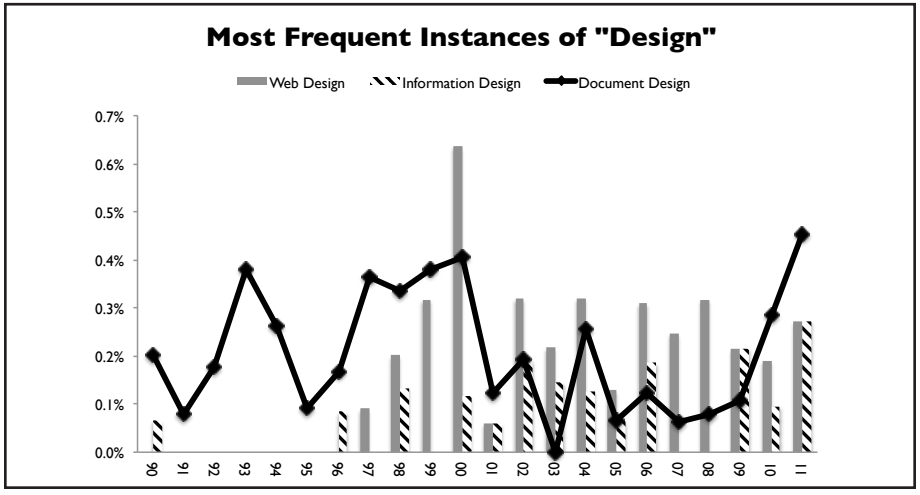



**Figure 22 shows the frequency with which the top three instances of design appear in professional and technical communication job ads (adjusted for overall annual ad numbers). The data for uses of web design and information design are displayed in bars and data for uses of document design are displayed in a line to provide better contrast and readability.**

document design are displayed in a line to provide better contrast and readability.

After increasing in usage in 1998, the highest concentration of *design* occurs in 2000, and the second highest occurs in 2011. 2004 saw the most diversity in the use of *design*, with 11 different variations of *design* used in job ads that year. *Document design* has clearly been the most dominant use of the term *design* over the past 20 years, but *web design* emerged in 1997 and has maintained a strong presence since.

In 2000, *design* was used in a total of 32 job ads, with a remarkable spike in *web design* coinciding with a host of web composing standards and technologies developed in the late 1990s, including HTML4, CSS, Javascript, Netscape Composer (the first free WYSIWYG software), Flash, and Dreamweaver. These scripting languages and composing tools made it possible for anyone with a browser and Internet connection to publish material to the

**Table 2. Instances of design in JIL ads from 1990–2011**

| Phrase | # of instances in ads 1990-2011 |
|---|---|
| Document Design | 61 |
| Web Design | 56 |
| Information Design | 24 |
| Multimedia Design | 14 |
| Design | 12 |
| Visual Design | 12 |
| Graphic Design | 10 |
| Instructional/Curriculum Design | 8 |
| Online/Online Information Design | 7 |
| Page Design | 5 |
| Interface Design | 5 |
| Communication Design | 4 |
| Digital/Digital Document Design | 2 |
| CD Design | 1 |
| Hypertext Design | 1 |
| Message Design | 1 |
| User-Centered Design | 1 |
| New Media Design | 1 |
| Non-Verbal Design | 1 |
| Interaction Design | 1 |

web. Job ads that asked for experience with *web design* were likely looking for candidates able to teach these technologies in anticipation of industry attention to web content development that was sure to follow.

The more recent upward trend in the use of *document design* in ads is interesting in light of communication becoming more digital and arguably less print-oriented. The more ambiguous *information design* established a presence in the late 1990s. It has increased in use in the last several years, but has not surpassed document design, especially if the past two years are any indication. The more frequent use of document design may suggest that, despite its traditional association with print, members of the field use the term *document* to encompass both print and digital texts. The use of document may also suggest a focus on genres or deliverables (e.g., reports, manuals, proposals), which is still at the center of professional and technical communication pedagogy. *Information design*, by contrast, is more ambiguous. Albers suggests that it is a relatively immature discipline that includes technical communication (as well as human factors and visual design) but is not exclusive to technical communication (2003). Information design's newness and interdisciplinary has made it difficult to define, and, although scholars who write about information design advances their own definition, "the definitions never match" (p. 2). The most recent definition, provided by Karen Schriver (2013), supports this relative ambiguity, suggesting that information design is concerned in general with "structuring content visually" (p. 386), rather than specifically addressing the design of certain genres.

Because the rate of technological change has been rapid, and the number of outlets or devices on which information must now be made available has expanded, it would not be surprising if an emphasis on information design ultimately replaces document design, visual design, or web design by addressing the ways singular content is arranged across a variety of media (single-sourcing). For instance, Schriver (2013) uses the example of a recent graduate tasked with creating a series of documents, both print and web based, using a set of information and data related to healthy living. If information design refers to how visual and verbal content is arranged across a variety of media and technologies while attending to the user experience and meeting the needs of specific audiences, the term is more inclusive, flexible, and reflective of the range of content and distribution channels for which information now must be adapted. This approach removes the emphasis from traditional document genres and acknowledges and accommodates the diverse hybrid genres through which information is now provided.

Ultimately, information design may be the direction that professional and technical communication takes with regard to *designing content*. But perhaps the variety of design possibilities suggested in a phrase such as information design makes it too ambiguous and harder to envision because everyone may imagine it differently (a variety of screens? Print and web documents? Infographics?). In this way, information design may have limited usefulness in a job ad or interview; it may not effectively connect what one person (or program) assumes with what another person (or job applicant) assumes. Why, if information design is the more appropriate term, does the field continue to use document design in its job ads? What is the difference between the two and why should a program consider using one rather than the other? For program administrators, it's important to articulate what expertise in information design means for research, teaching, and ability to influence workplace practice.

## The Rise of New Media

Similar to the ambiguity of information design, the term *new media* has not been well defined in professional and technical communication literature until Anne Wysocki's (2013) recently published chapter on the topic. Nor has the relationship between new media and professional and technical communication been clearly identified. However, unlike information design, the popularity of the term new media does not seem to have been affected by that ambiguity.

Technical communication likely acquired its familiarity with *new media* through discussions in the related field of rhetoric and composition (a field that has not shared professional and technical communication's level of interest in information design). For instance, in 2000 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin published *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, which has become a widely cited text in the field of computers and composition and was the winner of the 2001 Lewis Mumford Award for Outstanding Scholarship in the Ecology of Technics from the Media Ecology Association (MEA). In 2001, Lev Manovich published *The Language of New Media*, and discussion ensued about how Manovich's understanding of *new media* was or was not useful for the field of composition (see Dilger, 2002; Sorapure, 2003; Ball qtd. in Lauer, 2012). In 2003, the journal *Kairos* published a special issue on "Issues of New Media;" and in 2004, four well-known composition and professional and technical communication scholars, Anne Wysocki, Johndan Johnson-Eiola, Cynthia Selfe, and Geoffrey Sirc, published *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*. This publication helped bring the concept and

applications of *new media* into the mainstream of composition. Johnson-Eiola's co-authorship is significant because, with Stuart Selber, he has since published several influential collections of essays in technical communication (2004, 2013).

In its early appearances in the MLA *JIL*, *new media* follows a similar trajectory in both rhetoric and composition and professional and technical communication. However, though *new media* in rhetoric and composition ads plateaus somewhat after 2008, its use has continued to increase in professional and technical communication ads. This increase may indicate that new media has come to represent the variety of channels of circulation and delivery that have emerged over the past several years as a result of smart phones and social media. It could also represent a theorizing of the effects these rapid changes in technologies are having on our notions of text, genre, and audience, and how these changes affect professional and technical communication workplaces and job responsibilities. Both of these possibilities are important for program administrators to monitor as we move into the future.

*New media* has seen the largest increase of use in job ads of all the selected keywords since 2007. In addition to more job ads including new media as a required or desired specialization, *new media* is used more prominently within job ads as well. Figure 23 shows the trend line (as a percentage, adjusted for annual variations in total jobs) of instances of *new media* as a keyword in job ads, as well as how, increasingly, *new media* is the first or only keyword used in job ads.

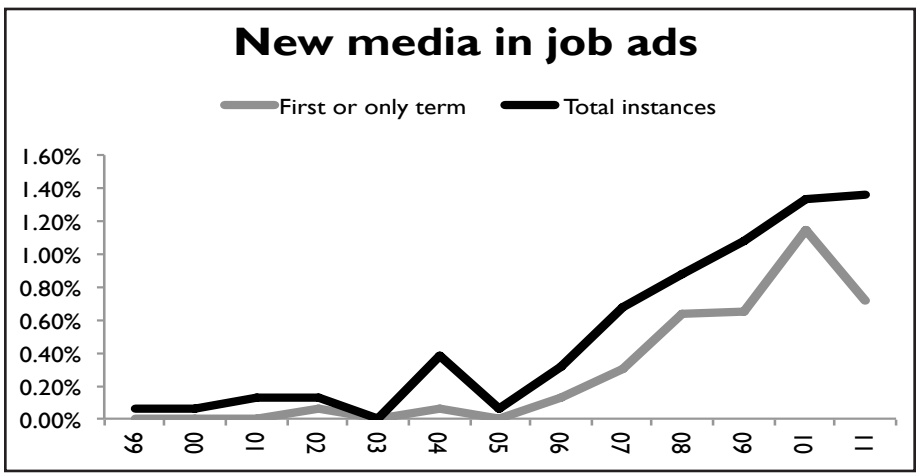



**Figure 23. Line graph that shows both an increase in the total instances of new media in job ads and an increase in how often new media is positioned as either the first or only keyword in a job ad**

In the early to mid 2000s, it was typical to see *new media* situated after a series of other terms, suggesting its newness to the field. For instance, a job ad in 2004 asked for a "primary focus on… technology, additional background in… visual rhetoric, new media design." However, by 2010, *new media* was the first or only of the selected keywords listed in 12 of 14 ads, or 86% of the ads that included new media, showing that not only has it become a more familiar term, but a term that carries considerable weight and caché.

A closer look at the wording of job ads reveals the variety of ways in which *new media* is characterized. Half of the 14 job ads in 2010 that include *new media* characterize it as an area of study (sometimes capitalized, sometimes not). For instance, one ad asks for "Demonstrated teaching experience, and familiarity with contemporary research in the areas of professional communication and/or new media." Another requests "secondary specializations in science writing, grant writing, or New Media." Other ads characterize new media as:

- A product or text: "Applicants must send electronically: Cover letter, CV, a statement of their teaching philosophy, new media evidence…"
- A technology: "A successful candidate will demonstrate a commitment to teaching composition, ability in specialty area, and ability to incorporate new media and other appropriate technologies with writing classroom practice.
- A type of composing: "Particular consideration will be given to those with expertise in technical, professional and new media composition"
- A concept: "The candidate must have a record of elective teaching with technology and demonstrate an understating of the role of new media in contemporary professional writing.

The emphasis on new media as a research specialization is a positive development for professional and technical communication programs in light of Rude and Cargile Cook's (2004) observation that the specializations requested in 2002–2003 job ads seemed to emphasize teaching rather than areas of research. The current data suggest that technology is no longer considered just skills we teach, but rather an area of research and study that we can continue to build on and learn from.

I also bring up the variety of ways in which new media is characterized in job ads because the variations reflect concerns similar to those apparent in the larger debate in the rhetoric and composition field over how scholars define new media, and how those definitions have changed as technol-

ogies (especially mobile and social media technologies) have evolved (see Lauer, 2012, for a longer discussion of this debate). For program administrators to articulate how our programs positively contribute to departments and universities, and how programs will benefit the future careers of potential students, administrators must take ownership over, and be able to define, terms such as new media even as those definitions evolve (see for instance, Wysocki, 2004, 2013; and Ball qtd. in Lauer, 2012).

At this point, it doesn't appear that programs have clear ideas about what new media is. Upon examination of the program websites of the only two schools that referred in their job ads to a program or major track in new media, it is not clear what either program actually means by new media. For instance, the first program, housed in the university's department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse claims that,

> By joining critical interpretation and situated practical action, the MA in New Media Studies prepares graduates to function as productive and responsible individuals in the evolving social contexts created by the new media.

This description suggests that new media is a thing or collection of things with powerful agency to create social contexts. It also appears that a student interested in this program would analyze and engage with these new media-engendered contexts. We might assume the social contexts include social networking, collaborative writing, wikis, blogs, gaming, mobile apps, and others. But interestingly, no references address specifically what the program thinks comprises *the* new media—only that the social contexts new media engenders are "evolving." No examples of technologies, websites, or practices, and no further explication are provided. On the one hand, that new media is not referred to as merely a collection of contemporary networking apps (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and the like) is reassuring. On the other hand, I wonder whether the administrator of that particular program feels comfortable explaining that program description to the parent of a student enrolling in the program or to a dean considering a new tenure line to support the program.

The second program is actually a "Professional and new media writing" track within a broader English major. The track is described on the department's website as one that

> Prepares students for a variety of writing fields in the corporate, educational, non-profit, and governmental spheres. Students take classes in specialties such as journalism, technical writing, writing for the web, and advertising and public relations.

What is remarkable about this description is that it fails to provide any real differentiation between this track (as one that is specifically concerned with new media) and any number of other typical professional and technical communication programs. The description includes no suggestion of what new media is, but more strikingly, nothing that even resembles anything "new" at all. In this respect, *new media* seems to be used to attract students who want to feel that they are getting the most relevant, cutting edge degree in how to communicate effectively in today's rapidly evolving technological context.

Program administrators who may not be able to define new media on command or use the term for any other reason than to make their programs sound cutting edge may not be entirely at fault. The lack of specificity or consistency in defining new media is not surprising given the relative lack of scholarly discussion about new media specifically in professional and technical communication literature (more has been written in rhetoric and composition). A survey of major journals in technical and professional communication, such as *Technical Communication Quarterly*, the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *Technical Communication*, and the *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, brings up only a single instance of new media in the published titles in the past ten years. In that article, "Mode, Medium, and Genre: A Case Study of Decisions in New-Media Design," S. Scott Graham and Brandon Whalen (2008) study the process of what they call a "new media designer." While they don't specifically define new media (despite the fact that they define other terms, such as *multimodal*), they characterize the process of developing new media as "dynamic, creative, intuitive, nonlinear (and sometimes childlike)" (p. 66). The authors describe new media in a variety of other ways throughout the article. At several points the authors interchange *new media* with *multimedia* and *multimodal* artifacts. At another point, the authors suggest that the rapidity with which multimodal and multimedia artifacts have become their own genres is a characteristic of new media. The authors extend this idea further to suggest that new media challenges our traditional assumptions about process and genre, or, "the professional in professional communication" (p. 66). For instance, the authors present the example of the development of a Flash e-card that doubles as a game that a company wants to send out to its customers and employees. The artifact represents a hybridization of genres, intended for multiple rhetorical purposes and directed at multiple audiences. The authors characterize this kind of hybridization as a feature of new media.

In addition to this single discussion of new media in professional and technical communication journals, mentions of new media appear in a few short pieces in a special issue of *Intercom* magazine devoted to "multimedia and new media, especially the role that new media centers or labs have on technical communication practice and instruction" (Sept/Oct 2011). In one piece, Rich Rice (2011) advocates for the development of media labs to "support the creation, design, and delivery of new media content and knowledge in integrated and systematic ways" (p. 7). Similar to the characterizations of new media as hybrid and dynamic in Graham and Whalen's (2008) study, Rice characterizes a new media lab as a space where

> Chaos is embraced, disruptions incorporated, false starts recognized as iterative processes, bugs featurized. In a media lab, digital technology crashes into media, recorded liveness, culture, rhetorical purpose, cost, time, and audience in order to explore ways in which a composition can impact society, afford communicative practices, invite interaction and reflective practices, promote collaborative learning that capitalizes on varied levels of expertise, maximize usability, and prioritize accessibility. A new media lab is an intensely interactive and responsive support space. (p. 7)

Rice imparts a sense that new media is characterized more by innovation and experimentation than by adherence to convention. New media comprises and supports multiple genres, formats, and composing and delivery modalities. Practically speaking, a new media lab, while supporting the "chaos" of a process that integrates many elements, is also important as a way of helping students ultimately develop "production-quality deliverables" (p. 7).

Geoffrey Sauer (2011) also advocates for the importance of a new media production space in his piece, "Multimedia Labs as Content Incubators." Sauer runs the Studio for New Media at Iowa State University, though interestingly, he does not use the term new media in the title of his piece nor does he use new media in the article to describe the space. Rather, he describes the Studio as "a small research center" designed "like a clubhouse, a technology hub, and a classroom" (p. 11). The spaces, as Sauer describes them, include elements of play and unconventionality, supporting Sauer's assertion that the Studio is "distinctive because it attempts to teach users about producing digital media, without 'teaching' in traditional ways" (p. 11).

Sauer suggests that a new media studio is needed at this point because content management systems (CMS), in which technical communicators could write for the web without learning web programming

and database languages like PHP, Python, Ruby, or SQL, have largely failed as a result of miscommunications between the developers of these CMS systems and the technical communicators who had to use them. (The extent to which technical communicators should know the programming languages that drive communication technologies is a hotly debated issue. See Lockett, Losh, Rieder, Sample, Stolley, & Vee, 2012; and Hart-Davidson, 2012, for perspectives on this issue). In this respect, the experimentation and creative problem solving that seem to characterize new media is necessary to address a complex communication problem between the development and distribution of content over web and screen technologies and a user's ability to effectively interact with such content.

New media, therefore, might be seen not only as a technology, space, or deliverable, but as a way of theorizing both what happens during proliferations of composing and circulating technologies and how to solve problems that arise from attempts to communicate through these technologies. In this respect, the increased use of the term new media in job ads may signal a desire of programs to hire faculty who are familiar with the latest composing and circulating technologies, and who can approach interactions with such technologies in thoughtful, theoretical, and deliberate ways. This is another step forward in our ability to better define our field and legitimize our work.

The genre of the job ad is one in which terms not defined but left open to interpretation could signal a desire to find out from applicants how they interpret new media. As Cheryl Ball commented in an interview when asked about her own experience on the job market,

> The hiring committees are like: well you tell us what you mean by 'new media,' and we'll see if it fits with what we want to do. Which is cool. It's powerful because the people who are on the market now who do multimodal or new media or whatever you want to call it, digital rhetoric stuff, are defining the field through their work, through their research, through their teaching, and you're getting a huge range of what that means and I think that's wonderful (qtd. in Lauer, 2012).

The continued trajectory of new media will be interesting to observe in light of its popularity and despite the lack of attention to the term in the professional and technical communication scholarship. The influence of Anne Wysocki's (2013) chapter about new media, which puts forward one perspective on the relationship between new media and professional

and technical communication, will also be interesting to follow. In "What technical communicators need to know about new media," Wysocki (2013) identifies six traits that characterize *new media*, including:

1. New media result from digitization
2. New media entail using code to control the presentation and distribution of media
3. New media depend on digital networks
4. New media are faster than print media
5. New media enable different kinds of interactivity than print media
6. New media are becoming ubiquitous

This work provides the most thorough treatment of the relationship between technical communication and new media thus far and explicates why having an understanding of new media will help technical communicators. Wysocki claimed that

> Because the production, distribution, and consumption of such texts can differ considerably from the production, distribution, and consumption of "traditional" print texts, technical communicators engaged with new media need to engage not only with software and genre features but also with larger concerns such as the expectations that audiences have for new media and the new sorts of relations we establish with each other as we choose among available new communication technologies. (p. 429)

Though Wysocki's chapter was published too recently to have influenced the use of new media in job ads over the past three years, it nonetheless suggests some additional reasons for the popularity of the term. For instance, references to new media in job ads could signal a program's desire for someone positioned to "stay aware not only of new software and hardware but also of how we can use and so shape new media to support our work as communicators" (Wysocki, p. 428). In this way, perhaps programs using new media in their job ads—in addition to wanting faculty who can theorize developments in new media—are signaling their awareness of, and interest in influencing, the latest technological developments in communication. Perhaps these programs, in attempting to help their students stay competitive, want to hire faculty who will help the program stay current with the latest technological and communicative trends, but do so in a theoretically meaningful way.

## Conclusion

Examining over two decades of jobs advertised in the MLA *JIL* provides a consistent, reliable reflection of where the field has been and where it's headed in its relationship with evolving communication technologies and texts. With the rapid expansion of composing technologies and practices, a concomitant range of terms used to describe these practices has emerged. While the term *computer* largely started the field's rich relationship with technology, we can learn much about the directions in which our field's path has branched by noticing the ways terms such as *technology*, *design*, *web*, *visual*, *electronic*, *digital* and *new media* have been used in job ads, and thus valued, over the years. The MLA *JIL* keywords show us what particular skills and perspectives programs have sought in new hires and these trends are important to note because of the ways that those hires, in turn, shape the identity of programs and the larger field.

Although trends have surfaced over the past two decades, the use of terms has not been consistent nor has it suggested nearly enough contemplation about the significance of naming—job titles for example—or of defining terms. Scholars continually call for critical thinking to accompany our integration of technology into our classrooms and texts; similarly, we need to be aware of how we articulate these technologies and how we can more strategically use language to better project the values and practices of our field as we navigate the rapidly changing technological landscape. Taking ownership of the ways we name and define the work we do, and the technological advances that are important to our work, is imperative to our ability to thrive in our departments, universities, workplaces, and funding contexts.

As research on the ways we name and describe our roles and our work continues, it will be interesting to track how the latest patterns realize themselves over the next few years and decades. New terms will enter the discussion, some that are familiar to us already, and some that will develop from future scholarship. For instance, a few terms did not make the initial keyword list for this study, including *distance education*, *networked*, *hybrid*, and *interactive*. These did not appear with great frequency in job ads, but because of their relevance could be considered in future research.

The trends in keywords represent changes in technologies, of course, but they also represent changes in how we discuss technology and how we name what is happening in the field. The keyword *new media*, for example, has a longer history in fields outside of technical communication but became increasingly relevant to professional and technical communica-

tion with the advent of the iPhone and other mobile and social networking technologies because of the new ways those technologies engendered for circulating and distributing texts. It has since become a term that carries a certain cutting-edge caché with students who enroll in our programs and administrators who fund our hires. However, it is only recently being theorized to any extent in our field and we need to do a better job anticipating trends and technologies so that we can be on the front end of researching and theorizing them. Staying abreast of patterns in keywords used in hiring is one way to anticipate what terms are being valued and how we can use those terms to add value to the work that we already do. I hope that this article can be used to support such efforts.

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# Oral Communication Assessment in a General Education Professional Communication Course: Politics and a Proposal

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**Abstract.** This article discusses ways that an oral communication course, Professional Communication, was assessed not only to meet the requirements of the university's outside governing board but also to increase instructional effectiveness within the course while collaborating with faculty who teach it. As a result of the course faculty's taking ownership of the assessment process, despite difficult politics, the faculty created a new assessment form genre, which allows them to begin assessing required characteristics for the governing board, as well as characteristics identified by the faculty as essential for students to master as they learn specific oral communication genres within the course. The article focuses on assessment processes and politics while also proposing a framework for assessment that goes beyond meeting requirements to expanding the process by meeting specific student and faculty needs.

**Keywords.** Programmatic reflection, assessment, oral communication, genres

Proving our effectiveness in a variety of ways has become a necessity in today's educational culture of downsizing faculty while expanding class sizes, growing budget restrictions, and shrinking funding sources (whether state/federally supported or private). Assessment efforts can strengthen our arguments for our teaching and research strategies, whether governed from on high (such as accreditation boards) or from within (such as self studies for academic audits). Recently, and not surprisingly, general education courses have also become the focus of assessment, at the direction of state education governing boards. The Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) is one such governing board, and Tennessee Tech University (TTU), one of the state's institutions, recently began participating in statewide, mandated assessment of its general education courses.

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In 2001, the TBR changed the general education course requirements for all universities in its system in an effort to move all curricula to 120 credit hours. Tennessee has a low percentage of residents with bachelor's degrees, and lowering the number of credit hours needed for a degree (the Professional Communication curriculum went from 132 to 120) would help ensure that students could more feasibly obtain a bachelor's degree in four years, thus enhancing marketing efforts and attracting more students to state universities. According to the 2012 Higher Education Profiles and Trends, published by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission(2012), as of 2010, only 14.7% of Tennessee's residents had a bachelor's degree (p. 2). This low statistic is significant because the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce's (2012) analysis of occupation data and workforce trends predicts that "54 percent of Tennessee's jobs will require postsecondary education by 2018" (p. 2). These statistics have increased the state's motivation to encourage its residents to obtain college degrees in general, including bachelor's degrees.

As part of the reduction in credit hours, the TBR redefined a category that had a direct effect on our Department of English and Communications at TTU: a nine-credit-hour "Communication" requirement that included the two-semester freshman English sequence and then SPCH 2410, Introduction to Speech Communication. TTU anticipated that one course meeting this requirement would not be enough for all students at the university to take, so upper-level administration assigned several interdisciplinary faculty to a general education communication committee, charged with exploring options for other courses to help meet this requirement. A department chair within the College of Engineering chaired the committee, and a professor of Speech and I were also on the committee.

At the time, the Professional Communication curricula included PC 2500, which served as an introduction to majors. Because this course contained oral presentations, the committee decided that this course would be a good one to explore for the oral communication, general education requirement, especially because the course addressed disciplinary content that would be especially helpful to engineering and business disciplines, and then the disciplinary content related more to Professional Communication could be moved to an already-existing 3000-level course. While the content for this general education course could not be designed specifically for a particular discipline, if the course framework were general enough, students could bring their disciplinary knowledge to the course and could

be more practically prepared to give presentations in their respective disciplines. The course was to include six oral presentations, along with instruction in team presentations and presentation technologies. The course included writing to a minor degree with such assignments as audience analyses, evaluations, and visual aids/handouts.

Everyone on the committee seemed to support this idea of the redesigned PC 2500. This interdisciplinary committee, then, helped recommend a course within the Department of English and Communications that would help meet the needs of students in fields the university wanted especially to support and grow, including engineering and business. The Professional Communication faculty welcomed the use of this course as part of the general education requirements because they wanted to enhance the major and saw this course as an opportunity for growth; plus, they felt that students could benefit from the technical/professional communication strategies the course would promote. However, over time, the Speech faculty grew to resent this change and would challenge it. Even though both courses satisfy the same general education requirement, no collaboration took place as PC 2500 was being redesigned or later as faculty began teaching the course.

In 2002, PC 2500 (Communicating in the Professions) gained approval as a general education, oral communication course at TTU. In redesigning this course (which incorporates Laura Gurak's Oral Presentations for Technical Communication) as a general education course, our Professional Communication faculty accomplished the progressive goal of "mak[ing] technical communication studies more central to . . . institutions and more influential with more students" (Rehling & Lindeman, 2010, p. 4). The Professional Communication Program at TTU focuses on scientific and technical writing, as well as effective oral communication and communicating using various electronic media effectively. The integrative process of adding this course to the general education curriculum has assisted in highlighting technical communication's focus within our university's (and our College of Arts and Sciences') commitment to technology as well as effective communication within the liberal arts. As students consider their general education course options, they can still take SPCH 2410 to complete the requirement, rather than PC 2500. Immediately after PC 2500 became a general education course, though, enrollment in the course understandably grew to an unmanageable level. Although the addition of this course did not impact the content of SPCH 2410 at all, PC 2500 included more team and work-themed presentations, and students soon perceived the course content as more relevant. Quickly, enrollment and

demand increased so much that often, only graduating seniors or students allowed to register early (such as honors students, athletes, or students with disabilities) populate the course sections, and the sections are full after the first couple of days of registration each semester. The Department of English and Communications does not have the faculty (full time or adjunct) to meet the demand for the course.

When the Speech faculty saw the high demand for a different course related to oral communication, they began to resent PC 2500's redesign and challenged the qualifications of the faculty teaching the course in addition to its content, even though PC 2500 faculty had backgrounds in English, Composition, or Professional Communication and even though the course had to meet the same outcomes goals as SPCH 2410; the Speech faculty maintained that PC 2500 was still a writing course on the one hand, but on the other hand, they tried to take ownership of the course, since it was now a "Speech" course. However, both courses have remained separate and are taught by faculty in the respective areas (Professional Communication faculty do not teach SPCH 2410, and Speech faculty do not teach PC 2500, although at first, some faculty did teach both). Unfortunately, tension developed between the two fields, and, as a result of other departmental difficulties, Speech and Journalism formed a separate departmental division from the other fields in the department, and a proposal has been submitted to TBR for Speech and Journalism to form a separate department of Communication. At this time, both SPCH 2410 and PC 2500 undergo assessment each fall as part of the TBR general education assessment process, and then recommendations are made by the faculty teaching the courses in order to improve achieving outcomes goals presented by TBR. Formal assessment began in the fall of 2010.

Because PC 2500 was a new general education course, assessment became a legitimating factor, especially because SPCH 2410 was an already established course and was and has since been considered the more "mainstream" and legitimate general education, oral communication course at TTU. In the edited collection Assessment in Technical and Professional Communication, Margaret Hundleby and Jo Allen (2010) state in their foreword that "assessment in our field has suffered both from irregular attention to its status in our overall practice and from uncertainty about productive and authentic strategies" (p. vii). Especially because PC 2500 is a relatively new course and has somewhat of a relationship to an already existing one, I believe establishing an effective assessment process and pattern for this course is essential to helping legitimize Professional Communication as a field at TTU. In addition, Hundleby and Allen call for those

of us in the fields of Technical Communication and Professional Communication to "begin the process of shifting the status of our assessment practices to a level commensurate with the effort we are putting into building the status of the field" (p. viii). The assessment efforts discussed here aim at accomplishing such a goal.

During the process of coordinating the assessment process, many issues rose to the surface that undoubtedly impact institutions not only with general education business/professional communication oral communication courses but also those with oral communication courses within the field in general or even courses that require oral communication as a significant component. In order to help highlight some of these issues and debates, I would like here to accomplish several things: 1) provide a brief review of some of the relevant literature focusing on assessment, 2) relate that review to the mandated outcomes goals that many of us address in our institutions, 3) discuss ways those goals define the genres we teach, although we can subvert that definition to some degree, 4) provide strategies for difficult political assessment contexts, and 5) propose an example of ways to maximize the use of outcomes based assessment for our benefit. While some of the discussion here is specific to TTU, much of the conversation is applicable to broader institutional contexts.

## Literature Review

In their essay "Students' Perceived Preference for Visual and Auditory Assessment with E-Handwritten Feedback," Crews and Wilkinson (2010) state, "meaningful assessment is essential" (2010, p. 400) in order to help students learn. Interestingly, the assessment method described here originally was developed to ensure that general education outcomes goals were being included and evaluated in oral communication courses; the assumption, therefore, is that if these outcomes goals are being included successfully, students will be learning (and the learning would be meaningful, as well). As Allen (2010) cautions, though, "most assessment experts caution against one-size-fits-all assessment" (p. 39). Creating an assessment tool that met the TBR needs as well as TTU's students' needs was somewhat difficult and required the development of a new genre (the assessment tool itself) that incorporated the TBR purposes as well as the communication instructors' purposes at TTU. Developing this type of assessment tool was important in reflecting a context for our assessment (Huot, 1996; Yu, 2010), as well as the need to implement an assessment tool that interfaced effectively with "an institution's learning goals" (Fraser, Harich, Norby, Brzovic, Rizkallah, & Loewy, 2005, p. 291); our students, many from business, nurs-

ing, and engineering disciplines, bring different knowledge to the assignments instructors pose to students in the class. While our instructors may not always understand the specifics of different technical disciplines that our students draw upon for their presentations' subject matter, the assessment tool allows for evaluation of general, generic qualities essential for successful presentations. Yet this assessment tool is an evolving one and continues to change based on changing student populations (the number of students in our classes from certain majors, for example) and even workplace expectations; many workplaces today require "presentations" rather than "speeches given from a podium" (Fisk, 2007).

Ideally, the assessment tool would be used as a teaching tool, such as Pathak (2001) demonstrated with the incorporation of peer feedback into an oral presentation module. Schullery and Gibson (2001) also discuss the benefit of assessing group communication skills, including weaknesses, and ways to use the results for improvement. While the teachable benefits of the TBR assessment in themselves do not seem very tangible, the individual instructors have access to their course assessment results (as presented via an Excel spreadsheet) overall, and they also are the ones filling out the assessment forms, so they can get a sense of what areas might be emphasized more for the current students as well as perhaps future ones.

The TBR outcomes goals as presented to the Professional Communication faculty originally did not seem directly related to teaching benefits, though. In fact, it did not seem clear to anyone how the assessment results would be used, and after three years of assessment reports, the TBR has not responded to any of them. Because the assessment process is time consuming, I wondered if there might be a way to accomplish the assessment process and include areas our faculty wanted to assess, as well, areas that we had learned from experience were important that our students learn but that the students were having difficulty learning. Below is a discussion of the mandated TBR outcomes goals for the oral communication requirement, as well as a discussion of how a particular tool, the oral presentation evaluation form, evolved during the assessment process. This tool enabled Professional Communication instructors to complete the mandated assessment while also learning more about students' progress regarding other generic characteristics of effective presentations

## Outcomes Goals

As part of the mandated TBR assessment process, oral communication instructors must assess certain outcomes goals, listed below.

**Table 1: Outcomes Goals for Oral Communication for Institutions in the TBR System**

| | |
|---|---|
| A | Students are able to distill a primary purpose into a single, compelling statement. |
| B | Students are able to order major points in a reasonable and convincing manner based on that purpose. |
| C | Students are able to develop their ideas using appropriate rhetorical patterns (e.g., narration, example, comparison/contrast, classification, cause/effect, definition). |
| D | Students are able to employ correct diction, syntax, usage, grammar, and mechanics. |
| E | Students are able to manage and coordinate basic information gathered from multiple sources. |

When the Professional Communication instructors were presented with these goals, they were disturbed mostly by items C and D. Instructors were concerned that item C reflected a focus on modes that had become outdated in the teaching of Composition (all of the Professional Communication instructors have taught Composition at the college-level and have taken graduate courses in teaching Composition). In addition, the instructors wondered about the use of "correct" in item D: would students still have a right to their own language and dialect, to some degree? This assessment would take place toward the end of the semester, so ideally, the students would have had experience with the oral communication genres needed to achieve success in the course, but the standards seemed vague, and the instructors were not sure what exactly they should be measuring. An awareness of audience seemed missing, as well; for example, if a student presented to a "Southern" audience, certain dialect and language features would be acceptable, expected, and even welcomed, whereas a similar presentation given in another region of the country might receive a different type of reception and could impact the speaker's ethos and credibility. The PC 2500 instructors realized that, just as it is crucial to present a credible speaking persona to their oral communication students as effective examples (Obermiller, Ruppert, & Atwood 2012), they needed to instill a similar ability in their students so that they could be credible, ethical, and believable presenters, as well.

In addition, these goals for oral communication were the same as goals given by the TBR for assessing Composition in general at TTU. While there did seem to be an awareness of purpose included in the outcomes goals, there was no discussion of audience, speaker dynamics, or use of visual aids. The absence of these crucial items was also disturbing to the

Professional Communication instructors, who focused on these elements heavily in their courses and designed their teaching strategies in a more integrative, holistic way.

As faculty teaching this course realized, despite the TBR's focus on seemingly outdated outcomes goals, they needed to and wanted to incorporate other goals that indicated the social construction of knowledge within our program, such as the growing need to address effective technology integration into the presentations, based on changing industry expectations. Addressing this social construction of knowledge in assessment processes is another element Hundleby and Allen and others (Huot) advocate (2010, p. viii-ix). Likewise, in his essay "Assessment in Action," Anson (2010) states, "it is crucial that the outcomes [used in assessment] emerge from the discussions and negotiations of the teachers and administrators within the program" (p. 5). Clearly, the TBR mandated outcomes goals process is not ideal but can lead toward more program faculty participation.

As the director of the Professional Communication Program, I designed an evaluation form in collaboration with another faculty member (see Appendix A) that clearly identified the different learning outcomes goals that we were required to assess. However, in consultation with other Professional Communication instructors, we added other items that were important for our purposes, such as the use of visual aids, speaker dynamics, and items that addressed audience awareness. By adding these categories, the instructors consciously altered the original genre and function of the assessment form. To this date, our formal, annual assessment process has focused on the outcomes goals, although individual instructors have been tracking progress informally on the other items that have been added to the form. In the near future, the faculty hope to more formally assess these added characteristics so that we can see as a whole how our students are progressing in these areas.

Adding these categories to our assessment allows us also to account for values increasingly becoming important not only within our Professional Communication Program as a whole but also within our university's mission as a technological university (Allen, 2010, pp. 39-56), since our focus is also on teaching students to incorporate technological media into their presentations. Addressing this area also contributes to the process of assessing multiple literacies, which Hundleby and Allen (2010) emphasize "places us well ahead of our composition colleagues in seeing the need for a thorough understanding of multiple literacies and the resulting responsibility to operate within the frameworks of their distinctive discourses" (p.

x). Because our assessment is so similar to Composition's as a result of the same mandated TBR outcomes being applied, beginning to assess these multiple literacies sets our Professional Communication Program apart to those stakeholders with whom we share our assessment results, an essential part of gaining program support, both from our administration and others (Allen, 2010, pp. 52-53).

As a program administrator, I found the generic evolution of this form interesting for a variety of reasons:

1. The assessment process, while originally motivated by one purpose/goal (actually unclear from the TBR perspective) evolved into a process that the Professional Communication instructors took and claimed ownership of. As Anson (2010) says, "No higher-level program assessment, no matter how carefully structured or replete with data, can improve without the input of classroom teachers, including a coordinated, self-conscious, and collaborative implementation of pedagogical strategies" (p. 4), and the generic evolution of the assessment form provides a starting point for faculty input that can then lead to a starting point for meaningful classroom change, whether it is based on changes in teaching or learning. While the TBR outcomes focus on assessment "from the outside in" (Anson, 2010, p. 5), including assessment from the inside, as well, contributes to more authentic assessment, since individual teachers can then see how the assessment impacts everyday instruction (Anson, 2010, p. 11) and vice versa.
2. While the assessment results are available to be distributed to TBR and university administrators for whatever purposes they deem necessary, the results are also discussed collaboratively among the Professional Communication instructors, and changes can then be made to course instruction, based on our purposes (in essence, what we value as the necessary generic characteristics that should be evidenced in the presentations). 3) While still accommodating the TBR requirements, the Professional Communication faculty can continue to adapt the assessment process to meet their and students' needs, such as conducting other, "non-required" assessments throughout the semester, using this assessment tool, to see how successfully students are learning the genres of the various types of oral presentations required in the course.

The oral presentation evaluation form/assessment tool is different from what instructors use normally when evaluating presentations; each evaluation form for each presentation is different and is tailored to each presentation's genre (for example, an interview, non-expert presentation, mini-discussion, team presentation, etc.). When the time comes at the end of the semester to conduct the "formal" TBR assessment, the instructors evaluate students using their genre-specific forms as well as the TBR evaluation forms; in essence, a specific as well as more general evaluation are conducted for the same presentation.

This complicated process of addressing both broad institutional as well as individual program goals is informed by genre theory (Russell, 1997; Russell, 2002; Cole & Engeström, 1993; Lave & Wenger, 1993; Winsor, 1999; see also Applegarth, 2012, regarding genre changes as related to social processes and the "workings of power" [p. 456]); as program director, when I designed the new, evolved form, I was consciously aware that, along with the other instructors, I was adapting this form to meet our needs as a program. This form probably will continue to evolve and change, based on students' changing needs. Although the assessment process is relatively new (and PC 250 is only 10 years old and has been taught as part of the general education curriculum for about that long), I have already noticed changes in our students that might cause the assessment form's focus to change.

For example, recently, I began to notice an evolving "genre of disengagement" in my students taking the course. While some students seem to "automatically" interact with the audience and present with enthusiasm (as evidenced in voice tone, body language in general, and eye contact), other students do not, and the result is a very unconvincing, less-than-sincere-appearing persona, certainly not a credible one. Possibly, this evolving genre could be a result of Tab Cooper's (2008) theory, that as we rely more and more on technology to communicate (such as via email, texting, twittering), we lose the knowledge of effectively communicating face to face; we are no longer actually observing others' emotional responses to ourselves and each other, and so we lose the emotional intelligence required to effectively communicate in person. Another possibility is that we as communication instructors need to pay more attention to the concept of Information Literacy: "Information literacy is not about the ability to accumulate information—there is usually too much information, not too little. Information literacy is about the ability to find the best information and use it appropriately and effectively" (Decarie, 2012, p. 167) (italics mine). In essence, students may have no problem understanding and following the assignments, even supporting their work with appropriate research, but they may not

be using it in ways that correlate with effective generic characteristics for effective presentations. Still another possibility is that now that students in general are more adept users of technology, there is not as great a need to focus on these technological skills themselves, as Cargile Cook and Zachry (2010) mention; instead, now, "our instructional and assessment focus is largely returning to excellence in . . . communication design" (p. 76), which could include effectively using/interacting with technology in oral communication in a more engaging, participatory way.

Likewise, some students may have difficulty adjusting to and applying the genres of academic presentations and those designed to help students transition to workplace contexts: "The ways in which subjects relate to discourse may be Teflon-like; therefore the language they are exposed to or use may not 'stick'" (Alvesson & Karreman 2000, p. 1132, quoted in Allen, Walker, & Brady 2012, p. 212). Although explicit instruction in generic characteristics appropriate to various types of presentations should help students, we all have noticed that some students seem not to improve in their skills (whether in written or oral communication) during the semester.

While I am not sure other students in the class notice this lack of audience interaction from whatever cause it originates, it is very obvious to me as one who has not been immersed in communicating via technology and who has been exposed to various oral communication genres for years. In addition, the fact that most of our oral presentations require PowerPoint or some other type of visual aid technology might be contributing to the problem: students who are accustomed to allowing technology to become the primary focus while communicating in their everyday lives apply that same strategy when using a different technology when presenting. As a result of this continuing disengagement, I have identified a need for more explicit instruction in this area that could be evaluated using an adapted version of the evaluation form we are already using. While the explicit instruction would not necessarily guarantee students' grasping the material better, it would make the information less tacit and more accessible.

In addition to these already rich dynamics involved in the evolution of this evaluation form and its dual purpose, other political dynamics played a part in the construction, evolution, and application of this form that underscore its part within our department's complicated activity system.

## The Assessment Process

The assessment process itself takes place every fall (fall of 2012 will be the third formal assessment that has taken place; a pilot assessment was conducted in fall of 2009). Before each fall semester begins, I ensure that

all instructors teaching the course are aware of the assessment process and the fact that we need to all assess a similar presentation (usually the final presentation) that allows incorporation of outside sources. Although there is some freedom among instructors regarding the presentation genres included in their courses, most follow a similar strategy of including interview presentations, presentations to non-expert audiences, a team presentation, a mini-discussion, and an impromptu presentation. Usually, because it is research based, the final presentation has been the focus of the semesterly assessment.

Around mid-term, I determine which students should be assessed, with the aid of random.org. Once the student numbers for each section are identified, I then email the numbers to the respective instructors, who then correlate those numbers to student numbers in their grade rosters. As these students give their presentations at the end of the semester, the instructors fill out the evaluation form in Appendix A (in addition to a separate form that more specifically evaluates the genre students are focusing on for this presentation and that is not included in the formal assessment process). The second form is the one the students receive and contains comments; the students do not receive the formal assessment form, and it does not contain comments. Once these forms have been completed, the instructors then transfer the results of the specific outcomes to a spreadsheet, which they then email to me. Once I receive all of the individual sections' spreadsheets, I transfer the results to a master spreadsheet. While I am aware of individual instructors' results while I am compiling the master spreadsheet, the final copy does not contain any identifying information. The following spring semester, all of the PC 2500 instructors meet to discuss the results of the previous semester's assessment; so far, the results seem to indicate that we are meeting TBR's outcomes goals, although we are still new to the formal assessment process (see Appendix B and Appendix C). Over time, we hope to see trends that indicate areas we might focus on to improve; in addition, we would like to add other categories to our spreadsheet to track the areas that we are assessing that are more specific to our students' needs (such as the need to address the "genre of disengagement," audience awareness, and speaker dynamics).

## Connection of Assessment Practices to Teaching Practices

Because we have only two semesters' worth of assessment data for PC 2500 and because the assessment results were very similar during those two se-

mesters, the data have not caused significant change in teaching the course so far regarding the TBR outcomes goals. So far, the governing board is not mandating that changes be made to course instruction. However, the assessment process has made an impact on other assessment processes within the department that will have a significant impact on teaching.

First, the evolution of our assessment form allows the Professional Communication faculty to assess other areas, such as the use of visual aids (an area not assessed by the TBR outcomes goals), that the faculty believe are essential to effective oral communication. Beginning fall of 2012, our fall assessment will include assessing the use of visual aids, and the results will help us determine how we might adapt our teaching strategies to instruct students on incorporating this dynamic element into their presentations.

Another way this assessment is proving to be helpful is related to two other types of assessment our department as a whole undergoes: a five-year academic audit by the TBR and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation reviews. Last year, our department underwent our first five-year academic audit (a new requirement within the TBR), and, although departmental general education courses were not the focus of the audit, I was able to discuss our assessment process briefly and ways we planned to use and expand results, such as the assessment of visual aids. Also, last year, our department produced a fifth-year interim report for SACS, and our department as a whole risked non-compliance because of a lack of "data" that were not based on student self-reporting. During a meeting with my department chair, I shared our oral presentation assessment form with her, and we both thought it could be adapted to assess writing portfolios produced by our majors in their senior year. While this form will probably evolve, too, based on its use within the department and its success, the basic format and categories used for the first assessment came from our oral communication assessment form. The assessment results based on the seniors' writing portfolios should have a direct impact on teaching within our department in the future, since SACS requires this type of more quantifiable assessment and data.

Overall, I anticipate that the changes made to teaching, based on our assessment practices, will be beneficial because the assessment process includes input from our faculty and allows for adaptation by changing categories on the assessment form, if necessary. However, there are some subjective aspects of the form that could allow our seemingly uniform data to not be so precise, such as the possibly different interpretations of "topic was appropriate for designated audience," "the visual aid was relevant," "the visual aid was well designed," "attire was appropriate," "student created a

welcoming environment," and even "correct diction, syntax, usage, grammar, and mechanics." Based on our previous assessment results, it appears our faculty are fairly well calibrated in judging these areas, since the results are fairly uniform across instructors. Also, we have relatively few faculty teaching the course, and those faculty are from very similar backgrounds and interact with each other often. As we hope to add more faculty in the future, we may need to ensure that our interpretations of these subjective terms are more precise to ensure more effective assessment and teaching.

As the content of this course evolves and changes, based on changing students' needs and also changing needs in the field of Professional Communication, especially related to the use of technology and related areas, such as visual aids, the assessment form will change to reflect those changes, as well. Part of the assessment process is discussing the results as a group, and during that time, instructors share with others what has worked well and what has not. The best practices identified during these sessions become part of the assessment process in ways that affect the evaluation form; although significant changes have not been made to the form yet, faculty input can impact the form's generic evolution. While the TBR outcomes goals on the form will not change, seven other points exist that provide more latitude for change. These types of changes are possible mainly because the faculty have taken ownership of the form and the process, though, rather than focusing only on the TBR outcomes.

While this process is fairly standardized overall, some elements make it a bit subversive in different ways, first within our department as a whole and then regarding our specific purposes as a program

## Politics and Program Implications

Unfortunately but predictably, our assessment process has had some negative political overtones within our department that have affected how we use our results and how others might eventually use them. These problems may relate to Rehling and Lindeman's (2010) characterization of the complicated political context surrounding technical communication's move to be recognized more within universities' general education missions: "It is not easy to add to such a political circumstance an unfamiliar and probably unexpected claim on the part of technical communication [to be part of a university's general education curriculum]. This claim is especially true due to ingrained attitudes about the role of career-oriented and professional programs within the academy" (p. 7). Since a main motivation for creating PC 2500 was to help prepare students in engineering and business at TTU, the relationship between these fields, Professional

Communication, and Speech seemed unusually complicated and created even more resentment regarding which discipline would more adequately prepare students for effective oral communication in industry settings.

Because PC 2500 had already been developed and was being offered, there didn't seem to be a remedy to this situation for the Speech faculty. However, over the years, administrative decisions have caused the PC 2500 course offerings to be somewhat minimal (half the number of sections that used to be offered are being offered currently), and hiring has been focused on Speech instructors, not on Professional Communication (in fact, we lost one full-time, tenure-track position to Speech, leaving us with the option to hire only adjuncts to teach the course, except for two full-time Professional Communication faculty members). The Professional Communication faculty perceive that the hiring preferences stem from the fact that, in our department, Speech is still considered the "more legitimate" and longstanding option for oral communication instruction. These unfortunate politics have also influenced our assessment process, too.

When TBR began introducing the assessment process in 2008, I was on maternity leave and did not participate in the assessment orientation process (instead, the director of Speech did). Because not every general education course from a particular field (such as math or communication) needed to be assessed, according to the TBR, SPCH 2410 was chosen as the one to focus on at our university. However, Professional Communication was still invited to participate in the assessment process, and I as program director wanted to see the results and determine how they could be used to improve our Program. I collaborated with the Speech director in fall of 2009 when we conducted our first pilot of the assessment process.

After giving our data to the Speech director, I waited to hear what the final report to be sent to TBR would say and was very curious to know how our Program did, since this was the first time we had undergone the assessment, and at the time, I did not have access to the same data spreadsheets being used in Speech. As time went on, I inquired about the TBR report, and to my dismay, I learned that it had already been submitted. When I asked to see the report, I saw that none of our data had been included in the pilot study. Because our data had deliberately been excluded, and because we technically were not required now to participate in the formal assessment, I chose to withdraw from the formal process, since there was no guarantee that our results would be included and since I started to develop a paranoid suspicion that somehow, our results could be used against us.

However, I still wanted to pursue the assessment process within our Program, not only to reveal to our faculty areas we might improve upon,

but also to begin to accumulate data on how we were indeed meeting the TBR outcomes goals, in case more efforts were made to eliminate our course from the general education course offerings. In spring of 2008, our department went through a mandatory, external, five-year review, and during that time, the Speech reviewer/evaluator recommended that PC 2500 be subsumed under Speech (because I was not on campus, I did not participate in the review process except to write a portion of our self study as director of the Professional Communication Program). This recommendation was not heeded by our department. At this point, more efforts to eliminate PC 2500 have not been made, although the Speech division is in the process of forming a separate department, and once that occurs, some may question why courses from two different departments meet the same general education, oral communication requirement. For the time being, the Professional Communication faculty seek to use the assessment process to benefit its own Program, while also shoring up data that can be used in its defense if necessary.

In retrospect, I believe two major things could have been done differently during this 10-year period to help aid the introduction of PC 2500 into the general education curriculum (and impact the assessment process more positively): one relates to course content, and the other relates to hiring and student demand. First, once Professional Communication faculty taught PC 2500 for one semester, word spread through advisement and students' word of mouth that the course better prepared students for oral communication in the workplace, based on more timely, situated assignments/contexts, as well as the emphasis on team presentations and technology. (Admittedly, another reason for the popularity of the course could be the emphasis on team presentations, especially for those with speech anxiety. However, not all PC 2500 instructors focus on team presentations to the same degree.) As a result of these positive perceptions about the course, enrollment increased sharply, while many sections of SPCH 2410 did not fill. Ideally, the Professional Communication faculty and Speech faculty would have collaborated to ensure that while disciplinary differences would necessarily remain between the two courses, the instructors teaching SPCH 2410 might make some adaptations to meet the needs of students, especially those in engineering and business. I don't mean to imply that SPCH 2410 was not meeting the needs of its students, but some changes could be made to help equalize the interest between the two fields. In addition, faculty in the two disciplines could meet to discuss their assessment strategies and results and learn from what each group was doing. Unfortunately, in this case, such collaboration did not occur.

Second, ideally, support would occur at all administrative levels that would encourage hiring to meet the needs resulting from skyrocketing course enrollment. As mentioned previously, while hiring has not been incredibly strong within our department in general, the Professional Communication Program did lose one full-time, tenure-track instructor position to Speech, and no requests to hire additional faculty in Professional Communication have been honored, except at the adjunct level. Because our hiring qualifications are a bit more specialized than in Speech, fewer possibilities for adjuncts exist in our area, and the few full-time and adjunct faculty we have simply have not been able to fill the course need for the students wanting to take PC 2500. In the last two semesters, we have had to turn away the equivalent of three sections of students each semester, and in the cases in which we were able to add another section, it filled within one day, sometimes within just a few hours.

Here, I do not mean to imply that our administration has been hostile toward the Professional Communication Program, but several somewhat unusual circumstances have unfolded around the same time: we have a new university president who appears to be more fiscally conservative, we have a relatively new dean and associate dean at the college level, and we have an interim department chair. All of these circumstances do not point to aggressive hiring in our area or even "rocking the boat" by recommending a new hire in Professional Communication when we have not been able to fill many other lines in recent years. Also, because Speech and Journalism are in the process of forming their own department, both deans at the college level thought that adding a new hire to Speech would increase the "critical mass" of faculty in that area, thus justifying more the need for a separate department. In summary, then, areas to focus on in similar situations for program administrators would be collaboration among faculty teaching general education courses, especially within similar fields (and avoiding the lack of collaboration) and ensuring support as much as possible among different administrative levels. Specifically, more communication could be encouraged and initiated among and between the different administrative levels. Even though these recommendations are idealistic, they are goals to be aware of and work toward.

## Strategies for Difficult Assessment Contexts

Through this difficult context, our Professional Communication faculty have identified several strategies that have proven useful in this assessment context that may be helpful to other Technical/Professional Communication program directors in other difficult political assessment contexts.

First, we determined what would be useful for our assessment purposes and what was not, based on the TBR outcomes goals. We noticed first that we were required to assess our presentation genres using the "modes" approach that we found outdated, based on our backgrounds in Composition Studies. As we reviewed these assessment criteria, we realized that several items were missing that were important to us as teachers and scholars, mainly the need to address audience awareness, speaker dynamics, and visual aids (including the use of technology). Even though we had to assess the specific outcomes goals introduced by the TBR, we considered ways they might be helpful to us (such as the goal of focusing on organization and trying to define what "diction," "grammar," and "syntax" might mean for our students who generally come from a narrow region of the country and tend to stay in the area upon graduating).

Second, this focus allowed the faculty to change the assessment form and use it as a tool, a cultural artifact (Lave & Wenger,1993; Cole & Engeström, 1993) that we could use to mediate between the sometimes competing activity systems of the TBR, our university, the PC 2500 course as a whole, and our individual PC 2500 sections. While accomplishing the goals of the first two activity systems with the more traditional use of the assessment form to measure outcomes goals, we could also gather data through our added items that would provide (at the moment) more informal results that could aid us in developing a course that suited our students better. At this time, the informal assessment is providing a snapshot of students' current needs in these important areas, and the faculty realize that these needs may change over time; as a result, we may also need to modify our assessment tool to track these changing needs. We added to the assessment outcomes so that areas our students demonstrated weaknesses in (such as use of visual aids, audience awareness, and speaker dynamics) would be present during the assessment process, not only to reveal how our students were doing in these areas but also to emphasize to ourselves, other new PC 2500 instructors, and any others reviewing our assessment data that these areas were important generic characteristics of the presentation genres we were teaching. Rather than eliminating the focus on the modes, syntax, and diction, we either added to our assessment categories or discussed among ourselves what "diction" might mean for our students and in what contexts of oral communication.

Third, we have been using the assessment results collaboratively; two full-time faculty members in Professional Communication created the evaluation form, and another formerly full-time faculty member contrib-

uted knowledge from her role assessing oral communication within the university's College of Business to adapt areas and suggest ways we might use the data to improve what we are actually doing. In other words, the Professional Communication faculty who teach the course are actively involved in discussing the process and results, which is a sometimes-different process from how assessment might normally be conducted in university environments.

## Conclusion

Han Yu (2010) states that "generally, we may consider a learning environment authentic when it presents students with certain tasks, contingencies, opportunities, and obstacles they may one day encounter in actual workplaces" (p. 42). The revised assessment/evaluation form is our instructors' attempt to make this assessment process more authentic and meaningful for our particular context, not only for the students but also for the faculty; adding assessment categories we felt were problematic for our students created a modified assessment genre that targeted areas our students needed to focus on more, such as speaker dynamics and attention to audience.

In the future, our faculty hope that our assessment process can focus on meaningfulness (Crews & Wilkinson, 2010), the assessment context (Huot, 1996; Yu, 2010), and using the assessment results as teaching tools (Pathak, 2001). Meaningfulness involves ensuring that the assessment process entails more than just "going through the motions" to meet external requirements but instead determines ways our faculty can own and learn from the assessment process itself. The context for the assessment, while somewhat stable, does change, based on any changes to assignments, the student population, and the growing use of technology and presence of outside sources. And using the assessment results as teaching tools continues; the assessment process is still relatively new, but the faculty hope that soon, we can focus on more clear areas revealed by the assessment as needed areas of instruction/learning for students.

For example, as Norbert Elliot (2010) mentions in his essay "Assessing Technical Communication: A Conceptual History," "The assessment of visual communication within a computer-mediated environment is an excellent venue for innovation. Within the construct of computer-mediated visual communication, the human interaction with language, ideas, and representation is, at once, most diverse and most unified. With its history of research into the impact of technology and the need for informed usability practices, the profession shows its strongest hand in this area" (p. 30).

Because our evaluation form includes three points about the use of visual aids that are not included at all in the TBR outcomes goals, this category would be an ideal focus for our own assessment "from the inside out" (Anson, 2010, p. 10).

Also, it's possible that over time, additional self-assessment could occur that originally began with the mandated outcomes goals. For example, Cargile Cook and Zachry (2010) mention that "in the more or less egalitarian culture of higher education, wherever individuals place a premium on their latitude to think and act as individuals, self-assessment processes and results must be calibrated to fit the culture. Over time, these processes and results may also begin to shape the culture in which they are employed" (p. 66). While it might be somewhat idealistic to think that this evolving self-assessment process might change the culture of our department, given the somewhat tangential nature of our program in a department that focuses on literature, the Professional Communication faculty could certainly begin to change and extend the culture of assessment within the Professional Communication Program itself, even going so far as to assess our Professional Communication majors' oral communication abilities later in their academic careers in more advanced courses. Such results could be used for our own self-assessment purposes in addition to departmental/degree audit and accreditation purposes and could help foster within our program "a shared culture of change, collaboration, and cooperation" (Cargile Cook & Zachry, 2010, p. 78). James Dubinsky (2010) mentions that this "culture of collaboration leading to change cannot be underestimated" (p. 85). Already, the assessment process as it exists now has proven to be a learning process for the faculty, as well, in a variety of contexts: personal, professional, political, instructional, and institutional, and it promises to develop into an even more significant process as our faculty continue to take individual ownership of the process while still meeting the outside TBR outcomes goals assessment process.

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## Appendix A

# Tennessee Tech University Oral Presentation Evaluation Form (PC 2500)

Speaker _____ Semester _____

| | Excellent | Very Good | Good | Fair | Poor |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Organization/Content** | | | | | |
| Student presented a clear thesis statement at the beginning of the presentation **(TBR outcome A).** | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| The presentation contained well-organized main points related to the thesis **(TBR outcome B).** | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Student developed the main points using effective rhetorical strategies **(TBR outcome C).** | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Sources used were appropriate to the purpose of the presentation and were managed well **(TBR outcome E).** | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Technical/audience-specific terms were explained; topic was appropriate for designated audience. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| **Visual Aid** | | | | | |
| The visual aid was relevant and related well to the presentation's overall purpose. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| The visual aid was well designed and reflected design principles discussed in class. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| The visual aid was visible, easily readable, and presented in a non-distracting manner using appropriate technological media. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| **Presentation Quality** | | | | | |
| Student presented using correct diction, syntax, usage, grammar, | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

# Appendix B

**PC Assessment Results Fall 2010**

**Outcome A**—Students are able to distill a primary purpose into a single compelling statement.

**Outcome B**—Students are able to order major points in a reasonable and convincing manner, based on that purpose.

**Outcome C**—Students are able to develop their ideas using appropriate rhetorical patterns.

**Outcome D**—Students are able to employ correct diction, syntax, usage, grammar, and mechanics.

**Outcome E**—Students are able to manage and coordinate basic information gathered from multiple sources.

| Outcome | Result |
|---|---|
| **A** | **3.78** |
| **B** | **3.78** |
| **C** | **3.34** |
| **D** | **3.34** |
| **E** | **3.72** |

Eleven sections were assessed, 10% of each section (three students).

Next fall, we should assess 20%; we can compare our results over time and compare with the Speech results.

# Appendix C

**PC Assessment Results Fall 2011**

**Outcome A**—Students are able to distill a primary purpose into a single compelling statement.

**Outcome B**—Students are able to order major points in a reasonable and convincing manner, based on that purpose.

**Outcome C**—Students are able to develop their ideas using appropriate rhetorical patterns.

**Outcome D**—Students are able to employ correct diction, syntax, usage, grammar, and mechanics.

**Outcome E**—Students are able to manage and coordinate basic information gathered from multiple sources.

| Outcome | Result |
|---|---|
| **A** | **4.11** |
| **B** | **4.17** |
| **C** | **4.06** |
| **D** | **4.06** |
| **E** | **3.94** |

Eight sections were assessed, about 21% of each section (six students out of approximately 28 for each section). In the case of smaller sections, more than 21% of the students were assessed.

Here are some changes we experienced since last time:

- Two additional instructors
- Four online sections
- Three fewer sections
- More "priority" students registering, such as Honors students, students with disabilities, and athletes?
- Other differences?

# A Survey of U.S. Certificate Programs in Technical Communication

**Jim Nugent**
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**Abstract.** Many colleges and universities offer certificates in technical communication as an alternative to full undergraduate or graduate degrees in the field. Despite certificates' increasing popularity in recent years, relatively little commentary exists about them within the scholarly literature. This article describes a survey of technical communication certificate and baccalaureate program administrators undertaken to develop descriptive data on programs' age, size, and graduation rates; departmental location; curricular requirements; online offerings; and instructor status and qualifications. It concludes by discussing implications of these data for a number of larger conversations within the field of technical communication.

**Keywords.** Certificate programs, program research, technical communication, program administration.

In this article, I describe my most recent effort to address the void of scholarly information about technical communication certificate programs by performing a survey of technical communication program administrators. By gathering descriptive data on programs' age, size, and graduation rates; departmental location; curricular requirements; online offerings; and instructor status and qualifications, this study provides information useful for program administrators and those interested in implementing certificate programs. It also describes important methodological considerations for those performing program research in technical communication. And perhaps most significantly, this study seeks to ground our understanding of certificate programs in concrete evidence, to facilitate situated and productive dialog in a number of important scholarly conversations, and to address, in part, the question of whether our field's evident anxiety over certificates is warranted.

*Programmatic Perspectives*, *5*(1), Spring 2013: 58-85. Contact author: ‹nugent@oakland.edu›.

Technical communication certificate programs have enjoyed great popularity and grown tremendously in their ranks over the past few decades (Meloncon, 2012a; Nugent 2010). In light of their apparent success, however, the body of scholarly literature on these programs remains surprisingly slim: it comprises a pair of book chapters (Little, 1997; Nugent, 2009), an article (Meloncon, 2012a), and a dozen or so CPTSC presentations (Bosley, 1997; Bridgeford 2000, 2003, 2004, 2005; Little, 1986, 1999; Nugent, 2006; Pfeiffer, 1987; Rehling, 1999; Shirk, 1988; Shirk, Staples, Feinberg, Reep, & Riordan, 1988; Worley, 2006). Although these works have spanned over a quarter-century of scholarship, they occupy, by my count, fewer than 85 pages of text.

Within the relatively scarce literature on certificates, few commentators have remained entirely sanguine about them. Almost all, in fact, have expressed some wariness about—if not outright suspicion of—certificate programs. For instance, Sherry Little (1997) suggested that the certificate's relative lack of oversight, its lack of standardization, its localization, and its curricular diversity may be to blame for its lack of acceptance as a valid credential (see also Little, 1999). Tracy Bridgeford (2003) voiced her concern that the label "'certificate' could reinforce the 'vocational ethos' often attached to our programs and courses" (p. 79). In a presentation to the CPTSC, Henrietta Shirk (1988) posed a series of questions expressing a general suspicion about certificates:

> Who should teach in these programs? Should our instructors have primarily academic backgrounds, should they be current practitioners in the field, or should the "ideal" program have a group of instructors who represent some combination of these different sets of skills? If there are industry advisory boards for our programs, do they recommend course content rather than dictate it? And is this course content balanced with the application of sound theory and effective teaching strategies? Are our certificate programs too focused in their content and therefore on the edge of being parochial? While graduates may meet the immediate job needs of local industries, will they also be equally successful […] in other parts of the country? (pp. 2–3)

In another presentation at the same CPTSC conference, Lou Rehling (1988) urged the council to "contribute to the evolution of certificate programs in our field by helping to set some standards and publicize some parameters" (p. 51). And James Porter and Patricia Sullivan (2007) implicated certificate programs, at least tangentially, in the marginalization of

professional writing as a discipline. They noted that professional writing remains the subject of "indignity and neglect" (p. 16) at many institutions, an indignity

> amplified by the number of English departments that start a professional writing certificate by adding an internship to a literature major and by insisting that their hire (notice the singular) in professional writing have status in literature (or at least have signed a loyalty oath to the love of it). In other words, English departments often undermine the disciplinarity of professional writing by hiring literary folks to teach it. Unfortunately, this form of colonization continues at many institutions. (p. 16)

It is clear from the available scholarship that certificates provoke anxiety about issues of program quality and about the welfare of the discipline and profession. Further, this anxiety invariably spills over into a range of conversations within the field of technical communication, from the proper role of industry in education to the perceived validity of various academic credentials. I take it to be indicative of certificate programs' significance that the scant commentary about them has invoked such important, field-wide issues as:

- the material and professional status of technical communication instructors (e.g., Shirk, Staples, Feinberg, Reep, & Riordan, 1988),
- the project of establishing technical communication as a profession (e.g., Meloncon, 2012a),
- the establishment of nationwide certification for technical communication practitioners or instructors (e.g., Savage, 1999),
- vocationalism and academy-industry collaboration (e.g., Bridgeford, 2003),
- the relationship between theory and practice in technical communication (e.g., Little, 1997), and
- the political and material consequences of technical communication's predominant institutional location within departments of English (e.g., Porter & Sullivan, 2007).

Certificates, it would seem, are imbricated in many important scholarly and disciplinary conversations, but are seldom the central topic of them.

The present study seeks to develop data that can provide some measure of contextualization, evidence, and insight to the disciplinary con-

versations that surround technical communication certificates. This study is an extension of earlier research I performed on certificate curricula (Nugent, 2010) and seeks most directly to answer the following research questions:

- What is typical of technical communication certificate programs in terms of their:
  - type of department or academic unit,
  - age,
  - size,
  - graduation rates,
  - course requirements,
  - length to program completion,
  - online offerings, and
  - internship requirements?
- To provide a baseline for analysis, what is typical for baccalaureate programs in terms of the same attributes above?
- What are the professional qualifications of certificate program instructors, and how do they compare to the qualifications of baccalaureate program instructors? These qualifications include:
  - level of academic preparation,
  - academic specialization,
  - possession of industry or professional experience,
  - status as a graduate student, and
  - status as a tenure-track instructor.
- Do technical communication certificate instructors have more or less professional status than baccalaureate program instructors?

In the sections that follow, I present an overview of the method for this study and a description of some of the methodological challenges that face program research generally. I then provide an overview of the survey results. Finally, I discuss some of the implications of these data for our understanding of certificates and their role within the wider discipline of technical communication.

## Method and Methodological Challenges

Previous surveys of academic programs in technical communication at all levels (Allen & Benninghoff, 2004; Harner & Rich, 2005; McDowell, 2001; Nugent, 2010; Rainey, 1995; Yeats & Thompson, 2010) took a number of varied approaches to selecting their samples. Of course, each of these studies has contributed greatly to the scholarly literature and to our understanding of technical communication programs. But almost all of them have drawn some portion of their survey sample from program directories maintained by the Society for Technical Communication (STC), the Associa-

tion of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW), or the CPTSC, and in doing so, have made assumptions—whether articulated or not—about the completeness and representativeness of those directories. Each study has also made assumptions about "what counts" as a program for the purposes of their research, and has assumed programs that "count" were adequately represented in their samples.

For instance, Kenneth Rainey (1995) surveyed a "representative sample of 50 schools" selected from the 140 programs "that we know about" (p. 40). His survey method remained largely unarticulated and he made no mention of how the 140 programs were identified or how the sample of 50 programs was chosen. Earl McDowell (2001) drew his sample of programs from the STC Academic Programs database but did not reveal how he selected his sample of 100 programs from the population of 148 programs he found there. Nancy Allen and Steven Benninghoff (2004) actively, if unsystematically, augmented a program directory maintained by the ATTW with "other schools whose faculty members are frequent contributors to discussion of program issues on ATTW-L (ATTW email-discussion list)" (p. 160). And Sandi Harner and Ann Rich (2005) relied on the STC Academic Programs Database to determine their sample. Like McDowell, Harner and Rich did not discuss how or why programs were excluded from their sample, but they made a notable move to foreground their assumptions about the types of programs it represented:

> The introduction to the STC database states, "To assist those interested in pursuing a career in technical communication, STC provides a database of academic programs worldwide. Schools are welcome to add their programs to the database." So we assume that if a program director has entered information, the goal of that program is to prepare students "interested in pursuing a career in technical communication." (p. 210)

The wide range of approaches taken in these studies suggests the scope, complexity, and magnitude of the problem that sample selection presents to academic program research in technical communication. I contend that this problem breaks down into at least two corollary challenges:

1. finding *what* programs are in existence, and
2. determining meaningful criteria for *which* programs to survey.

In the following sections, I discuss how I addressed both of these challenges in the present study.

## Finding What Programs are in Existence

Despite previous studies' reliance on program directories, no complete and authoritative list of programs in technical communication can be said to exist, making it difficult to initiate systematic research of technical communication academic programs at any level.[1] Although independent directories of academic and commercial programs in technical communication are maintained by each the STC, the ATTW, and the CPTSC—and they each stand as an invaluable resource for the field—my close examination of their contents in 2008 revealed notable inconsistencies: a number of programs appeared in one directory but not in the others; some programs were absent entirely from the directories; and, as I came to discover, programs offering certificates were notably underrepresented across all three directories.

To generate a more complete sample source for this study, I set about compiling my own directory of technical communication programs at all levels (certificates, baccalaureates, baccalaureate concentrations, minors, associates, masters, and doctorates) in the United States. To develop this resource, I first collected the contents of the existing program directories into one database. This yielded an aggregated directory of 134 unique technical communication programs—34 programs (34%) more than found in the STC Academic Programs Database alone. However, after performing a few subsequent, informal web searches, I came across web pages for many additional programs not appearing in any of the three major program directories. In an attempt to correct such omissions, I systematically searched the web for overlooked technical writing and technical communication programs. Over the period March 9 through 14, 2008, I performed web searches using Google (‹http:// www.google.com›), querying in order—and without quotation marks—the following phrases:

1. technical writing program,
2. technical communication program,
3. technical communication certificate, and
4. technical writing certificate.

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[1] In 2009, the CPTSC sponsored a research grant to Lisa Meloncon to develop TechComm Programmatic Central, a comprehensive directory of academic programs. Such a resource will do a great deal to help us overcome this first methodological challenge

Reading each of the top 600 results for each of these queries, I recorded every academic program I came across that met all of the following criteria:

- it was offered in the United States;
- it did not yet appear in my aggregated programs database;
- it offered a certificate, baccalaureate degree, or graduate degree expressly in technical communication, technical writing, professional communication, or professional writing; and
- it did not already appear in my previous search results.

The four queries listed above yielded, respectively and in sequence, 11, 9, 12, and 6 additional programs meeting these criteria. Adding these programs to my aggregated program database yielded a revised directory of 172 U.S. technical communication programs—72% more programs (72) than the STC Academic Programs Database alone and 28% more programs (38) than the STC, ATTW, and CPTSC directories combined. Although it is obviously impossible to verify if every U.S. technical communication program was contained in the resultant directory, I believe that it represented a more comprehensive sample source for program research than any other available at the time I conducted this research.

Through the process of compiling this comprehensive directory, a number of oversights in our accounting of programs became apparent. As I found that programs offering a certificate were disproportionately underrepresented in the three major program directories. Of the 134 total U.S. technical communication programs listed in the combined major program directories, 41% (56) offered a certificate. Of the 38 additional programs I found through Google web searches, 86% (33) offered a certificate. That is, programs excluded from the STC, ATTW, and CPTSC program directories were more than twice as likely to offer a certificate as those that were included. Correcting this underrepresentation was, of course, particularly important for the present study.

## Determining Which Programs to Study

The second major challenge for program research is determining criteria for which programs to survey. Since the major program directories alone were inadequate sample sources for this study, I had to augment them with web research to create a more comprehensive program list. In compiling a this resource, I was immediately faced with a vexing methodological question: what exactly defined a program in technical communication?

What set of criteria could I apply to a given program to systematically determine whether it actually counts as a technical communication program? As I expanded my sample set through web searches, what terms should I have used for the queries? For instance, in addition to querying "technical communication program," "technical writing program," "technical communication certificate," and "technical writing certificate," should I also have queried the phrases "professional writing program" and "professional writing certificate"? Are the differences between technical communication/writing programs and professional communication/writing programs strictly nominal, or are they more essential?

To many teachers and scholars in the field of technical communication—where the terms *technical*, *professional*, or even *business* are frequently conflated—this last question may seem moot. As reflected in the titles of the field's most prominent scholarly journals, we are apparently comfortable with a wide range of descriptors for what we do:

- *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*,
- *Journal of Technical and Business Communication*,
- *Business Communication Quarterly*,
- *Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Transactions on Professional Communication*,
- *Programmatic Perspectives*,
- *Technical Communication*, and
- *Technical Communication Quarterly*.

Meanwhile, at the level of our academic programs, of the 141 programs listed in the STC, ATTW, and CPTSC directories combined—that is, programs that self-identified as "technical" communication/writing programs—43% (60) offered at least one program (certificate, baccalaureate, baccalaureate concentration, minor, associates, masters, or doctorate) containing the word "professional." At least superficially, it seems, the distinction between technical and professional is not immediately apparent.

In fact, as I found in my web research, most "professional" writing/communication programs proved, upon cursory examination, to be indistinguishable from programs expressly in "technical" writing/communication. However, I also encountered a significant number of programs whose descriptions were substantively afield. For instance, in performing a Google web query for "professional writing program" in March 2008, the second listed result was for the University of Southern California (USC) Master of Professional Writing program. The program boasted "An

interdisciplinary approach uniting five disciplines: fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, screenwriting, and playwriting" (University of Southern California College of Letters, Arts, & Sciences, 2008). The website also touted the program's "Proximity to Los Angeles' entertainment and literary industries." Although USC's program was expressly in professional writing, I have a suspicion that most members of CPTSC would not classify it as a technical communication or even technical communication-related program. And given USC's explicit goal of preparing writers for the entertainment and literary professions, I think even fewer would agree that the program represents a fully adequate course of preparation for a professional technical communicator.

In my examination of the 98 subsequent results from the same web search, I found that 7 of the 10 new programs I came across (that is, programs not already listed in my combined program directory) appeared to offer more preparation in creative, literary, or dramatic writing than in technical, scientific, non-fiction, or workplace communication—a pattern I did not witness in my searches for "technical writing" and "technical communication" programs/certificates. This is, of course, a casual and unsystematic interpretation of these programs' offerings; given the intractable challenges of methodically quantifying or qualifying outlier programs, I don't intend to present these findings as anything more than anecdotal. However, they seem to suggest that differences between expressly professional programs and expressly technical programs are more substantive than frequently acknowledged.

Defining technical communication—or even just articulating the ways it might stand distinct from professional writing or professional communication—is a particularly thorny undertaking, as it necessarily touches on a number of lingering disciplinary, professional, and political issues (see Johnson, 2007). Calls to draw up lists of core competencies, to certify practitioners, and to professionalize the field are seemingly permanent features of technical communication scholarship and commentary (Kynell-Hunt & Savage, 2003–2004; Savage, 1999; Society for Technical Communication 2011, 2009; Turner & Rainey, 2004). However, given the ongoing lack of consensus among researchers, practitioners, and teachers about what constitutes the ideal course of professional preparation for technical communicators, an axiomatic and universally accepted definition of a technical communication program is unlikely to emerge in the near term. In addition, curricular studies report little consistency in technical communication curricula at both the baccalaureate and certificate levels; as far as we can tell, there is no such thing as a *standard* curriculum in technical communi-

cation (Harner and Rich, 2005; Nugent, 2010). Thus even efforts to empirically derive a working definition of a technical communication program are likely to be met with frustration.

Given that examining individual program curricula to assess their status as a technical communication program would have been untenable—not only because such an undertaking would exceed the scope of the current study, but because it would imply that established criteria exist for making such a determination—I chose a simple and systematic means for identifying the relevant programs to survey. I elected to rely on program names to determine their inclusion in this study. Specifically, I restricted my sample to programs in the comprehensive directory offering at least one baccalaureate degree, baccalaureate concentration, certificate, or graduate degree having the word "technical" in its title (such as "technical communication," "technical writing," "technical and business communication," etc.). That is, degrees and certificates expressly in "professional" writing/communication were excluded from my sample except in cases where the program also offered a "technical" degree or certificate. Of the 172 programs listed in the comprehensive directory of programs, 141 met this qualification.

My final step in determining the sample was to restrict the survey to only those programs offering baccalaureates or certificates. Of the 141 remaining programs in my sample, 27 offered no apparent certificate, baccalaureate degree, or concentration of any kind, leaving 114 programs in the final sample. I then composed and executed the survey.

The survey instrument was four pages long and contained 14 questions that solicited 40 pieces of data about applicable certificate or baccalaureate programs (see the Appendix for a facsimile). On 3 April 2008, I mailed the survey to the administrators of the 114 selected programs along with a cover letter and a prepaid-postage return mailer. On 12 May 2008, I sent reminder postcards to the 80 program administrators who had not yet responded. On 18 June 2008, I sent new duplicate surveys and cover letters (again with a prepaid-postage return mailer) to the 73 program administrators who had still not responded. By 15 September 2008, I received a total of 59 completed surveys—a response rate of 52%.

## Results

The survey results presented in this section address the program considerations outlined in my research questions: programs' locations, ages, sizes, and requirements as well as characteristics of faculty teaching in the programs.

## Program Locations

In Table 1, I have categorized responding programs by type according to the name of their department or academic unit. According to this breakdown, 59% of programs offering a baccalaureate degree were housed in departments of language and literature or English.[2] By comparison, 43% of programs offering a certificate were housed in departments of language and literature or English, suggesting that certificates enjoy relative freedom from technical communication's traditional academic home of English. In addition, certificates also showed up in a greater diversity of institutional locations, including those outside of traditional academic departments The five programs that I classified as "other" (each of which offer only certificates) belonged to the following departments or academic units:

- College of Extended and International Education,
- Community Education and Training,
- Business and Professional Development,
- Continuing Studies, and
- Business and Management.

## Age and Size of Programs

The following are the major results regarding the age and size of responding programs, as reported in questions 6a–d and 7a–d of the survey:

- **Certificate programs in technical communication—while certainly an established phenomenon—are newer relative to baccalaureate degree programs.** The average age of baccalaureate programs in 2008 was 18 years, with programs ranging in age from 0 to 50 years (*SD* = 11.1). The average reported age of certificate programs was 14.3 years, with programs ranging in age from 1 to 28 years (*SD* = 8.3).

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[2] This number is consistent with several other studies of technical communication academic programs. Sandi Harner and Ann Rich (2005) found that 61% of baccalaureate programs (*n* = 80) belonged to departments of English, Lisa Meloncon (2009) found 61% of master's programs (*n* = 80) belonged to English departments, and Isabelle Yeats and Dave Thompson (2010) found that 64% of programs at all levels (*n* = 127) belonged to English departments. In contrast, Meloncon (2012b) has suggested that most baccalaureate programs do not belong to English departments. However, the sample in that research intentionally excluded many programs that are concentrations within English majors and may therefore be unrepresentative. (This again reinforces the importance of sample selection in the design and interpretation of technical communication program research.)

- **Program sizes vary widely, but baccalaureate programs maintain larger enrollments than certificate programs.** Baccalaureate programs reported an average of 40.4 enrolled students at the time of the survey, and ranged from 2 to 250 students (*SD* = 45.0). Certificate programs reported an average of 26.2 enrolled students, and ranged from 0 to 370 students (*SD* = 54.8).
- **Baccalaureate programs outpace certificates in graduating students.** Responding baccalaureate programs conferred an average of 10.4 baccalaureate degrees during the course of the 2006–07 academic year (*SD* = 8.30). During the same year, certificate programs conferred an average of 9.0 certificates (*SD* = 8.97). Taken together, responding programs conferred a lifetime total of 5,597 baccalaureate degrees over 660 baccalaureate program-years—a historical average of 8.5 degrees awarded per year per program. They also conferred a lifetime total of 2,935 certificates over 431 certificate program-years—a historical average of 6.8 certificates awarded per year per program.

## Degree and Certificate Requirements

The following are the major results regarding degree and certificate requirements, as reported in the multipart questions 6 and 7:

- **Most certificates (86%, *n* = 34) can be earned independently of any other degree, and do not require students to be concurrently enrolled in some other degree program.**

**Table 1. Department or academic unit for all responding programs, for programs offering a baccalaureate, and for programs offering a certificate.**

| | All | | Baccalaureate | | Certificate | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Department or unit** | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| English/Language and Lit. | 32 | 55 | 22 | 59 | 15 | 43 |
| Technical Communication | 9 | 16 | 7 | 19 | 8 | 23 |
| Communication | 4 | 7 | 3 | 8 | 2 | 6 |
| Writing | 5 | 9 | 3 | 8 | 2 | 6 |
| Humanities | 3 | 5 | 3 | 8 | 3 | 9 |
| Other | 5 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 14 |
| Total: | 58 | 100 | 37 | 100 | 35 | 100 |

- **The average certificate requires roughly one-fourth the coursework of the average baccalaureate degree.** Responding baccalaureate programs required an average of 29.3 courses (both within and outside of the department) for program completion, whereas certificates required an average of 7.6 courses (*SD* = 4.34). Expressed in terms of semester-hours, baccalaureate programs required an average of 91.1 semester-hours (*SD* = 50.9), whereas certificates required an average of 25.5 semester-hours (*SD* = 14.5).
- **Certificates tend to be slower paced than baccalaureates.** The average anticipated time to completion for certificates was about half that of baccalaureate degrees, despite the fact that certificates only required around one-fourth the coursework. When asked how much time they anticipate students to spend completing their program, respondents indicated an average of 6.8 terms for baccalaureate degrees (*SD* = 2.52) and 3.3 terms for certificates (*SD* = 1.45). Expressed in weeks of instruction, respondents anticipated on average 99 weeks for baccalaureate degree completion (*SD* = 33.2) and 48 weeks for certificate completion (*SD* = 23.5).
- **Although they were just as likely as baccalaureate programs to offer at least some course content online, certificates are much more likely to be obtainable entirely online.** Nearly two-thirds of baccalaureate degrees (66%, *n* = 35) offered some online courses, as did an equal portion of certificate programs (66%, *n* = 35). However, only 6% of baccalaureate degree programs could be completed entirely online (*n* = 35), whereas 31% of certificate programs could (*n* = 35).
- **Baccalaureate programs were much more likely to require an internship than certificate programs.** Fifty-eight percent of baccalaureate programs required an internship for program completion (*n* = 33), whereas only 17% of certificate programs did (*n* = 35).

## Instructor Degrees and Professional Status

The following were the major results concerning the degrees and professional status of instructors who regularly teach technical communication, as reported in questions 11, 12, and 14a–f (see Table 2):

- **Few technical communication instructors hold degrees expressly in the disciplines of technical communication, technical writing, business writing, or professional writing.** About one in three instructors who regularly teach technical communication in all responding programs could claim such academic preparation.[3] In programs offering a certificate and only a certificate, this ratio fell to one in five.

- Certificate program instructors have less academic professional status, but more workplace professional experience. Certificate program instructors held fewer academic credentials and were less likely to hold tenure-line positions. Overall, if a program offered a certificate, compared to instructors in programs offering a baccalaureate degree or concentration its technical communication instructors were:
  - about one and one-half times as likely to have industry experience;
  - just as likely to have a degree specifically in the disciplines of technical communication, technical writing, business writing, or professional writing;
  - three-fourths as likely to have a doctorate; and
  - four-fifths as likely to hold a tenure-line position.
- Technical communication instructors in programs that offer a certificate and *only a certificate* have even less academic professional status. That is, instructors in such programs, relative to the instructors in baccalaureate programs, were:
  - about one and two-thirds times as likely to have industry experience;
  - two-thirds as likely to have a degree specifically in the disciplines of technical communication, technical writing, business writing, or professional writing;
  - three-fifths as likely to have a doctorate; and
  - three-fifths as likely to hold a tenure-track position.

## Academic Specializations of Instructors

In question 13 of the survey, I asked participants about the academic specializations of program instructors who regularly taught technical communication courses in their program, but who did not hold degrees expressly

[3] This is consistent with data on hiring reported by Carolyn Rude and Kelli Cargile-Cook (2004). In 2002–03, "While PhDs in technical or professional communication were the most commonly hired, they filled fewer than one-third (29%) of the primary positions that advertised for someone with their specialty" (p. 61). The authors attributed this to the fact that "current doctoral programs cannot graduate sufficient doctorates to fill the market's need" (p. 61) and to the lack of exclusive demand for technical communication specialists.

in technical communication, technical writing, business writing, or professional writing. Their responses, which I sorted into broad categories, are listed in Table 3. Across all programs, instructors who regularly taught technical communication courses demonstrated a diverse range of academic specializations. Their most commonly listed specializations, however, were the English-related fields of composition and rhetoric, literary studies, and English (general or unspecified). The 19 responses comprising the "other" category of specializations were:

- Design
- Engineering
- Film/Media Studies
- Graphic Arts/Graphic Design (2)
- Information Design
- Instructional Design
- Journalism (2)
- Law
- Liberal Arts
- Management
- Nuclear Engineering
- Philosophy
- Psychology
- Science and Technology Studies (2)
- Systems Engineering
- Web Design

**Table 2. The number of regular instructors of technical communication holding various qualifications, in all surveyed programs and by program offering. The left-most column lists the applicable survey question.**

| | | In all programs | | In programs offering: A certificate | | Only a certificate | | A bachelor's | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Survey | Qualification | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| 14a | Industry/professional experience | 381 | 64 | 228 | 71 | 67 | 83 | 226 | 50 |
| 12 | Degree expressly in tech. comm. | 178 | 30 | 101 | 31 | 17 | 21 | 139 | 31 |
| 14c | Master's as highest earned | 254 | 42 | 155 | 48 | 35 | 43 | 182 | 40 |
| 14d | Doctorate as highest earned | 283 | 47 | 126 | 39 | 19 | 23 | 237 | 52 |
| 14e | Currently a graduate student | 118 | 20 | 47 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 118 | 26 |
| 14f | Hold a tenure-line position | 236 | 39 | 112 | 35 | 19 | 23 | 197 | 44 |
| 11 | All tech. comm. instructors | 598 | 100 | 322 | 100 | 81 | 100 | 452 | 100 |

### Summary of Results

Overall, compared to baccalaureate programs, certificate programs in technical communication are younger, are less likely to be housed within departments of English, are smaller in enrollment, and graduate fewer students. Certificates are also more likely to be earnable completely online and much less likely to require an internship. Instructors teaching in certificate programs have more industry experience though fewer hold technical communication-specific degrees; fewer certificate programs instructors are on the tenure track and they have fewer academic credentials overall.

As rules of thumb, technical communication certificates can be earned independently of any other degree, and they require about one-fourth the coursework of a baccalaureate but take half the time to complete. Regardless of whether their program offers a certificate or a baccalaureate, only 1 in 3 technical communication instructors hold a degree expressly in technical communication, technical writing, professional writing, or business writing. However, if a program offers a certificate and only a certificate, this ratio drops to 1 in 5.

## Discussion

In earlier research (Nugent, 2010), I found that certificate programs enjoy great flexibility at both the curricular and programmatic levels. In that study, I performed a detailed examination of 65 certificate program curricula nationwide and concluded that such programs are "wildly disparate" and that "no core curriculum can be said to exist among them" (p. 165). In a survey conducted in the second part of that study, I also found that

**Table 3. Reported specializations of instructors who regularly taught technical communication, but who did not have a degree specifically in the disciplines of technical communication, technical writing, business writing, or professional writing**

| Specialization | Responses |
|---|---|
| Composition and Rhetoric | 30 |
| Literary Studies | 29 |
| English (general or unspecified) | 16 |
| Education | 5 |
| Communication | 5 |
| Linguistics | 4 |
| Creative Writing | 3 |
| Other | 19 |

certificate programs demonstrate a strong concern for the needs of local industry (as compared, say, to broader professional standards). I found that a majority of programs made use of an industry advisory board, recruited from local industry, and/or employed some other means of gathering feedback from local industry. As I concluded, the curricular flexibility and the local orientation of certificates were

> consistent with a conception of technical communication as a postmodern profession in a market where no standard, universally-required skill set has emerged—whether from the collective needs of industry or as a result of professionalizing gestures from elsewhere. (p. 165)

The results presented here, I believe, further corroborate this depiction of certificates as a flexible and unstandardized course of preparation within a field whose contours themselves are flexible and unstandardized.

The present study suggests that technical communication certificate programs are not as established as baccalaureate programs (as indicated by program age, enrollments, and graduation rates). Compared to baccalaureates, certificate program instructors have less professional status in the form of academic credentials, access to the tenure-line positions, and technical communication–specific degrees. And because certificate programs are much less likely to require an internship for program completion, their curricula appear to require less by way of experiential learning (see Little, 1993). However, certificates may also demonstrate signs of being less tradition-bound than baccalaureate degrees. That is, among the programs surveyed here, the certificate programs are less tied to the brick-and-mortar university (in that they are more likely to be earnable online) and they are less tied to the traditional departmental home of English (in that they are more likely to fall into a diverse range of programmatic locations outside of English). Compared to baccalaureate program instructors, certificate program instructors have less professional status in the form of academic credentials, access to the tenure-line positions, and technical communication-specific degrees. In addition, instructors in certificate programs can claim more industry or professional experience than instructors in baccalaureate programs, though they cannot claim the same level of academic preparation. These results appear consistent with the notion that certificates are more flexible and less academically oriented than their baccalaureate counterparts.

In light of the results presented here, certificate programs' precise impact on the status of technical communication as a profession and

as a discipline seems uncertain. Given that certificate programs are less established and have instructors with less professional status, certificates may—at least within academe—serve to undermine efforts to achieve material security for those in the field. However, this study also suggests a number of other, more troubling conclusions about the status of the field and its instructors. Across all programs, fewer than 1 in 3 instructors of technical communication hold degrees expressly in the disciplines of technical communication, technical writing, business writing, or professional writing. Of those instructors not holding technical communication-specific degrees, their most commonly listed specializations are in English-related areas. Some 3 of every 5 baccalaureate programs are housed within departments of English, as are about 2 of every 5 certificate programs.[4]

Although these results are hardly surprising, they do serve as an immediate confirmation and reminder that technical communication—at least as reflected in the staffing and location of academic programs—has not yet achieved disciplinary autonomy or realized the goal of professionalization. Technical communication's frequent lack of practical and political distinction from English suggests it has yet to attain many of what Gerald J. Savage (1999; 2004) enumerated as the defining features of a modernist profession, particularly the features of market closure, self-regulation, and a formalized body of knowledge. Beyond the present survey, of course, there are other signs that the goal of modernist professionalization remains unrealized: the lack of standard—or even consistent—curricula for baccalaureate degrees and certificates (Harner & Rich, 2005; Nugent, 2010); the failure to establish certification for instructors or practitioners (Turner & Rainey, 2004); and, as I have discussed here, even the broad range of names used for our academic programs, scholarly journals, and the field itself. In light of the much larger hurdles still facing the projects of professionalization and disciplinary legitimization, I suggest that much of the anxiety inspired by certificate programs is, *at least for the time being*, misplaced. Certainly certificate programs have not shown signs of surpassing baccalaureate programs in enrollments or graduation rates. I believe more productive battles remain to be waged in technical

[4] I don't mean here to join the fray concerning English departments' status as the predominant scholarly home for technical communication (see Dragga, 2006, 2010), nor do I intend to speak to the larger disciplinary-political shifts occurring in English studies (see Ostergaard, Ludwig, & Nugent, 2009). Rather, I intend these results to speak only to the current status of the projects of professionalization and discipline formation within technical communication.

communication's war for professional and disciplinary status (to use a fraught, if possibly apt, metaphor).

In some ways, certificates could, in fact, advance the status of technical communication by encouraging the growth of academic programs. Because the barriers to setting up new certificates are lower compared to other types of programs (Little, 1997), certificates could help bring a certain strength in numbers to technical communication, promoting at least one important source of disciplinary and professional standing: ubiquity. Further, thoughtfully designed certificates could play a role in ensuring that technical communication's growth remains healthy. Although Robert Johnson (2004) has urged us to be cautious about the dangers of unchecked growth, he has also posited that one strategy for long-term sustainability

> is for programs to become more focussed and specialized. Each program, in other words, could have distinct and recognizable purposes beyond the pale of general technical communication. In short, we could consider creating programs that present "pockets of specialties": programs where students can go to focus on strong and well developed areas of curriculum and scholarship that will be fruitful for students and faculty alike. (p. 117)

Because of their flexibility and concern for local needs (Little, 1997; Nugent, 2010), certificates could be ideally positioned to help establish these sorts of strategic programs. For example, Bowling Green State University and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee have each inaugurated certificates with a special emphasis on international technical communication, and the University of Washington established a certificate in user-centered design. The existence of these programs may suggest that certificates are flexible enough to accommodate emerging issues in the field and are poised to offer specializations, as Johnson has suggested.

I should note, though, that the possibilities I have sketched here remain speculative. More in-depth research is called for—research on the students, the graduates, the individual contexts, and the administration of certificate programs, both qualitative and quantitative—to more accurately gauge certificates' impact on the field. The larger scholarly conversations surrounding disciplinarity and professionalization will, no doubt, remain with us for the foreseeable future. But the kinds of data furnished by program research such as this can, I believe, provide valuable contextualization, evidence, and insight for these conversations, and may suggest new paths forward for productive dialog.

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# Appendix: Survey Instrument

## A Survey of Professional and Technical Communication/ Writing Programs

*Your cooperation with this research project is greatly appreciated, and will greatly contribute to our knowledge of certificate and undergraduate degree programs in professional and technical communication/writing. This survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Please return your completed survey using the enclosed, prepaid mailer.*

### About Your Institution

**1.** Which of the following best describe your institution? (*Check all that apply*):

- □ Two-Year College or University
- □ Four-Year College or University
- □ Public
- □ Private
- □ For-profit
- □ Other (*Please specify*):

**2.** How many students attend your institution? (*Check one*):

- □ 500 or fewer
- □ 501–2,000
- □ 2,001–5,000
- □ 5001–15,000
- □ 15,001–25,000
- □ More than 25,000

**3.** What is the official name of your department or academic unit?

**4.** Which of the following are conferred by your department or academic unit expressly in professional or technical writing/communication? (*Check all that apply*):

- □ Certificates
- □ Associate's degrees
- □ Minors
- □ Concentrations within a bachelor's degree
- □ Bachelor's degrees
- □ Master's degrees
- □ Doctorates
- □ Other (*Please specify*):

**5.** Which of the following are conferred by your department or academic unit, in any specialization? (*Check all that apply*):

- □ Certificates
- □ Associate's degrees
- □ Bachelor's degrees
- □ Master's degrees
- □ Doctorates
- □ Other (*Please specify*):

1

## About Your Professional or Technical Writing/Communication Bachelor's Program (If Applicable)

**6.** If your department or academic unit offers a professional or technical writing/communication bachelor's degree or non-minor degree concentration, please answer the following questions (a–k):

**a.** In what year did your program confer its first professional or technical writing/communication bachelor's degree or degree concentration? .....

**b.** How many students are currently enrolled in your professional or technical writing/communication bachelor's program? .....

**c.** How many professional or technical writing/communication bachelor's degrees and degree concentrations did your program confer over the course of the 2006–07 academic year? .....

**d.** Over the lifetime of your program, approximately how many professional or technical writing/communication bachelor's degrees and degree concentrations has your program conferred? .....

**e.** How many total courses—from all departments or academic units—are required for completion of your professional or technical writing/communication bachelor's degree program? .....

**f.** Of those courses required for completion, how many are offered exclusively by your department or academic unit? .....

**g.** A course in your professional or technical writing/communication bachelor's degree program typically meets for how many hours per week? .....

**h.** How many weeks are in a term of study for your professional or technical writing/communication bachelor's degree program? .....

**i.** How many terms are anticipated for a student to complete your professional or technical writing/communication bachelor's degree program? .....

**j.** What portion of your professional or technical writing/communication bachelor's degree or degree concentration can be earned online? (*Check one*):

- □ No portion
- □ Only some portion
- □ The entire degree

**k.** Does your professional or technical writing/communication bachelor's program require an internship for completion? (*Check one*):

- □ Yes
- □ No

2

## About Your Professional or Technical Writing/Communication Certificate Program (If Applicable)

**7.** If your department or academic unit offers a certificate in professional or technical writing/communication, please answer the following questions (a–l):

**a.** In what year did your program confer its first professional or technical writing/communication certificate?.....

**b.** How many students are currently enrolled in your professional or technical writing/communication certificate program?.....

**c.** How many professional or technical writing/communication certificates did your program confer over the course of the 2006–07 academic year?.....

**d.** Over the lifetime of your program, approximately how many professional or technical writing/communication certificates has your program conferred?.....

**e.** How many total courses—from all departments or academic units—are required for completion of your professional or technical writing/communication certificate?.....

**f.** Of those courses required for completion, how many are offered exclusively by your department or academic unit?.....

**g.** A course in your professional or technical writing/communication certificate typically meets for how many hours per week?.....

**h.** How many weeks are in a term of study for your professional or technical writing/communication certificate?.....

**i.** How many terms are anticipated for a student to complete your professional or technical writing/communication certificate program? .....

**j.** Can your professional or technical writing/communication certificate(s) (*Check one*):

- □ be earned independently of another degree, or
- □ does it require concurrent enrollment in any other degree program?

**k.** What portion of your professional or technical writing/communication certificate(s) can be earned online? (*Check one*):

- □ No portion
- □ Only some portion
- □ The entire certificate

**l.** Does your professional or technical writing/communication certificate(s) require an internship for completion? (*Check one*):

- □ Yes
- □ No

3

## Instructors in Your Program

**8.** How many instructors teach in your department or academic unit? Please include all faculty, adjunct, graduate, full-time, and part-time instructors, regardless of their specialization. .....

**9.** How many graduate students, if any, teach in your department or academic unit? .....

**10.** How many instructors in your department or academic unit hold tenure-track positions? .....

**11.** How many instructors in your department or academic unit regularly teach courses in professional or technical writing/communication? Please include faculty, adjunct, graduate, full-time, and part-time instructors. .....

**12.** Of the instructors in your department or academic unit who regularly teach courses in professional or technical writing/communication, how many hold degrees specifically in the disciplines of Technical Communication, Technical Writing, Business Writing, or Professional Writing? .....

**13.** Of the instructors in your department or academic unit who regularly teach professional or technical writing/communication courses and who do not hold the degrees listed in the previous question, what are their areas of primary academic specialization? (*Please list*):

**14.** Of the instructors in your department or academic unit who regularly teach professional or technical writing/communication courses,

- **a.** How many have industry or professional experience? .....
- **b.** How many hold a bachelor's as their highest degree earned? .....
- **c.** How many hold a master's as their highest degree earned? .....
- **d.** How many hold a doctorate as their highest degree earned? .....
- **e.** How many are graduate students? .....
- **f.** How many hold tenure-track positions? .....

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4

# A Survey of Emerging Research

## Debunking the Fallacy of Colorblind Technical Communication

**Miriam F. Williams**
*Texas State University*

**Abstract**. This keynote was presented at the 2012 annual meeting on September 27-29, 2012, at Michigan Technological University in Houghton, Michigan. The meeting's theme for that year was "Communities, Workplaces, and Technologies."

In keeping with our conference theme, "Communities, Workplaces, and Technologies," I'll spend the next few minutes discussing how scholars and practitioners in our field are addressing issues of race and ethnicity in the community and in the workplace.

In 2004, when I began surveying technical communication literature for my dissertation, I found few references to race or ethnicity. Yes, technical communication scholars had explored issues of diversity, but I found little that addressed the unique ways that historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups within the U.S. created or responded to technical communication. As a doctoral student in Technical Communication and Rhetoric at Texas Tech University, I had taken on a minor in Ethnic Studies to prepare myself for research that explored issues of race and ethnicity within our field. Although I found my minor useful, I wanted to know what scholars in our field thought about communicating technical and scientific information to people of color. This was important to me because I knew from my work in government agencies that scholarship on racial and ethnic communities within the United States was as necessary as scholarship on international technical communication, on gender and technical communication, or on any of the areas of inquiry that we accept as important to our field.

Before my doctoral studies, I had worked as a proposal writer for a historically black college in Austin, Texas, and knew that the funded grant proposals written at this college did not conform to the standards outlined in technical communication textbooks. The proposals were effective and

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were funded, but they were also different in that they addressed race in a way that no technical communication textbook I'd read recommended at that time.

Although living in the state's capitol (Austin), I had edited regulations for Texans and knew that the responses from Latino and African-American business owners to these instructions were different than Anglo-American audiences who had similar education levels and incomes. Years prior, while working in Houston, TX, I interviewed Latinos from South America, Central America, and Mexico who were applying to receive public benefits. During these interviews, I learned that agency forms, which were provided in English and in Spanish, were as useful for employees as they were for clients. These forms were so thorough that they served as a refresher course for government employees who had taken Spanish courses in high school or college, but who had never used the language in the workplace. These documents served as a space for clients to communicate their eligibility, as a script for the government workers during interviews, and, ultimately, as a tool that taught some caseworkers how to write to clients in plain Spanish.

After leaving the public sector and enrolling in doctoral studies, I presented my first paper on race and regulations at the 2004 Association of Teachers of Technical Writing  Conference in San Antonio, Texas. After the panel discussion, an audience member asked the panel, "Where do we draw the line?" when addressing culture and technical communication. This question, which was answered by another panel member, has helped to shape my entire research agenda. My answer is, "I don't know, but as a scholar of technical communication, I am not drawing it at race." And neither are many of our colleagues.

I am happy to report that over the next few years, graduate students and their instructors will have a wealth of studies to pull from when conducting research on race in our field.

A few of the scholars I've crossed paths with who are conducting research in this important area include Krystle Gonzales Danuz, Joseph Dawson, Carlos Evia, Angela Haas, Natasha Jones, Natalia Matveeva, Kyle Mattson, Cruz Medina, Flourice Richardson, Janie Santoy, and, of course, Gerald Savage. And this year's CPTSC conference program is a testament to the fact that many more have genuine interests in this important area.

Although some of these scholars are researching race as it relates to diversity within technical communication programs, others are digging for answers related to social justice questions that have been examined by other fields through different lenses. These scholars are taking the traditional description of technical communication as a field that advocates for

the user to a new and exciting level by focusing on historically marginalized groups and issues related to race, class, gender, and sexuality because these identity factors are not mutually exclusive.

Although the scholarship I mention here does not directly address "diversity" as it has been previously addressed in our field, the emerging scholarship that I reference might inform ethnic and racial minorities that our field is a safe space in which they can study, teach, and practice. This research is a counterargument to those from other areas of English studies who criticize our field for being apolitical and acultural—claims that may negatively affect our ability to attract students trying to choose between technical communication, creative writing, rhetoric and composition, and literature.

In my interactions and collaborations with scholars and practitioners in our field, I've seen the emergence of scholarship addressing five, broad research areas:

- representations of race in historical technical communication artifacts,
- race and social networking sites,
- sustainability issues in institutions and communities,
- teaching multicultural courses in technical communication programs, and
- social justice and activism.

I'll limit my discussion to a few studies on historical research, social media, and sustainability.

Some scholars conducting research in these areas are faculty in technical communication programs; others are emerging scholars or doctoral students who I mention to encourage them to continue their research. Others are industry practitioners who bring perspectives that we value and respect. I know it is the norm in the academy to cite the works of prolific scholars with many years in the classroom or many publications archived, but right now, I am most excited about what new scholars in technical communication have to say about race.

## Historical Representations of Race and Ethnicity in Health and Science Communication

Emerging scholar Flourice Richardson is conducting historical research that examines the rhetorical strategies used by the State of North Carolina to continue the involuntary sterilization of the poor and African Americans

after World War II. Richardson's work examines reports, legislation, and other artifacts that supported the eugenics movement in North Carolina. Not many pages into her manuscript of a chapter for a forthcoming edited collection, she situates her work firmly within our field, connecting it with previous studies, including Steven Katz's 1993 article, "Aristotle's Rhetoric, Hitler's Program, and the Ideological Program of Praxis, Power, and Professional Discourse."

To be clear, those of us who examine historical representations of race and ethnicity in technical communication will not have to do so without excellent examples of rhetorical, ethical, and historical analyses. We can use the theoretical lenses employed for years in our field to examine communities and cultures that our field has yet to examine. We can also employ theoretical perspectives and methods from other areas that many of us have never studied or are unfamiliar with, but that are used by scholars in ethnic studies, sociology, and other disciplines.

Regardless of our methods, though, when examining historical representations of race and ethnicity in technical documents, we should study artifacts with the same depth of knowledge about the era's politics and race relations as a historian would. This approach may require qualitative and quantitative research that examines the documented narratives of individuals and groups, regardless of their levels of power during the historical period examined or their perceived levels of understanding of historical technical documents.

## Contemporary Issues on Social Networking Sites

A more contemporary area well suited for technical communicators is research related to representations of race on social networking sites, especially as it relates to sharing health and medical information. I am hopeful that you are familiar with the work of technical communication scholar Aimee Roundtree, whose study on minority health and social media was presented at the South by Southwest (SXSW) 2011 Interactive conference and was favorably reviewed in the media.

Although we are surely familiar with Twitter and its accompanying blue Twitter bird logo, I am not sure that all of us are familiar with a small, unnamed Twitter community made up of people of the African Diaspora—people whose relationships emerged organically from school affiliations, research, and just common interests. This community is likely one of many, mostly black Twitter communities made up of academics, artists, journalists, and activists who are interested in African-American history, politics, and culture. This particular community's microblogging ranges from live tweets

about predominately black music award shows, reports about health and disease, movie reviews, political commentary, and, thankfully, humor.

Two years ago, one of the most interesting conversations this community engaged in took on a humorous tone and was communicated mostly through the use of graphics. It was in response to technology journalist Farhad Manjoo's 2010 Slate article, "How Black People Use Twitter." The article was accompanied by a graphic of a dark brown Twitter bird wearing a baseball hat turned slightly to the side (you know, like Jay-Z) and tweeting from a cell phone. Although the title and graphic were troubling, Manjoo reported some interesting news—at the time of the publication, 2010, one fourth of Twitter users were African American.

Manjoo also wrote, "Black people—specifically, young black people—do seem to use Twitter differently from everyone else on the service. They form tighter clusters on the network—they follow one another more readily, they retweet each other more often, and more of their posts are @-replies—posts directed at other users. It's this behavior, intentional or not, that gives black people—and in particular, black teenagers—the means to dominate the conversation on Twitter" (p. 1).

When I noticed that the article was being retweeted by members of the network of black scholars and artists I mentioned previously, I expected to find a host of responses published in the progressive blogs that many in this network write for.

Instead, I noticed that the hip-hop bird had been quickly named "BrownTwitterBird" and had been Photoshopped to depict easily recognizable African Americans.

The article and its brown Twitter bird graphic ultimately went viral and led to a discussion on NPR (2010) titled, "How Black People May or May Not Use Twitter," which reported, "Alicia Nassardeen, of the blog 'instant vintage,' was the first to parody the black Twitter bird. She Photoshopped the birds with afros, and wearing kinte [sic] cloths and graduation caps. There were Michael Jackson birds, Prince birds, Antoine Dodson birds, and even an Old Spice bird—on a horse."

Although handled with humor, the argument was clear—there is no one way that "black people use twitter" and the idea that black Twitter users were a monolithic group was so ridiculous that the idea was responded to with good old-fashioned snark and humor. It is fair to say that black people in the United States, for historical reasons, have a strong group political identity that may inform some reactions to technology or technical communication, but we must avoid what Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) calls "the danger of a single story." Adichie states, "Power

is the ability not just to tell the story of another person but to make it the definitive story of that person."

Fortunately for those of us in technical communication, the emerging research I see in this area avoids making generalizations about how people of color use technology. Scholars doing work in this area are identifying clear sample groups but are not attempting to generalize their findings to entire races or ethnic groups. Examples of these scholars include Cruz Medina, who is researching Latina use of Twitter in a technical writing classroom, and Octavio Pimentel, who is studying YouTube's polices regarding racist videos and inflammatory user comments.

## Sustainability Issues within Institutions and Communities

While avoiding the myth of monolithic racial and ethnic groups, scholars are exploring sustainability issues inside and outside of the workplace. Within the workplace, Thereisa Coleman, a former director of institutional research and assessment at a historically black university, is researching the ways that institutional researchers at black colleges use data and reports for sustainability and survival in an age where the very existence of these institutions is questioned. You'll soon find examples of how issues of sustainability and technical communication evolve outside of the workplace in Diana Cárdenas and Cristina Kirklighter's research about a Latina activist who uses what they call "a hybrid form of technical communication" to fight environmental racism.

As we explore issues of sustainability and activism inside and outside of the workplace, scholars are suggesting specific theoretical perspectives and methods. Natasha Jones' research implores us to use ethnographic approaches in our studies of networked activism, and Janie Santoy explains how we can use critical race theory to explore these questions.

## Looking Ahead

Although initially unintentional, much of the emerging research that I've mentioned is not only about people of color, but it is also being conducted by people of color, which speaks to our field's growing diversity in scholarship and in scholars. It's clear, though, from recent and upcoming special issues of journals in our field, that issues of race, ethnicity, and social justice will be researched by scholars of all races and will address fascinating topics that I failed to mention here. As we embrace this research, and as our field becomes more diverse, I urge you to also consider courses, at

the undergraduate and graduate levels, that address multicultural issues in technical communication—not simply as a component of an ethics or social issues course, but as a semester-long course that gives students the opportunity to wrestle with race, ethnicity, and technical communication.

Though there is room for consideration of multicultural audiences in all of our courses, Angela Haas' 2012 JBTC article, "Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: A Case Study of Decolonial Technical Communication Theory, Methodology, and Pedagogy," gives us an example of what a course that focuses on race and technical communication might look like. Examples of current graduate courses in technical communications programs include Language Problems in Multicultural Environments at Texas State University and Race, Rhetoric, and Technology at Illinois State University. These courses will not only prepare our students to design and to write for increasingly diverse audiences within the United States, but the courses will make our students competitive in a marketplace that demands cultural competence.

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# Profile of Professional and Technical Writing as Part of the Community at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs

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**Abstract.** **This article discusses institutional context, program history, and program development as they relate to the local and university communities for the Professional and Technical Writing (PTW) undergraduate emphasis at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. A program profile, disciplinary strengths, faculty overview, community engagement, and assessment issues are described.**

**Keywords.** **Community, curriculum development, client-based coursework, university and programmatic vision, stasis theory, technical and professional writing**

The University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (UCCS) campus was formed in 1965. Among the three CU campuses—the others being Denver and Boulder—UCCS has had, from the beginning, an intense institutional relationship with and commitment to the local communities. Paying attention to this relationship and staying committed to the needs of the surrounding communities has meant that developing and sustaining any kind of program, and in this case a writing program, involves applying the goals and values of a community-based approach. In this article, rather than survey UCCS's commitment to writing, I focus instead on how the institution's community-based goals and values set the stage for UCCS's undergraduate program in Professional and Technical Writing (PTW).

## Institutional Context

Although UCCS was not officially formed until 1965, CU was offering classes in the Colorado Springs area, mostly at Colorado College, as early as the 1920s. By the 1960s, however, CU's presence in the Springs had established some strong community ties with local businesses

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and organizations. One such relationship led then Colorado Governor John Arthur Love and Hewlett-Packard (HP) Company co-founder David Packard (whose company had a huge presence in the city) to establish a permanent home for the university in Colorado Springs. In 1965, George T. Dwire sold the Cragmor Sanatorium property for $1 to the state and UCCS moved to its current location in the Cragmor neighborhood of northern Colorado Springs, one of the highest parts of the city. Classes were held in the Cragmor Sanatorium building, what is now Main Hall, and Cragmor Hall, a modern expansion of Main Hall.

Because of its ties to HP, the university initially focused on programs in engineering and business. Three decades later, a 1997 community referendum merged Beth-El College of Nursing with UCCS. In recent years, programs such as the Network Information and Space Security Center (NISSC) were added to connect the university with the large military communities in the Springs. Other programs, including the CU Institute for Bioenergetics and the Institute for Science and Space Studies, cast an eye toward the future, keeping UCCS current and relevant. Over the years, connections to local communities expanded to include the needs and interests of small businesses, non-profits, and environmental organizations. More recently, UCCS has started building the infrastructure to support the global needs of our communities, particularly in the fields of business and engineering.

Today the university is a comprehensive baccalaureate institution, focused on providing "unsurpassed, student-centered teaching and learning," and also offering "a selected number of masters and doctoral degree programs" (Vision Statement). Shaping the vision and goals of the institution are the community ties that the administration continues to sustain and grow. One of the reasons for the strong connections to our local communities is that the students here tend to stay in the area after graduating. The majority are often older, non-traditional students who are returning to school in the hopes of advancing their careers or switching careers. Although in recent years the percentage of traditional-aged students has slowly increased, the majority of UCCS students (approximately 72%) are currently non-traditional. Most also have families and/or work at least part time while attending classes.

The core values of the institution reflect these demographics. The first three (of eight) university core values include:

- helping traditional and non-traditional students be academically successful;
- linking the university with the community it serves, and

- aggressively seek[ing] the development of a multicultural campus environment (UCCS, Vision Statement).

It seems obvious that, as Jo Allen (2010) stated in "Mapping Institutional Values and the Technical Communication Curriculum: A Strategy for Grounding Assessment," any program in the university would speak directly to its values. As she goes on to explain, "At its simplest, a mission reflects what the university is (research, doctoral, liberal arts)" (p. 40); in our case, the university is a student-centered teaching university. Additionally, the mission also reflects "just as importantly, what [a university] does (leads, provides, engages, serves, promotes); institutional values suggest its desired outcomes (civic leaders, global learners, citizens of character, industry leaders)" (p. 40). In our case, speaking directly to our values means serving our communities by helping our students achieve academically.

Strengthening connections with the community through both programmatic design and assessment and sustained community outreach are particularly valuable means for creating and situating the PTW program at this institution. The PTW program has from the start fit nicely—and as it grows, more purposefully—with the core values and mission of UCCS.

## Program History[1]

The Professional Writing Program beginnings can be traced back to 1985, when the English Department hired a tenure-track faculty member charged with developing business and technical writing courses: ENGL 307, a 3-credit course then called Business Writing, now called Business and Administrative Writing; and ENGL 308, a 2-credit course called Technical Writing, converted since to a 3-credit course, ENGL 309, Technical Writing and Presentation. After two years, the faculty member who developed these courses resigned, leaving a void in providing direction to courses that were increasingly important to business and engineering majors. However, the English Department continued to offer these courses. They were taught primarily by an instructor in the Writing Program, Harriet Napierkowski, and at times by part-time instructors in the program.

In 1992, Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC), a local company, asked the English Department to develop and deliver a series of in-house writing

[1] The Program History section was pieced together from the Annual Program Review Report, written by Harriet Napierkowski in 2004, and from conversations over the past four years with senior faculty members in the English Department.

courses that would lead to a certificate for their technical writers. Based on the needs of the writers at DEC, Napierkowski developed four courses:

- ENGL 311, Advanced Grammar
- ENGL 312, Technical Editing and Style
- ENGL 313, Document Design (now Web and Print Document Design)
- ENGL 314, Managing Writing Projects for Business and Industry

During the 1992-1993 academic year, Napierkowski delivered these courses at the DEC facility in northwest Colorado Springs through the CU-Colorado Springs Extended Studies Program. Twelve technical writers enrolled in the courses and completed their certificate requirements over the period of the academic year.

In 1993-94, the English Department explored the feasibility of offering the newly developed courses to undergraduate students. Out of this exploration arose the effort to establish the Professional Writing (PW) Program. Job growth in the computer industry was rapid in the 1990s, and industries with high technology content, such as pharmaceuticals, engineering, management, and public relations grew just as quickly. One of the goals of the PW program was to prepare students for careers in a well-compensated profession that was becoming increasingly important along the Colorado front-range. As technology filtered into traditional employment sectors, the types of jobs in technical communication became increasingly diverse. In 1995, Napierkowski was hired as the Director of Professional Writing and Technology, a newly created, professional-exempt 12-month position. In addition to teaching a 2/2 load, her charge was to develop and direct the Professional Writing Program and to support the use of instructional technology by Writing Program faculty in networked computer classrooms.

As Director, Napierkowski expanded the cadre of courses available to students, developing a fifth course, ENGL 315: Professional Writing Internship. Additionally, to help students develop a broader range of essential workplace skills, she designed the program to include up to three credits of course work from related disciplines:

- Journalism 290 (Communication Department)
- Computer Art 210 (Visual and Performing Arts Department)
- Web Development 380 (Information Systems, College of Business)
- Principles of Computer Science 115 (Computer Science, College of Engineering and Applied Science)

With the concurrence of the English Department, Napierkowski submitted the new courses along with a proposal for a Professional Writing Program to the LAS Curriculum and Review Committee and received immediate approval both for the courses and for the program. The program included the five newly developed courses (ENGL 311, 312, 313, 314, and 315), the two existing business and technical writing courses (ENGL 307 and 308), and one additional existing course (ENGL 301, Advanced Rhetoric). The Department felt that such a program would provide a pragmatic application of a liberal arts degree toward a professional career and thus would make available an important service to our undergraduate students and to the local community. The minor, for example, would attract LAS, Business, and Engineering students interested in enhancing their majors and their career opportunities by strengthening their professional writing proficiency.

The English Department also considered how such a program could serve English majors. Although English majors could not minor in professional writing because the courses would have the same prefix, the PW program would allow them to select a track with an emphasis in Professional Writing. English majors would continue to be held to the English Department requirements, but they had the option of fulfilling those requirements by selecting either a traditional literature track or a professional writing track. Students on the professional writing track would take 27 credits of literature courses, rather than the standard 39, and an additional 18 credits in professional writing courses.

In 1996, PW Program was launched, allowing students to pursue one of the following:

- an emphasis for English majors,
- a minor for non-English majors, or
- a certificate for students not pursuing a degree.

The PW Program quickly gained recognition and in 1998 was cited in an article by then University of Colorado President, John Buechner, as a model program in his Total Learning Environment (TLE) campaign for the University System.

With the addition of the Professional Writing track, the English department now awards Bachelor of Arts degrees in the following four emphasis areas (or "tracks"):

- Professional Writing
- Rhetoric and Writing

- Literature
- Teacher Education Preparation (elementary or secondary education, for Education majors)

## The Program Today

In 2006, Napierkowski retired and the PW director position was converted to a tenure-track position. I was hired as the new director in 2007. I soon changed the name to Professional and Technical Writing (PTW) and started to re-develop and eventually pilot a new curriculum, mapping its disciplinary articulations, and identifying program foci that lend shape to the undergraduate major. Two immediate changes, however, included redistributing the numbers of literature and professional/technical writing courses required for PTW students and creating 2000-level courses to better meet the writing needs of PTW students and students in the College of Business (COB) and the College of Engineering (COE). With departmental support and approval, the following changes were made:

Literature to PTW course credit distribution:

- Started with 27 credits of literature courses and 18 credits in PTW courses
- Changed to 18 credits of literature courses and 27 credits of PTW courses

Later, as the English curriculum as a whole was reconsidered and reshaped, the final credit hours settled on were:

- 15 credits in literature
- 6 credits in writing
- 3 credits in English studies
- 25 credits in PTW

Lastly, in response to the writing needs of students in the COB and COE, ENGL 307 Business Writing and ENGL 308 Technical Writing were redesigned as 2000-level[2] courses, currently listed as ENGL 2080 Business and Administrative Writing and ENGL 2090 Technical Writing and Presentation. (See appendix for current PTW degree plan)

### Curricular Design

Similar to the Michigan State University Professional Writing program that Danielle DeVoss and Laura Julier (2009) described *Programmatic Perspec-*

[2] In the AY 2010-2011, the course numbers were changed from 100-level designations to 1000-level designations. For the remainder of the article I will be using the newest course level designations unless referring to prior courses.

*tives 1*(1), the Professional and Technical Writing program housed in UCCS's College of Liberal Arts & Sciences "is not a writing-across-the-curriculum or writing-in-the-disciplines endeavor; rather, it is a writing-as-curriculum degree program" (p. 73) and is part of the larger English department curriculum. It has been redesigned to reflect an English Studies approach, pulling together core reading and writing practices from Literature, Rhetoric and Writing, and Professional and Technical Writing. One of the primary goals of this English Studies approach is, as Bruce McClomisky writes in *English Studies: An Introduction to the Discipline(s)*, to develop "a language (more *common* than the discourse of critical pedagogy) through which all of the disciplines comprised by English studies can speak to one another with less descent into divisiveness and greater reference to common purpose" (p. 26). Among the faculty, and articulated to students upon entering the department, we share the core belief that analysis, critique, and production of discourse are "functionally complementary, not ideologically opposed" (p. 43). Such a statement, although seemingly broad, is a grounding point for us in terms of lessening descent and referencing our common ground. The approach is also introduced to students in ENGL 2000: Introduction to English Studies. In the course, English studies in the department is defined for students as "analysis, critique, and production of discourse in social context" regardless of the chosen emphasis or track (McClomisky p. 41). This means that analysis requires selection, a form of critique; to be meaningful, critique requires analysis; analysis and critique are produced in written, visual, and/or oral forms. This definition is delineated further and discussed through the following concepts to draw on the common purpose we share across our respective disciplines[3]:

- *Identification*: Drawing on the rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke, McComiskey describes "*identification* as a process whereby two or more entities (or disciplines, in our case) perceive a union of interests despite their unique qualities" (p. 41). In our case, our interests are joined in that we see ourselves as part of the larger English studies project.
- *Articulation*: Drawing on cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall, McComiskey describes articulation as linkages that can be rearranged to address new issues as they arise. Students in English

[3] As ENGL 2000 is a team-taught course with faculty from all four tracks teaching in four-week segments. The concepts listed above come from lecture notes for ENGL 2000 developed by Dr. Katherine Mack who teaches the Rhetoric and Writing section of the course..

studies need to be adept at articulating the linkages among the sub-areas as they move through the curriculum and address different challenges.

- *Discourse and its implications*: Language is dynamic; it is part of larger processes.
- *Social context and its implications*: Language becomes meaningful in specific contexts; the meaning of an utterance changes depending on the context; the same utterance means differently in different contexts (Examples: What a word means in a Shakespearean sonnet is different from what that word means in a 20th century novel. What "homeboy" means in rap is different from its meaning in a country-western song. What "context" means for a student in a PTW class is different from its meaning in a literary history or rhetorical criticism class.)

As McComiskey states, English can be "a powerful collection of integrated (structurally separate but functionally interrelated) disciplines with a coherent and collective goal that does not compromise each discipline's unique integrity" (p. 43).

To build further on the work of ENGL 2000 and to establish a common background among all English majors, students also take the following common courses:

- ENGL 1310: Rhetoric and Writing I
- ENGL 2010: Introduction to Literary Studies
- One British Literature breadth course (early or late)
- One American Literature breadth course (early or late)
- ENGL 3000: Literary Criticism Theory and Practice
- Designated Diversity course
- ENGL 3110: Advanced Grammar

## Disciplinary Articulations and Program Foci

The PTW program engages students in exploring, experimenting with, and enjoying different forms of communication; different types of technologies; and interactions and work with other students, faculty, and business and community mentors in internships and collaborative projects. The program is geared toward students interested in specializing in writing as an area of expertise. It helps students develop advanced writing skills with emphases on collaboration; writing for/in diverse disciplines, com-

munities, and cultures; and document design, editing, and publishing. It also prepares students for careers in professional and technical writing, information development, Web authoring, grant and proposal writing, and publications management.

The PTW curriculum draws from literature, rhetoric and writing, and major themes within the English major. Spanning this disciplinary foci are the student outcomes, described in Table 1, that shape the entire PTW curriculum. These foci include core practices, technological literacy skills, and advanced practices and theory. Program outcomes are mapped onto the coursework.

To establish a common core in PTW, all PTW majors take two core courses (students from other emphases in the English department can choose to take these courses as well instead of ENGL 1410 and 3010):

- ENGL 2080 or 2090: Business and Admin Writing or Technical Writing and Presentation
- ENGL 3080: Advanced Business and Technical Writing

To gain practice and specialization in writing, PTW majors take courses from the following three categories:

Practice courses—students choose 2 (*core practices*):

- ENGL 3120: Technical Editing and Style
- ENGL 3140: Managing Writing Projects in Business and Industry
- ENGL 3150: Professional Writing Internship
- ENGL 3750: Grant and Proposal Writing
- Technological literacy courses—students choose 2 (*core practices and technological literacy*):
- ENGL 3130: Designing Documents for Business and Industry
- ENGL 3160: Tools for Technical Writers
- ENGL 3850: Advanced Topics in Professional Writing

Advance practice and theory courses—students choose 2 (*advanced practices and theory*):

- ENGL 4060: Diversity Topics in PTW
- ENGL 4065: Intercultural Professional and Technical Writing
- ENGL 4080: Special Topics in PTW
- ENGL 4800: Peer Tutoring or ENGL 4810: Special Topics in the Teaching of Writing

- ENGL 4820: Classical Rhetoric
- ENGL 4880: Topics in Public Writing

All students are also required to complete a one-credit hour Senior PTW Portfolio Practicum.

Within the PTW program, and particularly through internship experiences and co-curricular experiences, students develop skills and sophistication in the following areas:

- Understanding the theoretical and historical aspects of the field
- Exploring and mastering practical skills in written and visual communication—writing to various users, designing information, editing print and electronic documents, software, and oral presentation
- Understanding the ethical concerns, responsibilities, and dimensions of different rhetorical situations
- Working critically, ethically, and collaboratively to complete projects

**Table 1: Student Learning Outcomes**

| Core practices | Technological Literacy Skills | Advanced practices & theory |
|---|---|---|
| Perform rhetorical analysis—identifying audience, purpose, context<br><br>Perform close reading of texts<br><br>Use a variety of research methods to gather information<br><br>Become familiar with the critical theories in core fields<br><br>Develop a historical breadth of understanding of core fields<br><br>Develop a knowledge of conventions and genres in core fields<br><br>Perform effective oral presentations<br><br>Balance the advantages of relying on others with the responsibility of doing their parts | Critically and ethically choose from a variety of technologies to address specific rhetorical situations and a range of readers'/users'/viewers' needs<br><br>Engage in a critical perspective of technology, its uses and contexts<br><br>Analyze technology as a physical tool, and as a socially constructed system<br><br>Use various software for writing, editing, and designing | Identify and effectively respond to reader/user/ viewer expectations<br><br>Develop a depth of knowledge in rhetorical theory and user-analysis<br><br>Participate effectively in a community, integrating your own ideas with those from various stakeholders<br><br>Produce appropriate and ethical text and graphics for displaying research data and findings<br><br>Evaluate and use appropriate strategies for production, revision, editing, proofreading, and presenting |

This curriculum offers students opportunities to select courses that provide a variety of writing practices, such as invention in writing, information and interaction design, writing for publication, rhetorical theory, and writing center theory and practice. The program includes the following career-related and educational objectives:

- Preparing students for successful careers in technical/professional writing
- Providing students with theoretical and practical (application of knowledge and production-related) experience in professional and technical writing
- Encouraging students to understand the ethical, cultural and rhetorical dimensions of all communicative acts
- Preparing students to work collaboratively with others in the iterative process of research, discussion, negotiation, writing, and editing

Following the vision of the institution, PTW students work to establish relationships and to solve problems collectively. To do this, they use what perhaps are not often considered relationship building and problem-solving tools—theories, close reading, user-analysis, and more broadly, words, images, texts, and interfaces. As David Franke, Alex Reid, and Anthony DiRenzo (2010) state, in terms of bridging cultures in the design of PTW programs, this program also strives to enact a "both/and" approach: "teaching students to reflect [and] teaching them the skills to 'succeed'—with 'success' a term that teachers tend to think about even more critically than their students" (p. xi). The goal is that as students gain experience and confidence, all these tools become building blocks for addressing real-world problems, working within communities, and establishing and sustaining relationships.

## Distinctive Features of the Program

The program includes three distinctive features: 1) the program faculty, 2) stasis theory as a theoretical foundation for the PTW program, and 3) the PTW program Senior Portfolio and Presentation requirement.

### PTW Faculty

The program's first distinctive feature is its faculty. In addition to the director, six fixed-term instructors currently teach exclusively in the PTW program. All of them come with graduate degrees in professional and technical writing (as opposed to degrees in literature or composition), and

four have extensive industry experience (10+ years) as well as teaching experience. The scholarly interests of the core faculty include technical communication, information and interaction design, professional writing, document design, project management and administration, nature writing, computers and writing, and more.

Between 2007 and 2010, the PTW faculty engaged in the following professional development and curricular development activities:

- Attended monthly development meetings during the AY
- Developed and conducted workshops for the development meetings (e.g., effective online practices, incorporating theory effectively into the 2000-level courses assignments, activities and strategies for student group work)
- Served on university-wide and/or college-wide committees (e.g., Faculty Minority Committee, PRIDE (LGBTQ faculty and staff committee), Chancellor's Task Force on LGBTQ Issues)
- Produced a range of publications, including single-authored texts, edited collections, peer-reviewed articles, and texts published in conference proceedings

Of the activities listed, the monthly development meetings provide the most consistent opportunities for instructor training and development work. During these meetings, which often last three hours, we revisit and revise existing practices and engage in activities that help us stay up-to-date and informed about what is happening in the field, in industry, and on our campus.

At least once during the academic year we revisit the theoretical approach—stasis theory—built into the courses in this program. Specifically, we discuss how we introduce the theory to students, with which assignments, readings, and activities; the challenges that continue to arise for each of us as we try new methods; and the successes we have had. One point of continued and focused discussion is how each of these aspects plays out differently whether we discuss ENGL 2080 Business and Administrative Writing (an introductory professional writing course), or ENGL 2090 Technical Writing and Presentation (an introductory technical writing course), or a 3000-level course designed to apply stasis theory more deeply at the theoretical and practical levels. We also discuss literature in professional and academic journals that continue to shape how we can apply and understand stasis theory in more nuanced ways. Recently, for example, because one of the instructors in the program specializes in health

writing and medical rhetoric, we circulated "Stasis Theory and Meaningful Participation in Pharmaceutical Policy" by Christa Teston and S. Scott Graham (2012). In it, the authors use stasis theory to analyze the FDA's public hearings on Avastin, a breast cancer drug, concluding that the hearings allowed only certain types of discussion and resulted in stakeholders disagreeing on crucial points. As a result of discussions of the article, the instructor decided to use it in a 4000-level course that focuses on writing in the health fields.

Recent development meetings have also included simple workshops on navigating and using Google docs in class and in-depth discussions on how to evaluate visual work produced by students. Most recently, two meetings were devoted to usability testing and the technologies available for conducting such work in our courses. In these meetings, one of the instructors led us through the available methods for conducting usability testing. We covered information from the Usability.gov website, including the 12 usability methods they outline (see ‹http://usability.gov/methods/index.html›), drawing parallels between those usability methods and existing methods we use. We also discussed ideas about why and how to apply these usability methods in our courses and for which assignments. Three decisions came out of these two meetings.

First, we decided as a group to incorporate one method discussed in place of doing peer review. Each instructor would decide which method based on the assignment. For example, with proposals, instructors might choose to incorporate the "parallel design method," during which each student in the group would come up with their own drafts; they would come together to evaluate each one—compare and contrast; then separate again to make changes, and come back together to develop one proposal from the best available options/approaches. Admittedly, this process is not revolutionary in terms of methodology; however, it is transformative in terms of making us more aware of our default settings and attitudes about the peer-review process and how we require students to compose multiple drafts. Additionally, it affords us another opportunity to include industry specific vocabulary—specifically, usability terms—in our courses and to draw more direct links between academic and industry practices.

The other two decisions were to develop a 3000-level special topics course about usability methods and to purchase eye-tracking equipment and software to use in the course. Two instructors decided to work together to design the course, bringing together their expertise and interests in design and technology. Additionally, the timing in terms of available and affordable equipment was just right. The work of Brian Still, an associ-

ate professor at Texas Tech and director of the Usability Research Lab, and Nathan Jahnke to develop a low-cost alternative eye tracking system to aid their own research has made getting such equipment affordable for our program. Eye-tracking equipment would be a vital research tool for students because it records exactly what users see as they use tools or accomplish tasks, and it allows students hands-on experience with usability testing and analysis. In October 2011, the EyeGuide Eye Tracker Still and Jahnke developed became available for sale (‹http://www.grinbath.com/content/about-grinbath›). With department approval and the course fees generated from the PTW courses, we would be able to purchase one of these headsets in the next academic year.

In addition to professional development work, the faculty is committed to community collaboration here and aboard. Several faculty are involved in a wide range of service and/or community projects. For example, one faculty member has volunteered to teach technical writing courses for the past two summers at a college in rural East Africa. Several faculty participate yearly in the Colorado Springs Undergraduate Research Forum (CSURF), a venue that provides undergraduates from the three area institutions—UCCS, the Air Force Academy, and Colorado College—a professional opportunity to present their research projects. Additionally, most classes in the PTW program engage students in work that reaches outside of the classroom to various sites of community-based work and text production. Faculty often identify such community-based projects a semester or more ahead of time. Course-based projects have included composing documentation for local art centers and nonprofit organizations, such as Colorado Springs Visitors and Convention Bureau and the Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region; as well as for university units, such as the athletic department, IT, university relations, and the Teaching and Learning Center (a resource center for faculty to learn technology).

One final point worth emphasizing about faculty development is the value of serving on college- and university-wide committees. For example, a few of us have served on the Information Technology Advisory Council (ITAC), a university wide committee that convenes "to analyze, report and recommend approaches and solutions for IT issues and problems, [and] provide [two]-way communication between the ITAC and the CU Colorado Springs community about IT issues" (‹http://www.uccs.edu/itac/mission.html›). One recent issue taken up by this council involved the decision to create "social media free zones in the library." Such an issue impacts not only university communities, but also the PTW program, and the Colorado Springs community in general. The social media free zones in the library

addresses practical needs students have to access technology to complete their homework, do research, and so on. This need became apparent as more students stood in longer lines to use computers at the library because other students were spending time on social media sites, such as Facebook. Currently, 80% of the computers in the library allow internet connection to social media sites, but creation of social media free zones brought this technology-communication issue to the forefront. It acknowledged the need to adjust to changes in communication practices, which play out in our classrooms every day, in the communities at large, and in our workplaces. As faculty, being involved with such issues allows us to address them in our classrooms. For instance, as the social media free zones in the library issue was discussed in ITAC, we offered a course in the PTW program on writing for social media in which we discussed changing communication practices. Being a part of such work on campus helps us shape not just the university and communities around us, but the program as well.

## Stasis Theory as a Theoretical Foundation for PTW

A second distinctive feature of the program is the theoretical approach built into the core courses of the program (i.e., ENGL 2080, 2090, and 3080), and continued vertically into junior- and senior-level coursework. Beginning in 2009, stasis theory became the theoretical foundation for the program, providing a tool for doing inventional work, rhetorical analysis and audience analysis, research, writing and arrangement, and teaming/collaboration. We use the five stasis questions Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor (1988) outlined to better reflect scientific inquiry (versus the traditional four questions—without the question of 'Cause,' that comes out of the rhetorical tradition):

1. Conjecture—Is there an act to be considered?
2. Definition—How can the act be defined?
3. Cause—What caused it?
4. Quality—How serious is the act?
5. Policy—Should this act be submitted to some formal procedure? (Brizee, p. 8)

In what follows, I explain why we adopted stasis theory in the PTW program, and how stasis theory is used in the courses and in the program. Initially, I adopted stasis theory as a bridge to the theoretical work already being done in first year writing, specifically in ENGL 1410: Rhetoric and

Writing II, Argument and Research, the second course in a two-course First Year Writing sequence. When I started in 2007, the Writing Program had already been engaged in this theoretical work in ENGL 1410 for a number of years. After the introductory courses in the PTW program were revised to the 2000-level, students in the College of Engineering and the College of Business could fulfill their second writing course requirement by choosing either ENGL 1410 or ENGL 2080 or 2090. To provide a more consistent writing experience, I worked with the Writing Program director to see how stasis theory can be integrated in PTW courses so that students receive practice in similar theoretical approaches to inventional work, analysis, research, and collaboration, particularly in their first year.

In working with the Writing Program director, stasis theory turned out to be a useful theoretical foundation for the PTW program, providing the broader understanding of theory as it applies to professional and technical communication. The goal became incorporating it into the whole program—from the introductory to advanced- or senior-level courses. Such work began in stages and is ongoing. We began with the introductory or 2000-level courses. In both ENGL 2080 and 2090, stasis theory is introduced as a tool for invention, arrangement, research, analysis—rhetorical and audience—and teaming. To accomplish this, PTW faculty primarily draw on the work of Fahnestock and Secor, "The Stases in Scientific and Literary Argument" (1988) and Allen Brizee's work on teaming, "Stasis Theory as a Strategy for Workplace Teaching and Decision Making" (2008). The two main goals of these courses with regard to the theory are 1) familiarizing students with stasis theory and how it can be applied to inventional work, analysis, research, and collaboration; and 2) getting students practiced in applying the theory. The following are specific entry points where stasis theory is included and the kind of work we aim to generate with students:

- research or white paper, in teams (ENGL 2080 and 2090): often the first main assignment that serves to introduce stasis theory and how it can be applied for invention, research and analysis;
- individual technical definition and description (ENGL 2090): provides practice in getting students to explore in more depth the first questions—fact and definition;
- instruction set and reflective memo, in teams (ENGL2090): continues with the practice of applying stasis questions to invention, arrangement and analysis, and introduces students to how it applies in teamwork and collaboration; and,

- formal proposal and presentation, in teams (ENGL 2080): continues with the practice of applying stasis questions to arrangement and analysis, and introduces students to how it applies in teamwork and collaboration in presentations.

Table 2 shows a stasis worksheet we use during the revision process with students. Such a worksheet can be used or adapted for the research papers, reflective memos for the instruction set, as well as the formal proposals and presentations. Students often work in pairs or teams to complete the worksheet and identify places where the questions are answered. Students also use the worksheet to identify remaining points of disagreement—both in the papers and among themselves. Often these points of disagreement are evident by colliding points of view or different interpretations of evidence. This is what stasis theory helps identify for students.

One assignment[4] that further illustrates how stasis theory is used comes from ENGL2090, where students were tasked with proposing where to announce a specific kind of exhibit. Here is the assignment, as presented to students by the instructor:

> Scenario: the Bodyworlds exhibit is coming to town. We are the events committee of Colorado Springs. We have two newsletters: one for science and one for the arts. We have a policy where we only announce an event in one newsletter or the other, but we don't know which one to place the exhibit in. What should we do?
>
> 1. Watch the Bodyworlds video (‹http://www.bodyworlds.com/en/prelude.html›)
> 2. Get into groups of 3
> 3. Run stasis theory on the issue and determine a course of action

As explained on the exhibition website, the Bodyworlds "exhibitions are first-of-their-kind exhibitions through which visitors learn about anatomy, physiology, and health by viewing real human bodies, using an extraordinary process called Plastination, a groundbreaking method for specimen preservation […]" (Bodyworlds, "Exhibitions: Questions and Answers"). In working through the stasis questions, students identify the issue/problem (invention); define and describe science and art (research and analysis); identify values/qualities of the issue/problem (research and analysis), for example, possible costs; and propose a solution (invention, research, analy-

[4] Provided by Lonie McMichael, senior instructor in the Professional and Technical Writing program at UCCS.

sis, collaboration), for example, a policy change to allow publication in both or recommendation about which one it should go into. Assignments such as this have an additional intellectual dimension that we aim to cull out, one that can be easily overlooked when going through the stasis questions—that is, the underlying question of jurisdiction or disciplinary

**Table 2: Stasis Worksheet**

| **Read the draft aloud and record where readers encounter difficulty** | | |
|---|---|---|
| Read the first part of the problem statement. Does it answer the stasis questions of Fact and Definition for the reader? Do not respond with a simple yes/no; point out where –which sentences specify and make this clear to the reader? | Fact<br><br>(Conjecture)<br><br>Is there a problem?<br><br>How did it begin and what are its causes? What changed to create the problem? | Rewrite thesis/problem statement sentences here: |
| | Definition<br><br>What exactly is the problem?<br><br>What kind of a problem is it? | |
| In the discussion/body of the draft, are these stasis questions of Quality answered for the reader? Do not respond with a simple yes/no; point out where –which sentences specify and make this clear to the reader?<br><br>Are they supported with evidence to reinforce the authors' evaluation? | Quality<br><br>How serious is the problem?<br><br>What are the costs of the problem? | Rewrite evaluative statements/sentences here: |
| In the final recommendation, are these questions of Policy/Procedure answered for the reader?<br><br>What is the call to action? | Policy<br><br>Who should be involved in helping to solve this problem?<br><br>What should we do about this problem? What do the clients need? | Rewrite policy recommendation statements/ sentences here: |

Adapted from Source: H. Allen Brizee, *Stasis Theory As a Strategy for Workplace Teaming and Decision Making* Journal Technical Writing and Communication 38(4) 363-385, 2008.

boundaries. Often, as Alan Gross (2004) explains, "the answers to questions of definition and quality are not the property of one discipline…" (p. 143). Negotiating across several intellectual communities, such as in the Body-worlds assignment, helps highlight how intellectual ideas, concepts, and arguments can belong in and to multiple intellectual communities or disciplines, each with different audiences, different arguments to make, and each taking possibly different forms. Providing students with opportunities for such recursive practice is one useful aspect of stasis theory. As Kathryn Northcut (2007) explains, "analysis may never be completed because of the dynamic nature of arguments themselves, yet the lack of finality does not negate the usefulness of stasis theory to rhetoricians" (p. 14).

At the 3000- and 4000-level, stasis work is ongoing and is incorporated in more targeted ways. Faculty have explored two specific ways to use stasis theory in more depth. We have students apply and stay in one or two of the questions for the duration of a project/paper or for the entire course. As Fahnestock and Secor (1988) contend, "full stasis development of a subject is the exception in written arguments in the academic disciplines. Scholars usually focus on well-defined issues for limited audiences. In particular, arguments in disciplinary contexts often stay in one stasis" (p. 430). Especially when courses are focused on specific disciplinary knowledge, applying only one or two stases becomes not only an invention device or a tool for arrangement, it becomes "a sensitive tool of audience analysis," one of the foundational aspects for technical/professional writing.

Recently, a 4000-level special topics course on writing in the health fields centered on staying in one or two of the stases for the duration of the course. This focus provides a level of understanding of disciplinary context and audience in writing in the medical and health fields. As Fahnestock and Secor explain, "it is clear that arguments within a discipline usually assume the value of addressing certain subjects in certain stases. That is what it means to write within a discipline" (p. 440). To better address the needs of this course, we met with the College of Nursing faculty. As a result, the course was further designed to focus on audience analysis and on the differences in disciplinary contexts between the medical and health fields, particularly differences between medical writing and writing based on nursing models. According to the nursing faculty, medical rhetoric or writing is not the same as writing in the health fields, especially the nursing field. One of the main differences is the model of care—the medical model focuses on diagnosis, treatment, and cure. As one nursing journal explains, in the medical model, "Disease is defined as a biophysical malfunction and the goal of treatment is to correct the

malfunction to cure the disease" (*Journal of Nursing*, 2007). Such a model devotes little attention to humanistic factors that impact care. In contrast, the various nursing models (e.g., Roy's Model and Tidal Model, preferred models in Psychiatric nursing; Casey's Model, preferred in Child care; and Orem's Model, most preferred in adult nursing) offer more humanistic approaches to patient care that accounts for psychological and social differences of culture and ethnicity as they relate to care and cure. Such differences shape how client situations are discussed, how data is organized, how findings are analyzed and interpreted, and how and what is ultimately written about patient care and disease (*Journal of Nursing*, 2007). A more focused theoretical approach that stays in only one or two stases is more useful at getting at these differences and how disciplinary knowledge—in this case, within medical and health fields—is generated. As Fahnestock and Secor point out, "When an argument stays in one stasis rather than exploiting the full range of stasis development, the stasis it is in becomes a powerful indicator of the author's sense of audience" (p. 430).

These current approaches provide a breadth of knowledge of stasis theory at the 2000-level and a depth of knowledge and practice at the 3000- and 4000-levels. As a result, students develop a means of doing inventional work, analysis, research, and collaboration. In other words, they develop critical skills to work *with* the people involved in any given discipline, project, or task.

## PTW Senior Portfolio and Presentation

A final distinctive feature of the program is the senior portfolio and presentation, which serves as a final review component of the undergraduate major. During the length of their study, students in the PTW program engage in opportunities to interact and work with other students, faculty, and business and community mentors in internships and collaborative projects. All students in the program are expected to prepare and maintain a working professional portfolio during their time in the program, to present it prior to graduation, and to deliver a professional presentation demonstrating their development as professionals and technical writers. The Senior PTW Portfolio Practicum, taken in students' final semester, supports students in this work by assisting them in achieving the goals for a successful portfolio—i.e., connecting their work with the outcomes of the program, designing their portfolios, and selecting the pieces to include. Each student's professional portfolio is expected to demonstrate educational growth, development of a professional identity, ability to reflect

upon and illustrate skills gained, and readiness to transition from college to the workplace and/or to graduate school.

Lastly, graduating seniors present their professional portfolios to a group of core PTW faculty and to members of area businesses and organizations, often those who have offered internship opportunities to PTW students. The group assesses the student presentations based on the ways students represent how well they have met key learning outcomes listed on Table 1. (See Appendix for the portfolios assessment[5] tool used by reviewers.)

More recently, faculty, administrators, and staff from various offices on campus have become part of these presentations. The effort to include other members of the campus community helps build knowledge of the PTW program across the campus, as well as helps the faculty in the PTW program understand the (mis)perceptions, needs, and expectations of other stakeholders on campus—for example, the faculty in the Colleges of Engineering, Business, and Nursing. Because confusion persists about exactly what professional and technical writing is, as well as how it is different from other writing efforts in LAS, such as the Writing Center, the Rhetoric and Writing Program, and Literature, the inclusion of other members of the campus community has become a useful and important part of addressing these perceptions.

## Facilities

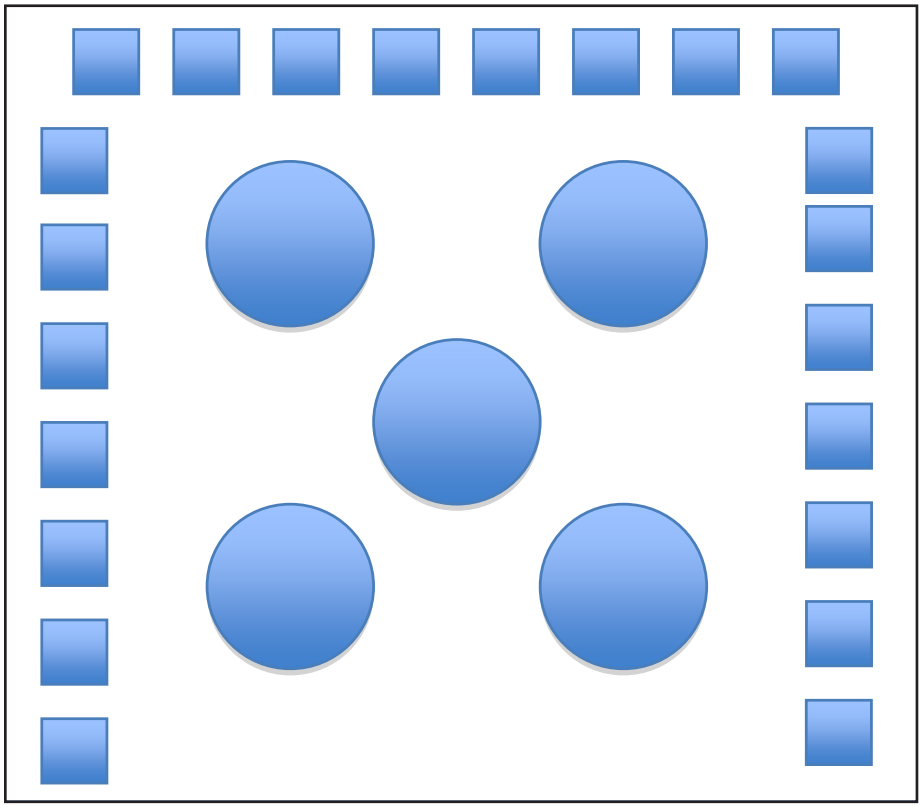
To better meet the goals and outcomes of the curriculum, attention to the physical ways courses are delivered and classrooms are designed were considered. Most PTW faculty teach in networked environments that include tools for communicating electronically in both synchronous and asynchronous ways, thus PTW courses are typically held in classrooms equipped with 22 computer workstations along three walls. Students can gather for collaborative work at four or five 48-inch round tables in the center of classroom. (See Figure 1).

These classrooms also come equipped with professional writing software tools, LCD projector and screen, and a VHS and DVD player. The rooms are spacious, allowing instructors easy access to all students and facilitating a more friendly and open learning environment. These physical spaces afford students practice with technology and the specific kinds of discourse communities that such technologies create as well as with the

[5] As the study was a pilot, I'm more concerned here with our method and questions than with actual results.

social dimensions of writing. The networked classrooms help us sustain our focus on the critical integration of technology into our pedagogical practices with the aim of further supporting and enhancing student learning and writing. Faculty continue to develop their own technological practices by attending workshops both locally and nationally, giving presentations, testing and adapting new strategies, and collaborating with each other about the most effective pedagogical approaches for these tools and networked environments.

**Figure 1: Layout of Computer Classroom**



## Students and Graduates

When I became director in 2007, it became clear to me fairly quickly that many students enrolled did not understand the nature of the program; they too often chose it as late as their senior year, leaving little time to address misunderstandings about the field and to develop any depth in their skills and knowledge. Not unique to this program, some students enrolled also wanted to write the great American novel, and so they were, as a result, frustrated by the technical and professional aspects of the cur-

riculum. However, in spite of these challenges, the program enjoyed large enrollment, reaching a high of approximately 70 students in 2008. In 2008, when the name of the program was changed to professional and technical writing, I noticed a drop in numbers. This seems typical for technical communication programs that change names to include the word "technical." As Sandi Harner noted in her program showcase article in the March 2010 issue, her program also saw a drop in numbers after a name change. As she explains, "first-year students rarely come to college knowing anything about technical communication. They don't know we exist and they don't know what they can do with the major" (p. 75).

Currently, with a more focused curriculum that is not literature heavy and a name that more accurately reflects the nature of the program, we have approximately 40-50 students in any given semester. Slowly, more students seem to be aware of our existence earlier in their academic careers and our recruitment efforts continue at various stages—both within the English department and outside of it. For example, beginning with fall 2010, first year students and transfer students majoring in English are introduced to the professional and technical writing emphasis in the introductory course ENGL 2000: Introduction to English Studies. Additionally, as the PTW director, I participate in the "majors and minors" and career fairs on campus and meet with various faculty from the Colleges of Engineering, Business, and Nursing to recruit students to minor in PTW.

In general, students in the PTW program like to write. Most have had success in high school English classes and writing in other disciplines such as history. As English majors, many also like creative writing and produce such work on their personal time; however, they do not seem to enjoy literature courses. In terms of future plans, often these majors do not see themselves going into teaching or moving out of the local area to pursue a graduate degree. As a result, when they are presented with a major that requires excellent writing skills and that gives them an opportunity to find a job that supports their families, students are eager to start the program.

Informal survey of the past three years, as well as graduates keeping in touch with me, indicates that the majority of them have remained in the area and sought employment with local organizations and businesses. Graduates of the program have found employment with a variety of technology and military-subcontractor companies as well as with a few local non-profit organizations. The following is a partial list of companies and organizations where PTW graduates found employment: Northrup Grumman, a global securities company to the government and commercial customers; Ingersoll Rand Security Technologies, a global securities

company; RT Logic Inc. (Real Time Logic), supplier of signal processing systems for the aerospace communications industry; ISS (Intelligent Software Solutions), a local open access software company to the government and commercial customers; COPPeR (Cultural Office of the Pikes Peak Region), the leading organization for centralizing and organizing information about cultural events and services in the community; Business of Arts Center, a local organization that provides arts education and cultural events to the community and facilitates the development of artistic and business skills of artists; and Pikes Peak United Way.

The majority of these graduates are working as technical or professional writers or editors, particularly those employed with the technology companies. Several other graduates in the last three years have gone on to graduate programs in history and education here at the university.

## Challenges

As DeVoss and Julier (2009) point out, challenges "typical of newly launched majors" include "arguing successfully for faculty lines, staffing courses, providing high-quality academic and professional advising for majors, and ensuring strong community and industry connections" (p. 82). At this point in our development, one of our most pressing challenges is continuing to deliver an excellent curriculum as the university moves to deliver courses in multiple ways. Overall, the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs has seen a large increase in enrollment in the past four years, no doubt a good problem to have. When I started as the director in 2007, the student population was just under 8,000 students. As of 2011, we have just over 9,300 students with a record high enrollment increase of 4.8% in fall 2011.

Consequently, space is becoming a critical concern and delivering coursework in ways that do not require physical classrooms is a major objective of university administrators. Efforts have begun to encourage program administrators to move more of their curriculum online, whether that means moving entire courses to an online format or creating hybrid courses. Additionally, the university is encouraging weekend models of course delivery—fitting courses into Friday, Saturday, or Friday-Saturday formats for 10 weeks rather than 15 weeks, and also offering condensed courses that fit into 2–3 week blocks during semester breaks. As most WPAs are aware, such formats present challenges for most writing courses. For professional and technical writing in particular, the specific aspects that are challenging to address include having ample time to research, write multiple drafts, and write critical and thoughtful papers; time to find

and develop relationships with clients for projects; time for both students and faculty to learn new technologies; and time to train faculty to deliver quality curriculum in these multiple ways.

A second challenge relates to the ENGL 3150: PTW Internship course. Currently, the course is one of four from which students can choose to fulfill one of the areas in the degree plan. Students who have chosen to complete an internship in the past have consistently commented about the value of this course in terms of developing a better understanding of how classroom practices and knowledge apply to the workplace, developing their own identity and confidence as a technical or professional writer, and confirming for themselves that they have chosen a field/profession they are passionate about and can succeed in. Moreover, a significant number of students have been hired by the companies and organizations they interned with—a huge factor considering that the majority of students are focused on getting a good paying job and staying in the area. Consequently, over the past two years, discussion among the PTW faculty has returned frequently to the possibility of making the course a requirement.

The decision to require an internship has revolved around two main concerns. The first is the demand of a required internship on the population of students we typically attract into the program—non-traditional, already-employed students who are often paying their own way through school and so are on a "deadline" to finish. The requirement of an internship would typically add an additional "job" to their schedules and additional costs in both money and time if they were unable to find and complete internships as planned or budgeted. A second concern is administrative responsibilities and demands for sustaining essentially another program—an internship program within the PTW program. If the course became required, managing this requirement would be the responsibility of the director, at least in the foreseeable future. The instructors in the PTW program have teaching-only appointments. As a result, adding this administrative component would be impossible without changing faculty contracts and positions, and without also affecting the number of sections we can offer each semester. Currently, we are at capacity with regard to the number of sections offered and the number of faculty teaching. At least one instructor consistently teaches an overload every semester, and course caps are often increased to accommodate waitlisted students. As resources shift and change in terms of faculty lines, student enrollment, and technology, and as the student demographic changes, the conversation around the internship course remains on our radar as we adapt and grow to meet our communities' needs.

## Concluding Thoughts

As DeVoss and Julier conclude,

> The design of a writing major must find a way to wrestle with institutional histories, intellectual and disciplinary legacies, both local and global, at the same time that it projects a clear intellectual argument for who we are and where we want to be. This emphasis points to the necessity of having a vision—one that is shared by faculty, that resonates in the curriculum, that is visible across courses, and that is understood by students. (p. 84)

What I have hopefully mapped out here is a program that illustrates such a vision, one in which the focus on community in particular—from the classroom to the university to the local area—is central.

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# Appendix

**PTW Senior Presentation Rubric**

In order to receive a 'passing' evaluation on the PTW senior presentation the student must receive a minimum of 'some evidence' in ALL of the categories.

| **Presentation Components** | **1 Strong evidence** | **2 Some evidence** | **3 No evidence** | **N/A** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Providing students with knowledge and skills (application of knowledge and production-related) experience in researching, collaborative learning, and technology | | | | |
| The presentation includes rich and diverse sets of example documents that show appropriate and ethical use of text, graphics and research | | | | |
| The presentation shows evidence of the student's abilities to work productively and negotiate collaboratively with others (in pairs, in small groups, etc.). | | | | |
| The presentation shows evidence of critical and ethical engagement in choosing from a variety of technologies and awareness of technology as a physical tool and as a socially constructed system. | | | | |
| Encouraging students to understand the practices and processes, and conventions and genres in all rhetorical situations | | | | |
| The presentation shows evidence of the student's understanding of reader/user/viewer needs and the use of appropriate strategies for production, revision, editing, proofreading and presenting. | | | | |

| **Presentation Components** | **1 Strong evidence** | **2 Some evidence** | **3 No evidence** | **N/A** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The presentation shows evidence of managing projects in stages, writing in multiple genres, and control over such features as tone, syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. | | | | |
| The presentation reflects the student's ability to focus on a defined purpose and to understand writing as a collaborative and iterative process of research, discussion, negotiation, writing, and editing. | | | | |
| **Overall** | **1 Strong evidence** | **2 Some evidence** | **3 No evidence** | **N/A** |
| The presentation shows ample evidence of development, growth over time, and increasing skills and abilities. | | | | |
| The design and layout of the presentation presents a unique and professional identity with the navigation, structure and content of it easily understandable and usable | | | | |
| The presentation shows attention to detail in the selection of example materials, including an appropriate set of materials and attention to arrangement. | | | | |
| The presentation showcases the student's unique skills and reflects their educational and professional purposes. | | | | |

:

Comments and Feedback

## Professional and Technical Writing Degree Plan

**General Education Requirements**
Students are required as part of their general education requirements to complete courses in Oral Communication, Cultural Diversity, and Global Awareness. These courses are identified in the LAS section of the schedule of courses and in the bulletin.

| Courses | Credits |
|---|---|
| Composition Requirement | 3 |
| Reasoning Skills Requirement | 6 |
| Humanities Area Requirement | |
| -General | 9 |
| -Core | 3 |
| Natural Science Requirement (including one lab course) | 12 |
| Social Science Requirement | 12 |
| General Electives | 27 |
| **Total Credits** | **72** |

**English Major Requirements Credits**
At least 15 credit hours towards the English major must be taken in residence.

| Courses | Credits |
|---|---|
| ENGL 2000 Intro to English Studies | 3 |
| ENGL 2010 Intro to Literary Studies | 3 |
| One British Literature Breadth course (early or late) | 3 |
| One American Literature Breadth course (early or late) | 3 |
| ENGL 3000 Literary Criticism Theory and Practice | 3 |
| Designated Diversity course (see examples below) | 3 |
| -ENGL 3200 Women Writers & Women's Experiences | |
| -ENGL 3410 Poetry for the People | |
| -ENGL 3600 African American Lit | |
| -ENGL 3650 Gender and Sexuality | |
| -ENGL 4860 Diversity Topics in Rhet/Writing | |
| ENGL 3110 Advanced Grammar | 3 |
| **Total Credits** | **72** |

**PTW Emphasis Requirements**
Students in the PTW Program need to register their program intent by filling out a form and turning it into the Program Director, Dr. Ilyasova (refer to contact information above).

| Courses | Credits |
|---|---|
| Required writing courses, six (6) credits: | |
| ENGL 2080 Business & Admin Writing **OR** ENGL 2090 Technical Writing & Presentation | 3 |
| ENGL 3080 Adv Business & Technical Writing | 3 |
| **Six (6) courses from the following PTW program must be completed for the PTW emphasis option:** | |
| Practice courses: (choose 2) | 6 |
| ENGL 3120 Technical Editing and Style (prereq ENGL3110) | |
| ENGL 3140 Managing Writing Projects in Business & Industry | |
| ENGL 3150 Prof Writing Internship (prereq ENGL3120) | |
| ENGL 3750 Grant & Proposal Writing | |
| Technological-literacy courses: (choose 2) | 6 |
| ENGL 3130 Designing Documents for Business & Industry | |
| ENGL 3160 Tools for Technical Writers | |
| ENGL 3850 Advanced Topics in Professional Writing | |
| Advanced practice and theory courses: (choose 2) | 6 |
| ENGL 4060 Diversity Topics in PTW | |
| ENGL 4065 Intercultural Professional and Technical Writing | |
| ENGL 4080 Special Topics in PTW | |
| ENGL 4800 Peer Tutoring **OR** ENGL 4810 Special Topics, in Teaching of Writing | |
| ENGL 4820 Classical Rhetoric | |
| ENGL 4880 Topics in Public Writing | |
| **ENGL 4090 Senior PTW Portfolio** Pass the senior professional and technical writing portfolio assessment. See PTW Director for details. | **1** |
| **Total PTW Credits** | **25** |
| **TOTAL CREDITS REQUIRED** | **120*** |

**At least 45 credits must be upper division, 3000-4000 level courses.**
*The total credits required number is an accumulation of the Gen. Ed. Requirements total, the English Major Requirements total, and the Professional and Technical Writing Option Requirements total.

# A Professional Writing Capstone Course:
## The Portfolio Seminar at Michigan State University

**Dànielle Nicole DeVoss**
*Professor of Professional Writing*

**Laura Julier**
*Associate Professor, Director of Professional Writing*

**Jonathan Ritz**
*Assistant Professor, Professional Writing Advisor*

> Effective writing requires a person to be sensitive to connections. Everything is connected, even though sometimes those connections are hard to see. Those connections affect the way an audience interprets a message. Professional writers can tap into those connections and manipulate them to craft effective messages, similar to how Jedi use the Force.
>
> *Kevin M., 2012 PW alum, in his WRA 455 portfolio memo*

> I write. I design. I am a promoter. I am an artist. I am a creator. I advance products. I create stories. I make advertisements. I deliver results. I analyze audiences. I construct ideas.
>
> *Lauren K., 2011 PW alum, in her WRA 455 portfolio memo*

> When you look at my portfolio or watch my presentations, the most important thing I want to be taken away isn't that I created a pretty poster or wrote a concise proposal. It's the context that these pieces existed in, the lessons I learned by creating them, and the communities that I worked with to create them.
>
> *Caitlin P., 2012 PW alum, in her 455 portfolio memo*

In an earlier *Programmatic Perspectives* piece (DeVoss & Julier, 2009), we presented a profile of the Professional Writing program at Michigan State University (MSU). In the past few years, we've grown significantly and have transitioned our curriculum in tandem with academic and professional changes. In this piece, we first briefly situate the program, em-

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phasizing recent changes. We continue—with the hope that we enact the promise that K. Alex Ilyasova (2012) imagined for this showcase section—by discussing and acknowledging the "intellectual aspects of designing, theorizing, implementing and applying the goals, structure, and approaches for" (p. 136) one particular course in our program. Here we focus on one of the senior capstone experiences in our undergraduate major: WRA 455, our senior portfolio seminar.

## Exigency

The Professional Writing undergraduate program at Michigan State University piloted initial courses in 2002–2003 and fully launched in fall 2003. The program was developed to meet the then-Provost's desire to further enhance writing at the university. The English Department was invited to develop the program in early discussions, but its faculty chose to instead continue their focus on literature, creative writing, and film studies, maintaining their primary emphasis on critiquing rather than producing texts.

Professional Writing is not a writing-across-the-curriculum or writing-in-the-disciplines endeavor; rather, it is a writing-as-curriculum degree program housed in MSU's College of Arts and Letters, geared toward students interested in specializing in writing as an area of expertise. The major helps students develop advanced writing skills with emphasis on writing, editing, and designing in digital environments, in diverse rhetorical situations and cultural contexts, and within a variety of mediascapes. The major prepares students for careers in technical writing, information architecture, media production, nonprofit communications, social media strategy, web authoring, grant and proposal writing, publications management, and editing and publishing.

Within the degree program, in their internship experiences, and through co-curricular activities, Professional Writing students develop skills and sophistication in the following areas:

- understanding how different contexts—related, for instance, to delivery mode, document type and genre, audience, and purpose—shape a writing-related task;
- writing to and for various audiences—cultural, professional, organizational—in effective and persuasive ways;
- writing creatively, with panache and flair; informatively, with clarity, conciseness, and comprehensibility; persuasively, with detail, description, and supporting evidence;

- conveying complex information in informative, understandable ways with both words and images;
- editing across project types and levels of edit (e.g., peer review, content editing, copyediting);
- mapping, coordinating, and managing large-scale projects; and
- exploring and mastering software to produce a range of documents.

We provide a much more extensive institutional and programmatic history in our earlier article (DeVoss & Julier, 2009).

Over the past few years, we've made a number of programmatic and curricular revisions. Some changes included adding new courses because of the need to deal with more material in more depth—for instance, we initially offered one course designed to cover editing and style but quickly found the need to divide the course into two: one focused on copyediting and style (for example, grammar, punctuation, stylistics), and a second focused on editing and publishing (for example, developmental editing, production, industry trends). We also added or significantly changed courses because of student feedback or in response to industry changes. One such recent change was the transformation of an upper-level digital video/media-production course into a sequence of two courses: one an introductory course focused on theory, analysis, and introduction to production tools, and the second an advanced course focused on project management and production. Another change included the development of an undergraduate research methods course. The course reflects our belief that although including inquiry and research in all of our classes is productive, teaching research methods and engaging students in large-scale research projects that draw attention to bridges between academic and professional contexts is crucial in our program. A third instance of change was the wholesale revision of course content in our Writing in Communities and Cultures emphasis area in the undergraduate major to focus more pointedly on nonprofit communications. This change was brought about by the hiring of a faculty member with a decade of experience in that field and supported by data from a focus group of nonprofit executive directors and communication staff.

What has remained stable in the program since its inception is our commitment to experiential learning and specific career-preparation objectives. Although the Portfolio Seminar has changed shape and we refined its focus, the philosophy and goals of the course have not shifted since we first imagined the course as offering a capstone for students in the undergraduate major.

## Course Description

The official title of WRA 455 is "Portfolio Seminar," and its official MSU Catalog description reads: "Workshop for students preparing professional document portfolios in print and digital formats, including application materials for career, graduate study, and professional positions."

It would be easy to think of this course and its goals and activities as superficial, perhaps even vocational. Students and faculty from other parts of our campus seem unable to envision the course, and often pose questions to us and to Professional Writing students something like this: "So… you take an entire semester and three credits to make a portfolio?" Perhaps the course title is misleading. We'd likely have similar questions about a course titled "The Lab Report Seminar" or "The Research Paper Workshop." But perhaps not, because the intellectual work of research or the set of activities that accompany and result in a lab report are more familiar, more easily conjured, and more widely understood.

It took teaching the Portfolio Seminar course and engaging in a significant amount of discussion and analysis (over two or three years) for program faculty and directors to understand the ways it could be grounded in the core skills and concepts of both the intellectual disciplines of professional and technical writing and the professional practices of working writers—and then to redesign the course with that understanding. In the first iteration of the course, designing the goals seemed easy: create and structure experiences that allow students to gather work, present it as evidence of the skills they had acquired in their undergraduate curriculum and through their pre-professional experiences, and tell the story of how their courses and co-curricular activities prepared them to see and talk about those skills as relevant to particular work tasks. We also planned to require students to examine specific instances of rhetorical work happening in community and industry settings.

Very soon, however, students were telling us about their frustrations with accomplishing these goals. They asked us questions such as: Who was their audience—faculty in the program? Potential employers? What if their stories weren't happy or successful ones? These frustrations were compounded by the fact that the PW program directors invited community and industry representatives who often had supervised students' internships to be the audience for public presentations of the student portfolios. Consequently, a variety of professionals were giving students feedback on their portfolios, and, as is often the case with useful feedback, a lot of it conflicted—or at least, that's how it seemed to students.

Students were unable—and with good reason—to ground themselves in a clear answer to a seemingly simple question: Who are you? An internship as an assistant web content developer during a student's junior year might result in some stellar documents to showcase in her portfolio, material that would be commended by faculty and community members. But if she subsequently came to realize a passion and talent for social media evangelism, then the mismatch between her portfolio and professional goals might appear as a lack of coherence on the student's part and might indicate a failure of the course to accomplish useful goals for the soon-to-graduate student.

In addition, sometimes students—many in their early 20s and facing a range of stresses and distractions at the end of their programs—focused on the bells and whistles of portfolio possibilities to the detriment of substance. We do not want to diminish the visual and aesthetic importance of portfolios; indeed, design and visual appeal are absolutely crucial and go a long way in anchoring one's professional identity. However, we realized that in moments of stress, students would turn away from making tough rhetorical and contextual decisions about portfolio pieces and annotations and instead spend hours selecting the perfect font face (which they would often change two days later).

Another complexity of the portfolio class was the relationship of the portfolio review process to the class. In our 2009 article, we discussed the assessment protocol for our undergraduate major; part of that protocol includes an evaluation of student work as presented in their professional portfolios.

Thus, the primary challenge in more purposefully redesigning the course as we taught it early on was three-fold:

- How could we conceive of and represent an audience and purpose for the portfolio that resonated with and for students in the most productive ways for them at this particular moment in their educational and professional lives?
- How could we better situate the intellectual and production-related tasks of the course as grounded in revisiting and synthesizing core curricular concepts and skills, rather than in simply making a pretty document that kind of pointed to those concepts and skills?
- How would we address the complicated relationship between the portfolio evaluation process for the course and the portfolio assessment process for the undergraduate major?

This third challenge is beyond the scope of this article, and beyond the purpose of the "Curriculum Showcase," so we'll not attend to it in what follows; instead, we'll specifically address the first two needs.

## The Work in/of the Course

The Portfolio Seminar course asks students to produce a large, multi-text, multi-component document that addresses particular audiences in specific cultural and rhetorical contexts to accomplish a very particular purpose. It requires audience identification and analysis; research about culture and context; and development of deep knowledge about rhetorical practices in that culture and context, including shared discourse practices and expectations. It requires investigating new resources; inventing forms and frames; drafting, writing, revising, and editing; and managing a production process and schedule.

In tackling all of the above, students and instructor are not necessarily relying on a shared knowledge base. Each student's career track or professional next step is different, and so students need to communicate to the instructor not only why they've made certain rhetorical choices, but how they came to believe the choices are appropriate. At each step along the way, students present key moves and moments: Here's what I learned; here's where I learned it; here's what led me to make the choices I did.

In developing the course, we thus aimed not merely to provide students with a set of steps for producing the documents needed by the end of the semester—creating a resume, cover letter, "elevator speech," landing page for a digital portfolio; developing a set of terms that would steer navigation through the portfolio site, a set of words with which to talk about the job and field in which they sought to work, and so forth. Instead, we designed a series of short assignments that would guide students through a series of moves requiring them to bring their skills in rhetorical and cultural analysis to bear upon the documents involved in matching a professional writer to a professional position (see Appendix A for a version of the course syllabus, Appendix B for the short assignments, and Appendix C for the portfolio-specific assignments). Our goal was to equip students to see documents they produced as texts doing work in the world—work that is rhetorical and cultural. We wanted students to understand and situate their resumes, for instance, as texts that have genre and discourse conventions just as any other text they studied and produced, conventions that could be investigated, interrogated, and manipulated or revised to accomplish their own purposes.

Although on the surface the short assignments from the class may appear very simple, the sequence should be familiar to any writing

instructor: produce a text out of one's experience; interrogate that text, including reasons for the choices made; gather responses from other readers; revise. Find other examples that attempt to accomplish the same goals; analyze them; compare them; revise. Assignments ask students to look at job ads as rhetorical documents and analyze them, and to interview a variety of professionals and gather stories about how others navigate what seem to be impermeable borders of job descriptions and qualifications. In subsequent assignments, they compose a resume and cover letter, understanding these tasks as rhetorical acts: What do you need to do to make the documents that represent you (resume and cover letter) match the job ad?

## Upping the Ante

All of these documents and revisions are, of course, useful to students in preparing to actually apply for and secure a job, but that's not the goal of the course. Because the course is a capstone for students in the major, we want to revisit and synthesize core skills and concepts in ways that up the ante. One of the consequences of engaging these skills on behalf of students' own purposes is to move that knowledge to a metacognitive level—to challenge them to be able to talk about how they design projects, produce texts, and accomplish goals on behalf of clients and coworkers.

The decision to require both a print and digital portfolio has a similar root. Translating the portfolio from an online format to a print format requires students to think about the different situations in which one or the other might be used and to make writing decisions—of invention, selection, arrangement, and revision—intentionally and effectively for a variety of audiences and cultural contexts.

The ways in which the assignments have been revised over the past five years have resulted from instructors weighing comments and complaints from students, faculty, and community partners (who continue to serve as audience and to provide feedback to students), and making adjustments about audience and purpose. We've moved more and more toward ensuring that the presentation of students' portfolios at the end of the semester serve student needs for useful feedback, for a sense of how the audience—that they've spent the semester researching and coming to understand—perceives the work of the portfolio.

## In the Class

The subject matter of the course is, superficially, the materials produced in engaging these acts: the resume, differently tailored cover letters, annota-

tions for portfolio pieces, iterations of portfolio pieces, as we discussed above. The true subject matter, however, occurs in the moment and in the context of production of these documents. The class is set up as a seminar, a workshop, and, at times, serves as a support group. Two class sessions offer evidence of how the class unfolds—one from early in the semester, and one from later in the semester.

Within the first two weeks of the semester, students are pointed toward and invited to explore day-in-the-life blog posts, articles, and interviews representing a wide range of professionals working in professional writing-related positions. Three examples from spring 2011 include day-in-the-life pieces about/by an editor, a web designer, and a non-profit foundation writer (Coyier, 2009; Doohan, 2011; Ling, 2009). These day-in-the-life pieces allow for a wide range of interesting discussions, including conversations about students' internship experiences and how those experiences represent and/or resonate with the day-in-the-life pieces, how these pieces are geographically or professionally anchored (or not), and whether they confirm or contrast with students' perceptions about what work life is like in particular positions.

In addition, the day-in-the-life pieces help prepare students for one of the short assignments required in the Portfolio Seminar—the informational interview assignment, for which students are required to identify and interview three professionals. Reviewing these pieces in advance helps students brainstorm and develop work life and workflow questions they otherwise might not have thought to ask without a perspective into daily life in a particular position, doing particular types of work.

A second example comes from last spring, approximately six weeks into the class, when the go-getter students had already begun applying for jobs and those still in shock about being two months shy of the end of their college careers were still somewhat in denial. One student in class asked, "What do they mean when they ask you to provide a 'salary requirement' in your cover letter?" One of the go-getters turned around, held up her hand, and said, "Oh, I've got this." She then stood at the white board and proceeded to create and narrate a chart describing how to first identify your cost-of-living needs (including, for example, housing, travel to/from work, parking, groceries, student loan payments, health insurance premiums); next the cost-of-living in particular areas (using CNN Money's CoL calculator); and finally the starting salary range for your professional category (using sites like glassdoor.com). The group then used the large screen display to search for advice on how to best articulate and justify a required/requested salary range.

Again, superficially, some humanities scholars might choose to dismiss these sorts of conversations and classroom activities as perhaps vocational and perhaps inappropriate for college-level discussion. We disagree. Part of the work we do as researchers, rhetors, and technical communicators is to help situate students as the most effective communicators they can be across the range of communicative contexts in which they write and work. Certainly, the ways in which they articulate their professional potential and expectations is one of the most valuable and important moments for them to demonstrate their rhetorical effectiveness. And, further, this sort of work is research. Certainly, it's not the traditional sort of research that most humanities scholarship might bring to mind, but it's dynamic digital research with real outcomes.

## Institutional Context: The Capstone Experience

The Portfolio Seminar is one of two capstone experiences students can take to finalize their degree path. The other option is to complete an internship concurrent with enrollment in an internship course. Although other programs consider enrolling in credit for an internship experience as the internship course, we distinguish between the internship itself and the intellectual component (the internship is the work, whereas the course is a set of assignments that ask students to observe and reflect on the work experience it in light of the concepts and theories presented in their Professional Writing coursework). We typically encourage students to pursue internships—with the course component if they need or want it—and to take the Portfolio Seminar; the ideal sequence is the internship first, then the Portfolio Seminar. Approximately half of our students complete at least two internships prior to graduation; some complete three or four and many pursue internships, part-time work, and volunteer opportunities.

As a capstone experience, the Portfolio Seminar is also intended to help students synthesize and bring together content from all their Professional Writing courses and to recognize key concepts, skills, and habits of mind that have emerged across the program. Importantly, the work also entails learning how to effectively articulate this knowledge and represent it to others.

## Student Portfolio Presentations

All students in the Professional Writing program are expected to prepare and maintain a working professional portfolio during their time in the program and to craft a professional presentation using the portfolio prior

to graduation—regardless of whether or not they enroll in the Portfolio Seminar. All Professional Writing courses support students in recognizing the goals of portfolios, designing their portfolios, and creating pieces to eventually add to their portfolios. Each student's professional portfolio is expected to demonstrate development of a professional identity, ability to reflect upon and illustrate skills, and readiness to transition from college to the workplace and/or to graduate school.

Some classes produce pieces that students see as immediate "wins" with easy portfolio fit—for instance, a typical required document in the Introduction to Professional Writing course is a media release, which most of our alums report producing (or at least encountering) across a range of job contexts. Other classes, however, produce pieces that students may not immediately see as portfolio fits. For instance, all students at Michigan State University (except for a select few) are required to take two Integrative Arts and Humanities courses to fulfill general university requirements—the products of these classes are typically text-only, research-oriented, academic essays. Many Professional Writing students are quick to shove aside the products of these courses as being too generic or too academic. For some PW students, however, it makes sense to demonstrate facility in producing a traditional, MLA-formatted, research-oriented essay. In some professional contexts, the ability to present and sustain a well-reasoned argument is a valued skill.

## The Portfolio Seminar and MSU's Liberal Learning Goals

MSU's Liberal Learning Goals, adopted in 2009, provide a broad framework for the university's expectations for students who have completed an undergraduate degree at our Carnegie-class, research-extensive, Big 10, 48,000-plus student institution. The Portfolio Seminar provides a space where Professional Writing students effectively demonstrate several of these goals. Here are three, specifically, with brief descriptions of how students articulate and showcase each goal (something that faculty and programs across campus have wrestled with since the announcement of the goals in 2009):

- **Effective Communication: The MSU graduate uses a variety of media to communicate effectively with diverse audiences.** In their portfolios, PW students use an array of media, including print-oriented documents, video pieces, mobile apps, wireframes, and more to achieve diverse communicative purposes. The genres and audiences typically reflected in these assignments are also varied, as these examples suggest:

**Figure 1: Alum spotlight booklet showcased in PW portfolio.**

**Figure 2: Poster written and designed for rehabilitation clinic on equipping patients and families to conduct post-concussion neurobehavioral inventories, showcased in PW portfolio.**

- a research poster presented to an academic audience at a campus forum
- an alum spotlight booklet to share with potential students, their families, and high school counselors (Figure 1)
- blog posts written while interning with National Geographic Traveler
- media releases announcing a state-wide folk festival
- a suicide-prevention booklet prepared in consultation with the university counseling center for an audience of student peers
- a fund appeal proposal for a nonprofit theatre company
- a poster for rehabilitation clinic clients (Figure 2)
- a content strategy report presented to a local women's center

- **Cultural Understanding: The MSU graduate comprehends global and cultural diversity within historical, artistic, and societal contexts.** PW students not only communicate in diverse communicative and media environments, but the major helps students learn rhetorical awareness as a habit of mind, whether analyzing the language patterns embedded in a specific discourse community, or the office culture of a specific workplace.

**Figure 3: Fundraising-oriented brochure crafted for a medical clinic in Uganda showcased in PW portfolio.**

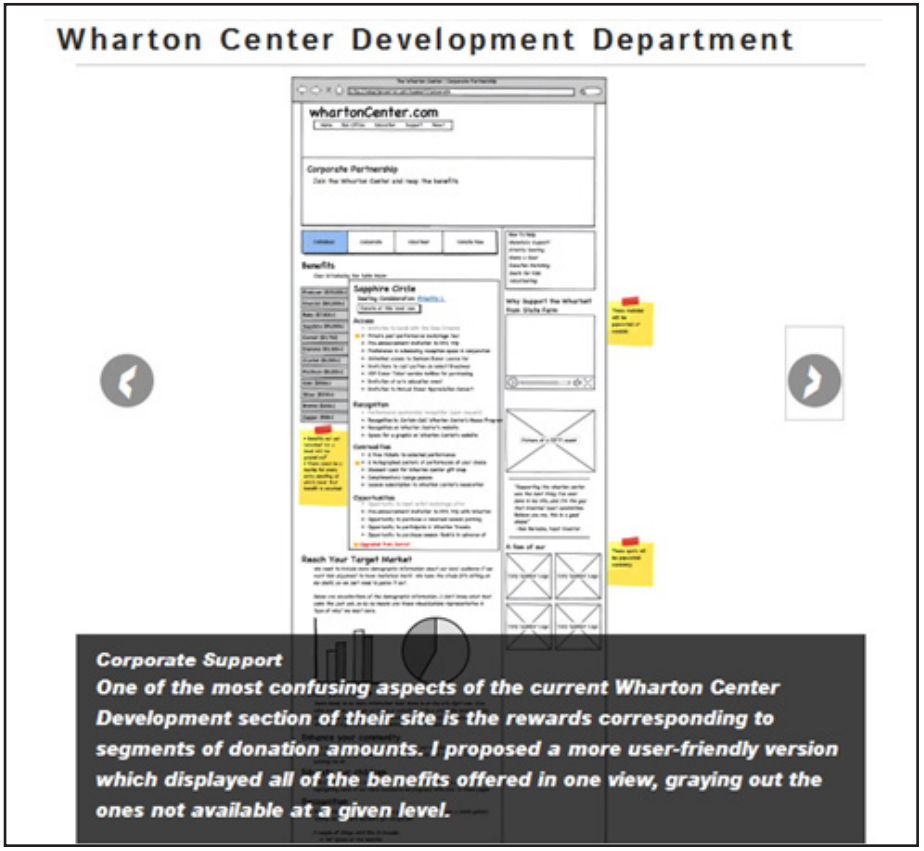
**Figure 4: Profile of Graeme McDowell, written for and published in *Golf Digest Ireland*, showcased in PW portfolio.**

In their portfolios, students provide evidence of the ways in which they craft communication as situated in and for particular contexts, for example:

- blog posts crafted for an audience of readers of a magazine in Sydney, Australia
- a brochure for potential donors and funders of a medical clinic in Uganda (Figure 3)
- articles profiling players and reporting on the Irish Open for Golf Digest Ireland (Figure 4)
- an analysis of state legislators' varied rhetorical moves in arguing for—and against—bilingual education in K–12 institutions in Michigan

- **Integrated Reasoning: The MSU graduate uses a variety of inquiry strategies incorporating multiple views to make value judgments, solve problems, answer questions, and generate new understandings.** PW teaches students to approach writing as problem solving and to use different resources, from techno-

**Figure 5: One portion of a larger content management strategy report and wireframe, showcased in a PW portfolio**



logical to human, to address these problems and pose effective, creative solutions. In their portfolios, students showcase these inquiry approaches and problem-solving strategies such as:

- designing a comprehensive web analytics plan
- writing a multi-part and multi-stage grant proposal
- crafting and implementing a content-management strategy (Figure 5)

The liberal learning goals are meant to be inclusive for all undergraduate majors and forward thinking in that they articulate transdisciplinary skills and attitudes required for college graduates in the coming years. Our portfolio seminar course helps position MSU's Professional Writing program in strong alignment with these goals and provides further evidence that PW is emerging as an exemplary 21st-century humanities major.

## Student Portfolios and the Culture of Professional Writing

One of the significant programmatic aspects of the graduates' portfolios is the way they continue to live in the program. On our departmental web site, which recently underwent a major overhaul, we collect and highlight as many of these portfolios as continue to remain active. (We encourage readers to visit the site, where the pieces mentioned and showcased here can be found within the context of students' portfolios: ‹http://wrac.msu.edu›.) Featuring the portfolios on the site not only allows visitors—possible employers and internship coordinators, and prospective students—to see some of the work of our alums, but it also allows instructors to draw actual sample projects and models from authentic student work and use those models in Professional Writing classes. Our doing so contributes to the felt sense of a PW culture, and a recognition that what students produce matters and has great value in the program. Further, the portfolios of these alums are a vital way that current majors learn about and network with working professionals, a way for alums to learn about graduating seniors, and for alums to stay connected to one another, maintaining a vibrant professional writing community beyond the university.

## Theoretical Rationale

The theoretical frame that scaffolds our program is more a philosophy and a set of values about writing in a digital world. We believe writing matters and that digital writing matters. And, although most college-educated workers in today's professional world write in some capacity, students who enter the world as professional writers write as professional writers. Writing isn't part of their job; rather, it is their job. And the writing they do hap-

pens across digital and analog spaces. That writing happens to, with, and for a range of geographically, culturally, spatially, and contextually diverse and diffuse audiences, and that writing serves a range of purposes—some visible and obvious, others embedded and less obvious. In the current compositional and professional context, writers must be nimble, thoughtful, media-attentive, and always situated to the complex dynamics of audience, context, and purpose.

Who and what informs this stance? The work of technical communication scholars does, to be sure, and the writing and research that fills this journal, and other venues such as *Technical Communication Quarterly*, the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *Technical Communication*, the proceedings of SIGDOC, and others. The work of professional writers in a range of capacities does—those who share their work on blogs, web sites, and online trade magazines such as *boxesandarrows*, *A List Apart*, Idealist.org, bookjobs.com, and myriad other spaces in which students live, connect, learn, network, and professionalize. And the work of authors who provide astute commentary on the ways in which education, work, creativity, and innovation happen in today's networked world does—writers such as Seth Godin, Sir Ken Robinson, Richard Florida, Clay Shirky, Charlene Li, Josh Bernoff, and others . All of these foster the philosophical stance we've taken toward professional writing and toward the Portfolio Seminar course.

In the Professional Writing program, we don't just equip students to do technical writing work. We help students cultivate tools and approaches for performing a range of writing tasks. We equip students with skills to work on large-scale projects, to engage in project management and a range of editing- and production-related practices, and, most importantly, to work in a world in which much writing and communication happens in digital spaces  using a range of digital tools—platforms, software, sites, and more. The Portfolio Seminar serves as the capstone and culmination of this training and these experiences.

## Curricular Reflection

At this point, we admit we've somewhat "broken" the model Ilyasova (2012) described when introducing the curriculum showcase model. That is, we've spent more time situating and describing the course, and less time explaining its theoretical foundations and offering a curricular reflection.

In fact, what we offer here, by way of conclusion, is a set of recommendations given the current financial and professional landscape our students face upon graduation from our programs, and what a course like

MSU's Portfolio Seminar can offer. We hope that these recommendations are nimble and flexible enough for others to adopt and adapt in different programmatic contexts.

First, we mentioned earlier, but haven't emphasized, that we are in a College of *Arts and Letters* and situate our work solidly in the humanities. Indeed, we see our work as humanities-based work. We also see our work as having traction in a digital, networked age, where communication across media and within communities is crucial. We attend to *humans*, and the ways in which humans make and share meaning, make and share information, and communicate needs and interests.

Second, we must advocate on behalf of our students and on behalf of our programs for courses like the Portfolio Seminar, and we must continue to argue that work such as that undertaken in this particular course not be dismissed as "vocational" or service-oriented. The days of a liberal education for the sake of a liberal education are long gone. We do our students a disservice if we are unable to articulate a curricular–professional fit and to model the types of opportunities that their undergraduate education will afford them in their professional paths. As good rhetoricians, we are well equipped to argue for and on behalf of the rhetorical and intellectual work required for materials such as abstracts and annotations, resumes, cover letters, and the online portfolio itself as a publication project.

Third, as Wang and Turner (2006), among others, have demonstrated, there is incredible richness in the process and intellectual work of compiling a portfolio, of revisiting projects and work completed a month or a year ago, and of reflecting upon and situating that work and its particular rhetorical and cultural contexts (see also Bacabac, 2013; Harner & Rich, 2005; Killoran, 2011; Luescher, 2002; Thomas & McShane, 2007; Wang & Turner, 2006). In fact, one of the most fascinating comments we've ever received regarding the portfolio process was from a student who took the Portfolio Seminar one of the first times we taught it. Soon after graduation, she accepted a good job as a professional writer and worked in the U.S. for some time before joining the JET Program to teach English in Japan. She then relocated to Australia to pursue a master's degree. Right after she accepted that first position after graduation, she commented:

> You know, I never actually used my portfolio during the job search. I mean, I never shared it with potential employers. But the act of putting together the portfolio was priceless. Assembling and reflecting on my work helped me to identify who I am as a writer, a thinker, and a professional—and I think that sense of self really showed in my applications and my interviews.

We offer this discussion and these course materials hoping others will find them interesting and useful, perhaps in pieces shared in workshops; perhaps in chunks integrated into different capstone experiences situated in minors, majors, or specializations; or perhaps as inspiration when crafting capstone experiences for writing programs to emerge in the coming years.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Syllabus – WRA 455 Portfolio Seminar

" I'm a professional writer editor designer. I specialize in the written word. I write to communicate. I edit to enhance. I design to appeal. The great thing is, all three can be applied to virtually anything!"

**Ashley B.**
*2010 PW alum*

" A communication artist is an individual who is adept at communicating intentions, theories, dreams, and arguments in an artistic, creative manner through a variety of mediums. As a communication artist, my talent lies in the creation and physical interpretation of ideas. "

**Lizy F.**
*2010 PW alum*

" ...in my following interview, the interviewer could NOT have been more pleased with my website. She could barely stop talking about it... She said it was so impressive to see a copy editor spend so much time on a portfolio and to demonstrate how well-rounded I was. They offered me the job the very next day."

**Cat F.**
*2009 PW alum*

**wra 455** portfolio seminar

*[specific course day, time, location, and instructor information removed]*

**introduction**

Although it may seem as if this class solely focuses on producing a print and digital professional portfolio, this course is actually about producing a **professional identity**. To do so, you will explore, research, reflect—and produce a set of documents for specific audiences and purposes (e.g., your overall sense of professional identity, your job search, your graduate school application materials).

This is one of many moments in your life that will be signaled by the need to compile and reflect on a body of work created at one time and place so that you are prepared to move on to the next.

It is thus helpful to think of the process of creating a portfolio as both the means and evidence of a major transition. The portfolio-production process requires you to shift your perspective on the texts you have made, and the student you have been. Although you have probably primarily composed papers, projects, presentations, and web pages for assignments defined by 15-week semesters and grades, you now need to look at these products as parts of a whole body of work that represents your skills, proficiencies, accomplishments, and potential.

# print portfolio

*due week 15 and finals week; 1000 points*

The print version of your portfolio is a "selected" representation of your work. This is the portfolio you might bring to a face-to-face job interview to use to talk from and to share your work while speaking with others.

The audience for this portfolio and its purpose are different from those of the online portfolio. You need to identify (from your experience, your research earlier in the semester, or from interviews or job ads) a professional position for which you'd apply—or for which you have an interview scheduled. Prepare this portfolio for an in-person interview for this job.

In compiling your print portfolio, you may make use of the same documents, design, and other features as your digital portfolio. Know, however, that representing your work digitally and online is different from representing your work in print.

# portfolio memo

*due week 15 and finals week; 450 points*

While your digital portfolio has a broader audience, the audience for the memo is the Professional Writing program, specifically the Director of Professional Writing and the Professional Writing Program Committee. The Director and the Committee work together to assess how well the PW program is doing what we said we'd do with and in this program; that is, the Director and the Committee pay close attention to the courses, the requirements, the experiences of students, and what students do beyond the major. The Director and Committee are interested to see the identities, opportunities, and experiences you've pursued within and outside of the program.

The purpose of this **2–3 page memo**, then, is to:

- **Reflect** on your academic, intellectual, and professional experiences in a way that synthesizes and draws connecting threads. It should not be merely a chronological narrative (although it might use chronology as a structuring device). There should be some overarching thread or theme—some touchstone to which you return. It might be your identity, a position title to which you aspire, or a metaphor.

- In reflecting on your work products, processes, skills, and competencies, you should set them **in the context** of your professional career goals and the culture and expectations of the professional community you seek to enter.

- You should also include a **self-assessment** of your skills and competencies as you understand them in light of those professional expectations. How have you developed your skillset—through coursework, course projects, independently developed projects, internships? You should point to documents or projects that demonstrate the development of your skills. And you should also include some indication of a career

trajectory for yourself: How do you plan to further develop yourself as a professional in your chosen field?

This memo should help you think across, draw from, and reflect deeply on your experiences. Writing this memo should also help you prepare for your portfolio presentation.

*From the portfolio memos of past presenters…*

It's interesting to me just how few artifacts in my portfolio have come directly from classes. As a freshman and sophomore, I had naively assumed that nearly my entire portfolio would consist of assignments and projects originally completed for my various writing classes. However, after gathering all of the artifacts I thought best represented me as a communications artist, I realized that most, if not all of them, were from either past jobs and internships, or from personal projects completed in my free time.

I think this says a lot about how well the Professional Writing program prepares us for how to take our major and what we've learned and apply it to the real world…

My original decision to study professional writing came from my interest in how humans use technology to communicate with one another. I've grown up in a generation exposed, on a daily basis, to a wide variety of media that communicate to us. These conversations begin with a message that was written by someone and it can be done with words, video, graphic illustrations, or even interaction with the web. It occurred to me that my success with media design would depend on my ability to understand and produce effective writing.

For the last four years, I have learned how to communicate. Practical skills that I have acquired in the classroom have transcended the ivy-covered walls of academia and have been built upon in various professional capacities. The skill-sets that the Professional Writing (PW) program provides have been invaluable to not only my present professional development, but to my future career…

As products from my employment and academic program, I have become a manager, a writer, a designer, a collaborator, and an innovator. Yet the intended core result of these combined skills is effective communication. I communicate effectively—and I do it creatively.

# portfolio presentation

*due week 15 and finals week; 450 points*

You will prepare your digital portfolio for a public audience and for professional purposes. During week 15 and into finals week, you will present your work to an audience of community and industry professionals and PW faculty.

You will have about 10 minutes to present yourself as a professional writer, using the portfolio as a tool to illustrate key skills and sample work.

Think of your talk as an opportunity to talk about yourself, your work, your philosophy about the work you do, and your potential to develop further.

You can structure your talk as a narrative (a story of how you got from here to there), or by focusing on significant skillsets you bring from your coursework and experiences or on several significant and transformative moments during your time in the program. Do *not* structure your talk as a tedious, step-by-step show of every single thing that's in your portfolio; instead, find an engaging and organized way to talk about your skills, competencies, and experiences, and about your identity as a professional. Think of this as a talk in which you answer our two key questions: *Who are you? What can you do?*

This audience is reading, viewing, and listening to your work first and foremost because this is the way we in the program assess how *we're* doing in preparing you to do the work you want to do and to be hired and valued for doing it. That's the way this public presentation serves the program. It serves you by giving you experience presenting yourself publicly, articulating what you can do and the path on which you are setting out.

# Appendix B: Assignment – WRA 455 Portfolio Seminar Short Assignments

## WRA 455 portfolio seminar

**short assignments**

| week due | description |
|---|---|
| 1 | Submit your resume and an analytical/explanatory essay (2 pages) in which you:<br>• explain what position you are aiming to secure with this document<br>• explain your categories or headers (why did you choose them?)<br>• explain the way they appear (why did you put them in the order you did?)<br>• explain what's here and why it's here; explain what's *not* here and why it's not<br>• reflect on what impression of yourself you think this document creates |
| 2 | Find (either online or in person/print) **five** resumes for people who have the job you want or a position to which you aspire. Submit the resumes with a memo (2 pages) that:<br>1. provides—*for each resume*—a one-paragraph analysis of the way this person represents him/herself in the document. Consider what kind of image the document creates of the person and what features lead to that image/impression; and<br>2. analyzes<br>• features and moves they seem to have in common<br>• features and moves that are distinct<br>• some discussion of whether you find them distinct in an effective or ineffective way<br><br>Also prepare a short slideshow presenting your findings, and be prepared to present your work in class. |
| 3 | Find an ad for a job you'd like to apply or aim for. Attach the job ad itself, with a reflection essay (1 page) in which you explain:<br>• what draws you to it<br>• what you think you already have that qualifies you for it<br>• what you fear does not qualify you for it<br>• what questions you have about the position and your qualifications |
| 4 | Submit your resume to me along with a memo (2 pages) in which you write about **two** items from the resume—a skill, an experience, a course project, a publication—and explain each of the two by addressing:<br>• what was the cultural and rhetorical context?<br>• what part did you have in it or what did you do?<br>• what skill set did it draw on or develop for you?<br>• how is it related to the position/career for which you're aiming? |
| 5 | You will complete **three** informational interviews over the next few weeks. We'll talk about how to conduct these and write them up in class, because you will need to identify individuals, contact each, arrange for a meeting, prepare yourself for the conversation, and then follow up with a thank you and anything else that emerges from the conversation. This assignment comes in two parts (due at different times; see short assignment 9 for the second part).<br><br>The first part of this assignment is to construct a list of three individuals (name, job title, affiliation and/or employer) you want to interview. Write a paragraph for each person telling me about why you have chosen the person, how s/he relates to your career goals, and what you hope to learn. In this document, also briefly indicate how and when you will contact the person and how and when you will conduct the interview. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **6** | Find an ad for a job you want. Research the organization or company, focusing on the kinds of things you'd need or want to know in order to apply for the job and to be interviewed for it. Write a memo (2 pages) describing where you found information and a summary of the information you found that would be relevant in writing a cover/application letter. |
| **7** | Find an ad for a job you want (it may be the same or different from the ad you used for short assignment 6). Write a cover/application letter. In your cover letter, make sure, of course, to situate yourself to the key features of the job as included or represented by the job ad. |
| **8** | Select **five** artifacts you plan to include in your portfolio. Draft a brief annotation (1 or 2 paragraphs each) for each of the artifacts. The annotation should include:<br>• the context in which you created the work<br>• what you did to produce the work<br>• the skills you think the work demonstrates |
| **9** | *See short assignment 5 for the first part of this two-part assignment*. Prepare a memo (4 pages) that addresses the following questions *for each interview*:<br>• What did you learn about the position?<br>• What did you learn about the person and her/his path to that position?<br>• What did you learn about how you might make yourself a stronger candidate for such a position?<br>• What did you learn about yourself from this conversation? |

| | |
|---|---|
| **10** | Bring in a collection of things that inspire design choices you want to use to represent your professional identity and work. These should be visual, although they don't have to be images; they might be objects (think broadly—logos, magazines, stickers, posters, ads, etc). Use these examples as inspiration to select the following design elements for your professional portfolio:<br>• typefaces<br>• color scheme<br>• graphics and/or photos<br><br>In a memo (1 page), describe the elements above, and address this question: What story are these elements supposed to tell? How are they supposed to represent you and your work visually? |
| **11** | Sketch a front page for your portfolio, including the navigation bar. In a short slideshow presentation, introduce the design sketch, explain one or two key features, and include questions you have about your design and navigation. Be prepared to share your slideshow in class. |
| **12** | Draft the text for the front page of your portfolio. Write a paragraph explaining your concerns about your draft, and what questions you want us to answer about it. Come to class prepared to share your draft and the questions you have. |
| **13** | Write annotations for 5 documents that may appear in your portfolio. |
| **14** | Draft the memo for Portfolio 1 (the version for the public presentation). |

**Criteria by which I will evaluate your work:**

- Is there evidence of significant engagement with the assignments?
- Is there evidence that you've gone out of your way to research what's requested in the assignment?
- Do you make your thought processes clear, even when you're unsure or undecided?
- Does the work show attention to principles of design appropriate to the audience, genre, and purpose?
- Is the work well-written—polished, proofread, and carefully edited?
- Is the work technically correct and accurate? (e.g., do the links work? does it account for or conform to the conventions of its genre?)
- Is the work appropriately written and designed for its intended audience?
- Does the work show evidence of your understanding of communication as a cultural act? That is, does it make appropriate gestures to the cultural context for which it's designed?
- Does the work present a clear, coherent, and consistent professional identity?

# Appendix C: Assignment – WRA 455 Portfolio Seminar Portfolio Assignment

" I'm a professional writer editor designer. I specialize in the written word. I write to communicate. I edit to enhance. I design to appeal. The great thing is, all three can be applied to virtually anything!"

**Ashley B.**
*2010 PW alum*

" A communication artist is an individual who is adept at communicating intentions, theories, dreams, and arguments in an artistic, creative manner through a variety of mediums. As a communication artist, my talent lies in the creation and physical interpretation of ideas. "

**Lizy F.**
*2010 PW alum*

" ...in my following interview, the interviewer could NOT have been more pleased with my website. She could barely stop talking about it... She said it was so impressive to see a copy editor spend so much time on a portfolio and to demonstrate how well-rounded I was. They offered me the job the very next day."

**Cat F.**
*2009 PW alum*

## wra 455 portfolio seminar

*[specific course day, time, location, and instructor information removed]*

### introduction

Although it may seem as if this class solely focuses on producing a print and digital professional portfolio, this course is actually about producing a **professional identity**. To do so, you will explore, research, reflect—and produce a set of documents for specific audiences and purposes (e.g., your overall sense of professional identity, your job search, your graduate school application materials).

This is one of many moments in your life that will be signaled by the need to compile and reflect on a body of work created at one time and place so that you are prepared to move on to the next.

It is thus helpful to think of the process of creating a portfolio as both the means and evidence of a major transition. The portfolio-production process requires you to shift your perspective on the texts you have made, and the student you have been. Although you have probably primarily composed papers, projects, presentations, and web pages for assignments defined by 15-week semesters and grades, you now need to look at these products as parts of a whole body of work that represents your skills, proficiencies, accomplishments, and potential.

## goals

Two key goals will frame all the work we do, no matter the audience or purpose:

1) As you craft a professional identity for yourself, we'll be constantly considering questions of **representation**. How does this document, this description, this word, this visual element, this design choice represent you? I'll ask you to analyze *all* your decisions with this in mind.

2) Just as you transition your identity from student to professional, you'll also have to revise texts and documents to serve new purposes—not to prove competence and secure a grade from an instructor, but to demonstrate **experience**, **skills**, and **range**. We'll be critiquing and revising with new audiences and different purposes in mind.

The class will function as an intensive professional workshop to support you in both of these goals. In this course, you will:

- Research the conventions and expectations for professional portfolios in the work setting for which you are preparing yourself.
- Develop a rich, sophisticated, and rhetorical sense of the function of portfolios (and their components) in the work setting for which you're preparing yourself.
- Select, revise, extend, redesign, and refine materials for use in your professional portfolio—in other words, you will be managing the multiple components of a mid-sized print and online publication.
- Further refine and extend the range of your rhetorical and technical skills in editing, revising, responding to others' work-in-progress, and working collaboratively.
- Develop your ability to describe your own skill sets and work style—conversationally and in writing.
- Further refine and extend your abilities in describing and choosing varieties of textual and visual styles for specific rhetorical situations.
- Develop and refine your skills in designing print and online materials for professional purposes.
- Develop a well-designed, effective public portfolio that represents your desired professional identity and suits your immediate purposes.

## texts and materials

Readings for this course are available online as PDFs or as links from our class ANGEL site, and are indicated on the course schedule. All other class materials (slideshows, videos, handouts, etc.) will also be available on ANGEL.

## assignments and grading

| assignments |
|---|
| *Note that these are just brief overviews—full-length assignments and examples will be provided in class.* |
| short assignments (100 each)..... 1400 |
| preparedness and participation ..... 500 |
| digital portfolio ..... 1200 |
| print portfolio ..... 1000 |
| portfolio presentation ..... 450 |
| portfolio memo..... 450 |
| **TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE.....5000** |

| points | percentage | gpa |
|---|---|---|
| 5000–4750 = A | 100–96 = A | 4.0–3.7 = A |
| 4749–4500 = A/B | 95–91 = A/B | 3.6–3.1 = A/B |
| 4499–4250 = B | 90–86 = B | 3.0–2.7 = B |
| 4249–4000 = B/C | 85–81=B/C | 2.6–2.1 = B/C |
| 3999–3750 = C | 80–76 = C | 2.0–1.7 = C |
| 3749–3500 = C/D | 75–71 = C/D | 1.6–1.1 = C/D |
| 3499–3250 = D | 70–66 = D | 1.0–.7 = D |

**Criteria by which I will evaluate your work:**

- Is there evidence of significant engagement with the assignments?
- Is there evidence that you've gone out of your way to research what's requested in the assignment?
- Do you make your thought processes clear, even when you're unsure or undecided?
- Does the work show attention to principles of design appropriate to the audience, genre, and purpose?
- Is the work well-written—polished, proofread, and carefully edited?
- Is the work technically correct and accurate? (e.g., do the links work? does it account for or conform to the conventions of its genre?)
- Is the work appropriately written and designed for its intended audience?
- Does the work show evidence of your understanding of communication as a cultural act? That is, does it make appropriate gestures to the cultural context for which it's designed?
- Does the work present a clear, coherent, and consistent professional identity?

## participation and attendance

Participation is ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL. Come to class prepared. Plan on expressing your ideas, frustrations, questions, confusions, etc., even if you're not able to articulate them without some hesitation—sometimes ambivalent or ambiguous remarks spark the liveliest discussions.

If you are absent, you miss valuable class time with your peers and will have difficulty keeping up with the pace of the class. If you miss class, you are still responsible for obtaining class notes and completing work you missed. **A third absence will make a difference in your final grade; for every absence after two, your final grade will go down .25.**

## ada

To receive any accommodation for any disability, students must first register with the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities. The RCPD will request appropriate documentation and make a determination regarding the nature of the accommodation to which a student is entitled. The RCPD will then give the student a "visa" that specifies the kind of accommodation that may be provided. It is then the responsibility of the student seeking accommodation to present the visa to his/her instructor.

## class schedule

| week | day | work due | activities |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | one | | • intro to 455; intro to portfolios<br>• overview of short assignments |
| | two | • Molisani, "Resume Secrets"<br>• MSU Career Network, "Create, Communicate, Connect" | • resume review<br>• PW key words |
| 2 | one | • class canceled—MLK Day | |
| | two | • **short assignment 1** | • job ad analysis |
| 3 | one | • **short assignment 2**<br>• MSU Career Network, *12 Essentials for Success* | • resume presentations |
| | two | • **short assignment 3** | • overview of portfolio presentations (with director of Professional Writing) |
| 4 | one | • MSU Career Network, "Conducting Informational Interviews"<br>• "In the Workplace" pieces from beyondwords blog | • conducting informational interviews<br>• generating ideas for interviewees |
| | two | • **short assignment 4**<br>• Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010–11 Edition > Authors, Writers, and Editors" | • creating interview questions<br>• developing an interview protocol |
| 5 | one | • **short assignment 5**<br>• Princeton Review, "A Day in the Life of a Writer"<br>• Alvina, "A Day in the Life of an Editor"<br>• Adams Grillone, "Checking for Commas: A Day in the Life of an Editor" | • researching organizations and companies |
| | two | • Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010–11 Edition > Technical Writers"<br>• Coyier, "Applications: One Day in the Life of a Web Designer"<br>• "A Day in the Life of a Web Designer"<br>• Lamarche, "Interview: James Brooks, a Young Talented Web Developer"<br>• Falconer, "A Day in the Life of a Social Media Manager" | • writing cover letters |
| 6 | one | • **short assignment 6** | • selecting pieces for your portfolio |
| | two | • **short assignment 7**<br>• Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010–11 Edition > Advocacy, Grantmaking, and Civic Organizations" | • selecting pieces for your portfolio |
| 7 | one | • Baker-Miller, "A Day in the Life of a Grant Writer"<br>• "A Day in the Life... St. Anthony's Foundation"<br>• "A Day in the Life of a Nonprofit Worker" | • writing annotations overview |
| | two | • **short assignment 8** | • writing annotations workshop |
| 8 | one | | • workshop time |
| | two | • **short assignment 9**<br>• Mathers, "Your Online Portfolio: The Rights and Wrongs" | • overview of and goals for second half of class |
| 9 | one | • Shirky, chapter 3 from *Here Comes Everybody* | • finding design inspiration |
| | two | • **short assignment 10**<br>• Dunn, "Principles of Effective Web Navigation" | • thinking about your front page text<br>• deciding on categories and navigation |
| 10 | one | • **short assignment 11** | • front page design and navigation presentations |
| | two | • class canceled—I am out of town | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 11 | one | • **short assignment 12** | • front page text workshop |
| | two | • Li and Bernoff, chapter 1 of *Groundswell* | • web creation software workshop |
| 12 | one | • Li and Bernoff, chapter 4 from *Groundswell* | • graphic design software workshop |
| | two | • Godin, selections from Linchpin | • workshop time |
| 13 | one | • **short assignment 13** | • annotations workshop |
| | two | • Shirky, chapter 9 from *Here Comes Everybody* | • workshop time |
| 14 | one | • **short assignment 14** | • memo workshop |
| | two | | • workshop time |
| 15 | one | • **portfolio memo and presentation** | • presentations |
| | two | • **portfolio memo and presentation** | • presentations |
| F | --- | • **portfolio memo and presentation** (5:45–7:45pm) | • presentations |

" I am a **writer**… I craft stories into messages… I am a **designer**, obsessed with typography, passionate about clean lines… I am a **cross-cultural communicator**. I study the prospective audience and use my writing and design skills to provide them with compelling messages, awe-inspiring stories, and fresh design. "

**Iza B.**
*2011 PW alum*

" I am a storyteller.... Provided here are just a few of the many tales I have told. I invite you to look through them all. I truly enjoy what I do—writing, designing, communicating, storytelling—and, embarking as a professional, I am excited to continue nurturing my passion. "

**Kelly B.**
*2008 PW alum*

" Successful writers understand the advantages of writing using not only text but graphics, illustrations, videos, audio, and the interactive and collaborative possibilities of the web. "

**Ben F.**
*2010 PW alum*

# A Call for Reaffirming a Humanist Understanding of Technology

**Dale L. Sullivan**
*North Dakota State University*

When invited to write this paper, I was told to think of it as an extended editorial, so I intend to take the liberties that accompany the writing of editorials, including the liberty to be pugnacious, to mourn the loss of a kinder world, to gesture toward the work of others in an informal way. I start with my pugnacious claim: I don't think our writing programs are doing enough to teach empathy, to teach students how to share the experience of those who need help, to teach writing from a humanistic perspective.

Within the last couple of months, I have started using an iPad for the first time, having had only a little experience with an iPod a few years ago, and I upgraded to OS X 8.1 on my Power Mac. I have been using computers ever since I bought a Zenith Z-100 desktop in 1980, although I am perhaps a laggard compared to most of my colleagues. Both of these new experiences, the iPad and the upgrade of operating systems, threw me into the experience of learning to read screens in different ways and learning to interact bodily with the machines in different ways.

These experiences were only intensifications of encountering alien interfaces every day. Nearly every website I visit has its own intuitive design, so I have to study the interface to figure out how to use it—how to navigate, activate, find information, and so on. It may be that as I get older, I am less nimble when it comes to perpetual learning. Watching preschool-aged grandchildren interacting with computers leads me to believe that age is a factor.

I mention these experiences because they have confirmed for me my belief that technology, though a product of human construction, is also alien to us when we first encounter it, and the more interactive and complex it becomes, the more alien it seems. In short, I believe I have firsthand

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experience supporting the claim that technology creates alienation. I don't mean Marx's view of alienation—that the worker is alienated from work because there is no ownership of the means of production and no feeling of having created a whole. Marx's view seems to be that technology itself is not alienating; rather, it is the division of labor occasioned by capitalists' introduction of technology that produces alienation. Instead of focusing on a person's encounter with a machine, he is concerned with the worker and technology within a work environment.

My recent experiences have set me to thinking about the growing need for mediation. I need someone to stand between me and the machine; or, better yet, I need someone to come alongside me and show me how to work with the machine, how to be reconciled to it.

We seem to have moved a long way into the hyphenated world of the *transhumanists,* where the boundaries between the person and her prosthetic extensions, though celebrated, have become blurred. I understand transhumanism to be a sect within posthumanism, subverting traditional understandings of what it means to be human (Elaine Graham, 2002; Kathleen Hayles, 1999; Cary Wolfe, 2010). Posthumanists are interested in boundaries between humans and human artifacts or between humans and animals, characterizing the relationships as interactions between autopoetic systems that create their own boundaries and select from the complexity of their environments in their own ways. Humans are thus decentered, and the boundary lines between the human and nonhuman are blurred by hyphenated relationships.

Transhumanists, the sect of posthumanists preoccupied with technology, imagine that reverse engineering of the human brain and uploading consciousness to a sufficiently complex computer will be possible in the near future (Kurzweil, 2006; Moravec, 1988). As Elaine Graham (2002), puts it, transhumanists believe in a promising future evolution of *Homo sapiens* through technological enhancements that will eventuate in immortality (p. 8). The typical transhumanist narrative predicts the gradual replacement of the biological body with a vastly improved prosthetic body, eventuating in a disembodied existence, making collective consciousness possible.

Because we are betrothed to technology and indeed have been experimenting with couplings for some time, we have come to gloss over the otherness of technology. We simply take for granted that our future is in the machine, so it follows that learning to inhabit virtual realities and to engage in virtual practices is a step in the process of transforming the hu-

man from a creature bound in time and space to a creature free to travel through the cosmos uninhibited—and in transforming the machine from a tool into an environment. I sometimes feel we are participating in a game of the survival of the fittest—who will be able to scramble over the barriers posed by new applications, new interfaces, new machines that are sold to us as steps toward improving our habitation, our new virtual world, our new selves?

Yet, within this evolving environment, there is a continuing need for instructions; indeed, because the landscape is always changing, those new to the environment are often profoundly alienated and seek help wherever they can find it—from friends, from Google querries, from help menus. As one of our colleagues, Stuart Selber (2010), has observed, "it is hard to conceive of a technological world in which people no longer need immutable how-to documents—in print or electronic form" (p. 115). He goes further, claiming that the instruction set, "can be seen as central to an age of social media" (p. 99).

But the instructions I find embedded in programs or scattered about the web often bewilder me, often take for granted that I know things I don't. Instead of mediating technology for me, they alienate me even further.

We need companions, fellow travelers through a technological environment changing so rapidly that, to older eyes like mine, the landscape looks more and more like a trail of relics, junk discarded by the early adopters long ago in their race to the promised land. What are we to do, those of us who follow in their path, picking up bits and pieces that may be used to eke out an existence? We seek companions by wandering about the web, where we can find texts, "dead texts" Socrates would call them, texts that always give the same answer to any questions we pose. They were accurate for some bygone generation of technology. We can sometimes cobble together enough knowledge, if we are blessed with *metis*, to make our machines run on three cylinders. How we long for mediators, people to come alongside, people who have explored the boundaries between themselves and the machine and can patiently teach us how to relate to the machine, not as an environment but as a tool; teach us how to take it up, to read it, to make it respond to us.

These companions would come to us face-to-face. Instead of directing us to the intuitive interface of the machine, they would first stand between us and the machine. We would recognize in them the human face, someone who shares with us the experience of alienation. Within the space of

shared human habitation, these mediators can then turn to the machine and show us how they have learned to interact with it. Side by side, looking together at the machine, we see it for what it is, not for what it promises to be in some evolved state. In place of the transhumanistic scattering of debris, bread crumbs left behind for those who follow, this sharing would be a humanistic rhetoric, a companionship in which we recognize our limitations and are unashamed to own them.

What would this rhetoric look like? It would, dare I say, look like the rhetoric Sarah Hallenbeck (2012) described in her "User Agency, Technical Communication, and the 19th-Century Woman Bicyclist." Hallenbeck describes three nineteenth-century bicycle manuals written for women by women. Of particular interest are Maria E. Ward's 1896 book, *The Common Sense of Bicycling: Bicycling for Ladies*, and an untitled manual by Frances Willard. Both of these texts were honest engagements between women who understood women and bicycles. They both mediated between the would-be rider and the machine.

According to Hallenbeck, Ward was almost brutally honest with her readers: "Rather than offering . . . a sense of the average amount of time it would take to learn to ride, Ward emphasized that learning difficulty varied widely from person to person: 'The period of instruction may last for five minutes or six months'" (p. 298). Nevertheless, she offered encouragement, telling her readers that they could learn to ride. There is, in the text, a personal interaction, as Ward comes alongside to help.

Willard, a more introspective writer, drew on her own experiences to understand her readers. Her introspection made it possible for her to empathize with them. Hallenbeck puts it this way:

Willard connected life experience to bicycle experience, suggesting that her realizations were her own but also offering openings for her readers to adapt these realizations themselves. Rather than explicitly urging readers to learn to ride, she guided them toward understanding the challenges of the bicycle metaphorically, as difficult but worthwhile and suggestive of women's need to learn to move through life confidently and tenaciously. (p. 302)

I opened my editorial by voicing a fear that we are not teaching our students to be empathetic, lamenting that we are not teaching a humanistic rhetoric. My lament wanders into a wasteland, if not a present reality, a reality that I am convinced will come with the transhumanist project. But the editorial ends with a ray of hope, a suggestion that we can restore a humanistic rhetoric, like the rhetorics of Ward and Willard, rooted in experience and empathy.

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**Author Information**

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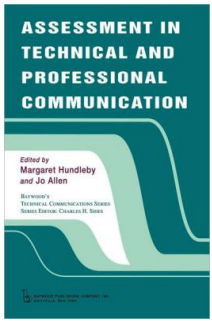
***Book Review Editor***
José Laurence, *Grand Valley State University*




## *Assessment in Technical and Professional Communication*

*Editors*
Margaret N. Hundleby and Jo Allen

Baywood Publishing Company
2010. 228 pp.

**Reviewed by Joanna Schreiber**
*Michigan Technological University*

The purpose of *Assessment in Technical and Professional Communication* is to encourage readers "…to think about the theoretical underpinnings that emerge as they examine the results of day-to-day assessment practice" (xii). The collection, edited by Margaret N. Hundleby and Jo Allen, contains fourteen original chapters, a foreword and an afterward. The fourteen chapters are paired off into seven sections, each section covering a different topic, approach, or understanding of assessment. Topics range from using portfolios in assessment to the relationship between technology and assessment, from assessing graduate student work to looking for relationships between university goals and programmatic goals, and from seeing opportunity to apply programmatic assessment skills to other assessment initiatives. With the exception of the first chapter, the paired works are intended to be complementary to each other, not merely two works dealing with similar topics.

The two chapters in the first section, aptly titled "Knowing Where We Are," provide us with a general and theoretical view of assessment specific to professional and technical communication. In "Assessment in Action: A Möbius Tale," Chris Anson focuses on the difference between the value of understanding assessment as something that can and should take place

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from the outside in (programmatic and administrative level) and from the inside out (student and instructor level). Using two fictional case studies to underscore his argument, Anson also nicely foregrounds and contextualizes the arguments/topics of several other works in the collection. Though paired with Anson's piece, Norbert Elliot's "Assessing Technical Communication: A Conceptual History" is not a response to Anson but a companion to what can be seen as a broad introductory section to assessment in technical and professional communication. Where Anson focuses on perspectives of assessment, Elliot historically traces modern and post-modern approaches to assessment and concludes that our challenge is to take the best of both.

Going beyond topically pairing off fourteen chapters, the editors have attempted to create a conversation in each section. Unlike the first section, in subsequent sections the two pieces specifically complement each other. The first is intended to initiate the discussion, and the second (usually much shorter) piece is meant to reflect on, problematize, or extend that argument. For example, Jo Allen begins the conversation, "Mapping Institutional Values and the Technical Communication Curriculum: A Strategy for Grounding Assessment" (Chapter 3), in the collection's second pairing by arguing for a relationship between institutional goals and values and programmatic assessment. Paul Anderson's companion offers the reader an example of what might be missed by not following Allen's advice ("The Benefits and Challenges of Adopting a New Standpoint While Assessing Technical Communication Programs: A Response to Jo Allen," Chapter 4).

The collection takes assessment in a variety of directions and serves a variety of interests, including multiple sites of analysis, assessment opportunities beyond programs, and projects that complicate assessment. Kelli Cargile Cook and Mark Zachry use the development of portfolio assessment to explain how the practice of assessment can productively foreground political issues, such as defining and determining key concepts and competencies, for different curricular stakeholders ("Politics, Programmatic Self-Assessment, and the Challenge of Cultural Change," Chapter 5). Cargile Cook and Zachry offer readers, particularly program directors, both a detailed discussion of a multi-year assessment transformation and possible positive outcomes from the political struggles that can arise. Readers looking for opportunities to increase the technical and professional communication presence at their university will be interested in Michael Carter's "Expanding the Role of Technical Communication Through Assessment: A Case Presentation of ABET Assessment" (Chapter 7). Using ABET Assessment as an example, Carter sees opportunities for technical commu-

nication to contribute to writing assessment beyond program assessment. In "Assessment of Graduate Programs in Technical Communication: A Relational Model" (Chapter 9), Nancy Coppola and Norbert Elliot provide readers with a glimpse of what a statistics-driven assessment might look like and offer a place to begin the task of developing global assessment practices. Those interested in relationships between technology and assessment as well as developing standard curricular practices will be interested in Jeffrey Jablonski and Ed Nagelhout's "Assessing Professional Writing Programs Using Technology as a Site of Praxis" (Chapter 11). Jablonski and Nagelhout discuss the development and testing of a representative programmatic web site for use as a site of assessment as well as show how assessment might be used as a means for gaining program coherence. Those interested in cross-cultural or cross-institutional projects will find Doreen Starke-Meyerring and Deborah C. Andrews' discussion about how such initiatives both complicate assessment and bring us to questions about what assessment is and what assessment should do extremely useful ("Assessment in an Intercultural Virtual Team Project: Building a Shared Learning Culture," Chapter 13).

The reflective chapters offer readers additional perspectives on ideas advocated in companion chapters. For example, William Hart-Davidson, in "Reconsidering the Idea of a Writing Program" (Chapter 12), cautions readers not to oversimplify Jablonski and Nagelhout's argument as a reductionist removal of people from assessment. They also complicate and enrich the arguments put forth. Deborah Bosley offers an alternate view of the assessment issues brought forward by Starke-Meyerring and Andrews ("Do Fish Know They Are Swimming in Water?" Chapter 14). These companion chapters can also help the reader make connections among the collection's sections. For example, Savage's assertion that Coppola and Elliot situate their modernist study in a post-modern problem hearkens back to Elliot's discussion in the second chapter of the collection regarding the relationship between modern and post-modern notions of assessment, challenging us to find the best of both ("Program Assessment, Strategic Modernism, and Professionalization Politics: Complicating Coppola and Elliot's 'Relational Model,'" Chapter 10). What we might consider a reflection on the entire collection, Sam Dragga's afterword takes the reader beyond the challenges, possibilities, and opportunities that have been discussed to remind us of the responsibility of assessment ("The Ethical Role of the Technical Communicator in Assessment, Dialogue, and the Centrality of Humanity"). While he is not commenting on all of the topics of the collection, he contextualizes assessment under the umbrella of ethics, reminding

readers, particularly program directors, that through assessment, "…we are guardians of the ethics of the discipline" (Dragga, 2010, p. 228).

*Assessment in Technical and Professional Communication* is both a collection of conversations and the beginning of a conversation about assessment in professional and technical communication. It is necessarily broad, and it nicely sets the groundwork for more focused work on specific assessment models, methods, approaches, theories, and initiatives. It offers compelling information and strategies to program directors interested in applying the skills of assessment across the university, rethinking the site and method of program assessment, or complicating individual program assessment as something that informs the field.

*Call For Papers*

# Writing Across the Peninsula (WAP)

**Conference:** "Revolutionary 'Riting: Working-class Perspectives and the 1913-14 Michigan Copper Strike"
Thursday, October 24 - Saturday, October 26, 2013
Michigan Technological University
Houghton, Michigan

## Proposal Deadline: May 1

Michigan's Upper Peninsula has a storied working-class heritage and has been the setting for numerous passionate clashes between workers and management. One of the most significant of these conflicts was the nine-month long 1913-14 Michigan Copper Strike. As Michigan's Copper Country pauses to reflect on the centennial of this labor action in 2013, the fourth annual WAP Conference will consider one of the most important expressions of working-class heritage: WRITING.

From articles in union newspapers to diaries of domestics to the treatment of working-class immigrant children in "English" classrooms, the effect of "class" on writers is significant. The 2013 WAP Conference will reflect upon and add to the local, regional, national, and international examinations of these crucial intersections between writing and the working-class.

## Submission Procedure

A proposal that includes the title of presentation, individual or panel members' names, institutional affiliation, and contact information, which heads a 300 words (or less) narrative description of the presentation(s) that details how the topic is relevant to a single 2013 WAP Conference theme. Please submit proposals as email attachments in a Word or Open Office document to ‹2013wap@gmail.com› by May 1, 2013; questions re: WAP 2013 to ‹gakaunon@mtu.edu›.

## Invitation to use the SLOT-C Database

# Connecting your students with nonprofits

# (It's free.)

Do you rely on the same on-campus or near-campus organizations for service learning projects? Have some projects turned out to be office work? Have students had trouble finding organizations compatible with their personal philosophies? Do you have trouble finding nonprofit partners nearby? The right projects nearby?

We'd love for you and your students to use the SLOT-C Database, a free service learning resource developed at Auburn University. It makes finding real projects—and good student-nonprofit matches—easier. It's designed for upper-division and graduate students in communication-related courses.

The SLOT-C connects your students to nonprofit projects across the country (and eventually beyond). It's searchable, and for some projects, students can telecommute. Also, students can learn a little about the organization up front.

After improving the beta version, we went fully online in September 2011. Hundreds of projects are currently in the database, and we're now recruiting nonprofit partners nationwide.

Please take a moment to visit the SLOT-C website ‹http://www.slotc.org›) to learn more. When you have a chance:

1. 1. Register as an instructor. Use your email address as your username. Choose a secure, but memorable password (e.g., fabprof500). (If you have any trouble, watch our tutorial for instructors: you'll find it by searching for YouTube slot-c.)
2. 2. Choose a password for your course or courses (one that students can remember).
3. 3. Describe one or more service learning projects for each course. (Your project descriptions can be brief.*)
4. 4. Try out a search. (Click Search Projects, and search for course projects like your students would. Remember, we're in an expansion stage: nonprofits are adding projects regularly.)
5. 5. Give your students the password.

Note: The homepage shows the database's project categories. Your students will have more success finding a good match if you read the category descriptions first and ask your students to search within those categories.

Here's an example: "Choose a grant. Search under both Grants and Letters of Inquiry. I'm flexible about who you work with, so you can telecommute if you'd like to. Please share the nonprofit's contact information with me."

Please use our Contact page to report problems or suggest improvements. The form is very short, and it will let us better respond to specific problems.

Sincerely,

Susan Youngblood and Jo Mackiewicz
Service Learning Opportunities in Technical Communication (SLOT-C) Database
Master of Technical and Professional Communication Program
Writing Studies at Auburn University

‹slotcdatabase@gmail.com›
‹http://www.slotc.org›

# Time to start writing

## Research paper, project reports, and panel proposals

You are invited to participate in the ACM Special Interest Group on Design of Communication (**SIGDOC**) 2013 conference September 30th - October 1st, 2013 in Greenville, North Carolina.

## Proposals are due May 15.

The SIGDOC call for presentations is now available at: ‹http://sigdoc.acm.org/2013›.

Please consider submitting a project report, research paper, panel session, or poster session on the design of communication for interactive systems in industry, education, recreation, scientific research, and social exchange.

SIGDOC conferences address issues of interest to people in interaction design, content strategy, information architecture, user experience, and technical communication.

SIGDOC focuses on the design of communication as it is taught, practiced, researched, and conceptualized. Members of SIGDOC are an interdisciplinary mix of professionals and academics in information architecture, experience design, user research, content strategy, technical communication, education, information science, and computer science.

# Call for Proposals:

# 2013 Graduate Research Network

## Submission Deadline May 9, 2013

**The Graduate Research Network (GRN)** invites proposals for its 2013 workshop, June 6, 2013, at the Computers and Writing Conference hosted by Frostburg University, Frostburg, MD. The C&W Graduate Research Network is an all-day pre-conference event, open to all registered conference participants at no charge. Roundtable discussions group those with similar interests and discussion leaders who facilitate discussion and offer suggestions for developing research projects and for finding suitable venues for publication. We encourage anyone interested or involved in graduate education and scholarship—students, professors, mentors, and interested others-—to participate in this important event. The GRN welcomes those pursuing work at any stage, from those just beginning to consider ideas to those whose projects are ready to pursue publication. Participants are also invited to apply for travel funding through the CW/GRN Travel Grant Fund.

**Deadline for submissions is May 9, 2013.** For more information or to submit a proposal, visit our Web site at ‹http://www.gradresearchnetwork.org› or email Janice Walker at ‹jwalker@georgiasouthern.edu›.

# Make Your Writing Research Count:

# Register with the Research Exchange Index (REx)

## EXTENDED DEADLINE: July 15, 2013

Help make sure scientific, technical, and professional writing research is well represented in the Research Exchange Index, or REx. This new resource recognizes local, national, and international writing researchers by periodically collecting and publishing information about the research they have conducted. REx also addresses longstanding problems in writing studies by providing timely access to information about ongoing and recently completed research, making it possible to easily aggregate research information across conventional professional categories (e.g., technical and scientific communication, composition studies), and more.

Until July 15, 2013, REx editors are collecting descriptions of research projects begun in or after 2000, whether completed or ongoing, published or unpublished. All researchers, including mentored undergraduates, graduate students, program administrators, and professional practitioners, are encouraged to contribute. REx asks only for summary statements about research questions, methods and findings and should not conflict with IRB or extant/future publisher agreements. Prior to digital publication, however, REx editors will review all entries for clarity and completeness of information. The final digital publication will include a framing essay that offers scholarly context for REx along with general analysis of REx contents and suggestions for its future use.

To make your research count—and make sure it is counted—visit the REx acquisitions site at ‹researchexchange.colostate.edu›, set up an account, and complete a short form for each of your research projects. Contact editors Jenn Fishman (‹jenn.fishman@marquette.edu›) and Joan Mullin (‹jmullin@ilstu.edu›) with questions and comments.

CALL FOR PROPOSALS:

# RESEARCH NETWORK FORUM at CCCC

26th Anniversary

June 6, 2013

Frostburg, Maryland

**Proposal Deadline: Wednesday, May 9, 2013**

‹http://www.gradresearchnetwork.org/›

**Questions?**

Email Janice Walker: ‹jwalker@georgiasouthern.edu›

The Graduate Research Network (GRN) invites proposals for its 2013 workshop, June 6, 2013, at the Computers and Writing Conference hosted by Frostburg University, Frostburg, MD. The C&W Graduate Research Network is an all-day pre-conference event, open to all registered conference participants at no charge. Roundtable discussions group those with similar interests and discussion leaders who facilitate discussion and offer suggestions for developing research projects and for finding suitable venues for publication. We encourage anyone interested or involved in graduate education and scholarship--students, professors, mentors, and interested others--to participate in this important event. The GRN welcomes those pursuing work at any stage, from those just beginning to consider ideas to those whose projects are ready to pursue publication. Participants are also invited to apply for travel funding through the CW/GRN Travel Grant Fund. Deadline for submissions is May 9, 2013. For more information or to submit a proposal, visit our Web site at http://www.gradresearchnetwork.org or email Janice Walker at jwalker@georgiasouthern.edu›