Proceedings for
2019 CPTSC
Annual
Conference

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Workshops
Leaving English: Factors to Consider in Separating and Building a Stand-Alone TC Program

K. Alex Ilyasova, Ph.D., University of Colorado at Colorado Springs

National trends over the last few years have shown that the number of English majors continues to decline (Flaherty, 2018), and as a result, English departments are starting to consider ways to stay relevant (ADE Ad Hoc Committee, 2018). In the midst of pressure to make explicit to students, parents, and employers how their degrees meet job skill demands, English departments are reconsidering their disciplinary identities, as well as the place for interdisciplinary collaboration within and outside English. In contrast, visibility and demand for technical writing continues to grow. As a result, technical communication (TC)/writing programs housed in English departments can end up in an awkward position to maintain disciplinary boundaries/authority and compete for resources with their own department—i.e., for students, faculty, training, and curricular/professional development. Additionally, given the long history of disagreement about the pedagogical value of the theoretical and practical disciplines within English departments (Tebeaux, 2016)—between literature and technical communication specifically in this case, and with literature still the most prevalent in terms of number of faculty in departments, that awkward space can turn into one where disciplinary authority, programmatic development and resources for TC programs (almost) stop. Taking this context into consideration, this workshop focused on TC programs and TC administrators who are housed within English departments and who are considering separation and becoming a stand-alone program/degree.

Topics and Activities

The goal of this workshop was to present and explore some of the factors that can impact the TC administrator’s effort to separate from their department, and that shape what kind of stand-alone program to build. The presenter discussed the following five factors that affected the separation of a TC program from the English department at her institution:

1. Interdisciplinary/interdepartmental collaboration
2. Administrative resources/support
3. Buy-in
4. Time
5. The degree/unit proposal

Some time was spent on working with attendees to gather relevant information from their institutional websites to help develop a better understanding how these five factors may impact their decision:

1. Interdisciplinary/interdepartmental factors: where is the TC program going in terms of disciplinary/interdisciplinary focus, what will hinder and what will facilitate the disciplinary development of the TC program, and how do credit hours get distributed
2. Administration factors: money/accounts, office spaces, general education and curricular control, faculty assignments
3. Buy-in and process: knowing who you need to buy-in—program faculty, department (if possible), other departments, Dean; know the process—department, college, university, state/system. Communicating more, not less, and knowing what you’re communicating.
4. Time: taking your time (making the time), assigning time to explore, decide, develop, and execute. Building into more time than you need, knowing the deadlines/schedules—department, college, university, state/system. Self-care and faculty care—short-term, long-term.

5. Proposals, budgets: writing the proposal(s), working through budgets, researching market needs/demands, addressing other department fears, English department fears, college resources, university values/mission, state/system trends, interdisciplinary—who to involve.

References


Creating more Inclusive Public Websites for our Programs and Institutions

Mary DeNora, Texas Tech University
Sushil Oswal, University of Washington
Sean Zdenek, University of Delaware

In this workshop, we helped participants explore, recognize, discuss, and begin to address the myriad of important issues impacting the (in)accessibility of their programs’ official websites and social media presences. We started from the assumption that even as disability studies has become more familiar in technical and professional communication programs, awareness of web accessibility as a robust and integrated set of tools approaches, and mindsets remain low.

We proposed drawing stronger interdisciplinary connections with the fields of disability studies and accessible design, which are themselves deeply interdisciplinary. Just as composition studies has arguably moved into and even beyond “Disability 2.0,” which can be defined as an attitude of acceptance towards students with disabilities in our classes (Wood et al. 2014), we call for a similar evolution in our field’s approaches to digital accessibility. While many of our colleagues are familiar with and support the need to describe all images with alternative text and to “add captions” to videos, they may not have a good sense of what that means, stylistically and rhetorically. They may also be approaching accessibility as an add-on or afterthought. When accessibility is reduced to a simple checklist instead of a robust and integrated practice (Oswal & Melonçon, 2017), it runs the risk of being overly simplified or forgotten. How do we begin with and keep accessibility in mind? More importantly, how can we train and support a diverse group of individuals—students, staff, faculty, and IT professionals—who manage our program’s continuously changing public gateways on the web?

We envisioned a diverse audience for this workshop and considered that every attendee at CPTSC was affiliated with and deeply invested in the ways in which their programs are presented to the public, including prospective and current students, colleagues at other universities, administrators, and other stakeholders. Because we have not achieved threshold-level accessibility, we anticipated a wide-range and robust discussion that was grounded in the specific issues affecting each participant.

Workshop topics and activities

While we weren’t able to anticipate every issue that participants raised in our 75-minute workshop, we were prepared to discuss any aspect of digital accessibility for program websites and social media that participants uncovered, including but not limited to the following:

- Document structure and accessibility guidelines
- PDF accessibility
- Image accessibility, including the limitations of automatic alt text on Facebook
- Video captioning and audio description
- Color contrast
- Accessibility testing

Obviously, we couldn’t cover all of these topics in detail, but we also didn’t want to be overly reductive. We had planned to adopt a nimble and flexible attitude towards a subject that, we believed, needed to play a more central role in our pedagogies and practices. We assembled a team of workshop leaders who had deep expertise in this area.
Our workshop proceeded as follows:

1. Workshop leaders: Made introductions and presented a theoretical framing in terms of disability studies and accessible design
2. Workshop leaders: Identified a list of accessibility issues and worked towards a shared rubric for identifying common issues using pre-selected web pages and pre-recorded clips for efficiency. Our goal was to indirectly teach participants to identify the accessibility issues in designing and updating websites and social media presences (15 minutes).
3. Review of accessibility issues with websites:
   - The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
   - Texas Tech University
   - University of Washington
   - University of Delaware
4. Workshop participants: Located accessibility issues on their own program’s website(s) and social media pages using the workshop leaders’ rubric. The purpose of the activity was to engage participants in an active understanding of accessibility in their local contexts and programs
   - Solo activity (7 minutes)
   - Small groups shared individual findings and questions with their group
5. Small groups prepared bullet list of cumulative findings and takeaways for workshop participants, and they reported their group’s findings to everyone.
6. Workshop leaders: Connected these findings to the accessibility theory and research using prepared handouts that participants took home with them. This activity tied the programmatic values to the accessibility and disability theory in the published literature of the last two decades.

References


Deep Impacts, Small Staff: An Innovative Programmatic Approach for Integrating Engineering/Technical Communication Skills Across the Engineering Curriculum, with a Nod to ABET

Traci Nathans-Kelly, Ph.D., Cornell University, Engineering Communications Program

At Cornell University in the College of Engineering, the Engineering Communications Program (ECP) has successfully built a unique and innovative programmatic structure to support integrated communication skills within courses across Engineering over the last six years. This workshop shared those successes (and some drawbacks) of this effort to spread the impact of communication skills within the majors. Along with traditional 3-credit stand-alone courses for engineering communication, the ECP has also created 1-credit courses the work in full partnership with engineering classes, which was the focus of this workshop. The 1-credit partnered course set-up has several advantages:

1. The students come to understand that communication work is not removed or siloed from the engineering endeavor.
2. The partnered courses promote deep and productive partnerships across departments and programs.
3. The partnerships allow for some ABET outcomes to mapped clearly.
4. A small department or program can have increased impact for a greater number of students overall.
5. There are increased opportunities for outreach, social justice work, and entrepreneurial endeavors for the students and instructors alike.

This workshop outlined the basic structure of these partnered courses, how they impact workload for instructors and students alike, how joint syllabi look between partnered courses, how to map ABET for your own purposes and others who need it, and address the various patterns for grading partnered work and how the communication grade can impact the engineering course grade. We spent time brainstorming, mapping, and troubleshooting with attendees as they began to design possibly similar structures in their own programs.
How to Build Meaningful Community Partnerships: An Interactive Workshop

Jessica Edwards, University of Delaware
Noah Smith, University of Delaware

One of the purposes of the technical writing classroom is to prepare scholars for political and cultural conversations that will ultimately influence social contexts and shape lived experiences of people. Scholars like Sapp and Crabtree (2002) remind us that teaching is connected to communities and that teachers have a duty to “develop more actively responsible citizens who possess democratic values” (p. 413). Additionally, Hooks (1994) notes that inclusive teaching disrupts the dominant model of education, and that kind of teaching “has to be demonstrated through pedagogical practices” (p. 8). In keeping with technical writing and pedagogical scholarship and using Critical Race Theory (CRT), the connections that exist between race, racism, power, as a framework, our goals for this workshop were two-fold:

1. To share strategies for inclusive teaching practices related to community engagement in the classroom
2. To empower participants to develop the beginnings of an assignment that engages students at the intersection of community writing, arts, and advocacy

Specifically, in addition to sharing our faculty/graduate student relationship, we used our experience of teaching a course created by the faculty co-presenter, “Topics in Professional Writing: Rhetorics of Diversity,” to discuss methods to cultivate classroom and community partnerships. In the course, groups of young scholars created CRT inspired pieces of professional communication to help a local Dance Troupe advance its goals related to the 1968 riots. By presenting their work to the Troupe’s CEO at a panel discussion on campus, scholars were able to see not only the importance of focused research and writing but also experience the transformative power of community engagement. With the lessons gleaned from this course and community partnership, we encouraged graduate students, faculty, and technical communication program administrators to identify specific ways to incorporate similar community projects in their writing classrooms or programs.

Summary of Topic and Activities

By the end of our workshop, participants had a rough design of an assignment they could use in their classrooms based on outreach toward specific communities around their institutions. First, we asked attendees to simply describe the existing relationship between their university and nearby communities. If there was no outreach or engagement that they were aware of, participants were able to free-write about what an ideal university-community partnership might look like.

Second, we shared details of the special topics course that was created by the faculty co-presenter, including course design related to book/viewing choices and learning objectives, assignments such as press releases and e-mail writing, and rhetorical strategies like CRAP principles of design and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Both presenters then talked through inclusive teaching practices employed during the semester to foster engagement and student interest with difficult conversations about systemic and structural problems as well as places that are working to subvert harmful practices. In addition, the graduate student co-presenter shared a short video clip of the panel discussion between the
community partner and two advocacy professionals working in local area. Then, the presenters shared CRT inspired documents composed by students to provide participants with a foundation to begin brainstorming their own ideas for an assignment to engage their local community.

During the remaining 30 minutes, participants paired into small groups for discussion centered on the workshop presenters’ ideas. Workshop takeaways were shared with the entire group at the end of the session.

Our workshop prioritized access as a running theme. In addition to presenters describing video images, using subtitles for videos, sharing presentation handouts, and providing a PowerPoint presentation, participants were invited to contribute to the conversation in several formats (which included a question and answer session, use of index cards, and group writing using large poster board paper) and to consider their own contexts in our broader conversation.

References
Session 1
Infusing TC Pedagogy with Artistic Creativity through Interdisciplinary Partnerships

Tammy Rice-Bailey, Milwaukee School of Engineering
Felicia Chong, Oakland University
Kimberly Baker, Milwaukee School of Engineering

In the last five decades, technical communication (TC) scholars have participated in conversations about infusing technical communication with artistic creativity such as film, music, and art (Richards, 2009), beauty/makeup (Chong, 2018), cinema/film/screenwriting (Daffer, 1970; Gillette, 2005; Shelton, 1993), classical art forms (Laplante & Flaxman, 1995), humor and comics (Cohen, 1992; Cooper, 1996; Weal, 1986; Yu, 2015), music (Girill, 1989; Nelson, 1989; Wiley, 1993), poetry (Welch, 2010), and storyboarding (Balzotti, 2016; Kody, 1992; Larkin, 1996). The value of artistic creativity is not only evidenced in TC scholarship but also in corporate settings. Prominent companies like Google, Apple, and Facebook have been cited as incorporating elements of the arts, performance, and/or play into their corporate environments. In fact, fine arts disciplines have also been shown to partner well with both industry and the classroom to allow practitioners and students to not only enhance the technical and interpersonal skills necessary for success but also improve student and user engagement. In an attempt to examine what artistic creativity might look like in the classroom, our panel examined such interdisciplinary approaches. More specifically, we introduced three creative/interdisciplinary approaches to TC pedagogy that are easy to incorporate and align with existing TC curriculum and traditional classroom assignments: drawing, improvisational games, and humor.

Tammy Rice-Bailey addressed how students use drawing and visual approaches to creating, organizing, and structuring documents in technical communication courses. Adapting early-childhood approaches and pedagogy focused on creativity as independent and collaborative activities that engage multiple modes of learning, students produce visuals such as storyboards, mind maps, visualizations, and infographics to support their writing processes. Takeaways included sample activities and assignments that integrate visual art with writing processes that can be used in classes across the TC curriculum.

Kimberly Baker described using improvisational games in their TC classes to teach collaboration skills to undergraduate students. Baker also conducted a pilot study to ascertain student reactions to practicing improv games in the classroom. Various games and the specific skills they target/enhance were covered as well as a summary of applications students identified for the skills that they learned and practiced through these games. Takeaways included instructions for simple improv games, the skills they target, and their practical applications in the both the classroom and the workplace.

Felicia Chong has researched the use of humor as a rhetorical strategy in technical communication literature. Since humor is situationally and culturally dependent, she showed examples and offered insights into the considerations that should be addressed by students and practitioners contemplating using humor in user documentation to effectively engage with readers/users. Takeaways included a list of instructor prompts and discussion questions to share with students about the place of humor in technical communication.

References


We Cannot Do This Alone: Interdisciplinary Voices in a Social Justice Community Project

Chalice Randazzo, Eastern Michigan University
Darlene Holliday, Family Empowerment Program

This presentation discussed four lessons that a technical, professional, communication (TCP) academic and a social work professional learned during an interdisciplinary, social justice community partnership. TPC scholarship in community engagement has discussed the interdisciplinary relationships required to sustain projects (Gonzales & Turner, 2017; Irving & English, 2008; Jones, 2016; Mara & Mara, 2018; Walton, Zraly, & Mugengana, 2015). However, as Kimme Hea and Shah (2016) pointed out, few scholars have actually included their community partners’ voices, which is a missed opportunity to improve partnerships: “A better understanding of community partners’ own self-defined stakes in service-learning projects can aid us in the continued creation, engagement with, and critical evaluation of our own community-based pedagogies and curricula” (p. 49). This presentation answered their call by bringing the community partner to CPTSC to voice her experiences alongside the TPC presenter.

The community project we discussed is a résumé workshop designed for the Family Empowerment Program (FEP), a nonprofit providing intensive case management services for residents from underrepresented groups living in income-based housing. The community partner for this project, an FEP social worker, currently has 112 households on her caseload, 48% of which are considered employable. The other 52% receive government assistance in the form of social security or disability payment benefits. The résumé workshop was designed to prepare a group of underemployed or unemployed residents for the job market.

Our partnership has provided four suggested lessons for other TPC scholars who want to foster sustainable community interdisciplinary partnerships, including:

- adapting to each other’s communication style: TPC writers and social workers might not be communicating on the same level;
- respecting each other’s goals: FEP’s metrics and the TPC academic’s community engagement;
- respecting each other’s boundaries: Specifically, the TPC academic took care not to use the FEP as a research site;
- incorporating each other’s expertise: The social worker brought expertise about working with the residents, including identifying residents who were employable from information gathered from the FEP’s annual surveys. She also invited residents to participate in the five week résumé workshop. The TPC academic brought expertise in job searching and résumé writing.

These suggestions echo other TPC scholars’ lessons about community engagement projects, especially localization and listening to community partners’ voices (Shivers-McNair, Gonzales, & Zhyvotovska, 2019; Shivers-McNair & San Diego, 2017). The first three lessons were used to establish the relationship and the project, and the fourth was for running the project. The presentation foregrounded these suggestions via an in-person discussion with the social worker and TPC academic—a unique format that foregrounds the community partner’s voice. It also included a handout with details about the project and provided suggestions on practices that can encourage sustainable interdisciplinary community engagement projects.
References


Working toward social justice by engaging other disciplines in engaging communities: A technical communication scholar’s role

Beth Shirley, Montana State University

Technical communication scholars have an imperative to utilize the cross-disciplinary and mediating nature of our field’s research to work toward social justice goals; we can do this by working with other scholars and practitioners to ethically engage communities in improving communications and disrupting traditional hierarchies (Agboka, 2013; Hopton, 2013; Rose & Walton, 2015; Simmons, 2008; Simmons & Zoetewey, 2012; Slack, Miller, & Doak, 1993; Walton & Jones, 2013). One significant way in which we can work toward that imperative is to use our research to understand how community members seek out technical and scientific information and what information is important to them. Conducting cross-disciplinary research in this way can help scholars outside of technical and scientific communication and practitioners within our field to also work toward social justice goals.

This presentation briefly presented methods and findings from empirical, community-based research conducted in rural Ohio in collaboration with a statewide farming organization. The goal of the research was to understand farmers’ attitudes about the environment and how communications may work to either encourage or discourage community members from developing environmentally adaptive behaviors, such as reducing fertilizer and pesticides and converting to no-till farming, behaviors that improve the health of local ecosystems and reduce the farm’s contribution to global climate change. In other words, the aim of this study was to work toward environmental and social justice issues at both the local and global levels. A secondary goal was to understand where farmers in Ohio currently seek out information on farming practices and what communications may offer ways of engaging community members in an increased understanding of environmental science. Findings indicated that land-grant institutions are considered by nearly all members of this community to be extremely important informational resources, especially the literature produced by the extension offices of these institutions, but findings also indicate that certain land-grant institutions are not perceived to be keeping farmers’ interests at the forefront of their work and that traditional hierarchies that marginalize small family farmers have created a perceived distance between the knowledge producers at the state university and the knowledge consumers. This presentation discussed what these findings mean for scholars at mission-based institutions and sparked a dialogue about what responsibility technical communicators have for engaging communities with science.

This research presents implications not just for technical communication scholars at land-grant institutions but also for technical communication scholars at any institution with a mission of community engagement, and for technical communication scholars working with researchers or practitioners outside our discipline at institutions and organizations with such a mission. This presentation initiated a discussion that asked the audience to consider:

- What communities are we meant to be engaging at our various institutions, and what technical communication strategies will help us reach those communities?
- How can we utilize that information to help our colleagues in the sciences and other disciplines fulfill their social justice missions through improved communication?
- What role can technical communication scholars play in helping other scholars and practitioners work toward social justice?
References


Taking Care of Ourselves and Each Other: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Researching Individual and Community Health Within the Fields of Professional and Technical Communication

Katherine E. Morelli, Boise State University

Within research on health disparities, many medical and health communication researchers and health professionals are calling for more “culturally and linguistically appropriate care” (Betancourt, 2005), reflecting a growing awareness of the importance of cultural sensitivity in healthcare and a shift towards more patient-centered care (Betancourt & Green, 2007). This term, however, is rarely operationalized in ways that provide actionable principles of applied practice. Several techniques are recommended including the use of Cultural Health Navigators (CHNs) or Community Health Workers as they are more commonly called (Nelson, 2002). CHNs are a type of health professional that helps connect underserved communities to the healthcare system. These professionals are members of the communities they serve and provide non-clinical experience-based expertise. CHNs also tend to be grant funded and hired based on experience rather than on more traditional criteria (e.g. education).

Currently, we know very little about how these health professionals meet the complex health-related needs of their communities and what kind of knowledge and expertise informs their practice. A better understanding of what these professionals do and know is needed in order to effectively integrate them into the healthcare system and to provide the kind of professional support they need to meet the needs of their communities and institutions. In this presentation, I discussed the findings from a year-long study investigating the context-driven practices, beliefs and expertise of five multilingual CHNs working with refugee families at a pediatric clinic in the southwest US. Specifically, I illustrated how professional and technical communication researchers might draw on social science methodologies and rhetorical inquiry in order to elicit the rich experiential and embodied expertise that also informs professional practice, and which offers interpretive resources for facilitating more effective intercultural communication and understandings in clinical settings and beyond.

This study has theoretical and practical implications for those working in the fields of professional and technical communication and demonstrates how both individual and community health might be investigated across contexts by drawing on multidisciplinary expertise and methodological approaches. The mixed and collaborative research methodologies utilized in this study could be adapted to other workplace and technical environments. Findings also inform more socially just institutional support for CHNs and offer one example of what providing more culturally and linguistically appropriate care might look like in locally situated practice. Finally, it is through this presentation that I showcased ways professional and technical communication researchers might build cross-disciplinary public-private partnerships through community-driven research in ways that are mutually beneficial and enrich and expand what it is we are able to do as researchers and practitioners.

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https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.24.2.499

Death Care and Technical Communication: What Mortuary Science Can Offer

Lora Arduser, University of Cincinnati

Aside from T. Kenny Fountain’s (2014) important ethnographic study of the gross anatomy lab, technical and professional communication (TPC) scholars have largely overlooked mortuary science as a field that can inform TPC scholarship. In this presentation, I focused on how mortuary science education and practices can inform TPC program administration in two ways.

First, with recent interest in intersection of art and TPC, as well as rhetorical work on the body, tactical communication, distributed work, and emotion, it is increasingly obvious that technical and professional communication is more than technical. Individuals that train and work in mortuary science develop and practice expertise in artistic techniques (restoration), scientific processes (embalming), and grief psychology. They have titles such as "embalmer," "mortician," "undertaker," and "funeral director." An embalmer or mortician preserves and prepares the corpse and may perform the work of an undertaker. The title "funeral director" describes someone who organizes and manages funerals, and who may perform any or all of the work described above (Clements Library, n.d.). The training for these different types of expertise can be informative for the field of TCP in terms of the programs we oversee and the classes we teach.

In addition, the history of the professionalization of the mortuary science field can be instructive for TPC researchers with regard to gender inclusion in scientific and technical fields.

According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) data, less than 30% of the world’s researchers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields are women (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2019). Although women were increasingly shut out of the funeral industry in the mid-1800s due to the new technoscientific process of embalming (used to bring the bodies of soldiers from the Civil War home for burial), women have re-entered the field in significant numbers in the last several decades. Anecdotally, this trend has been captured in contemporary blogs such as Mommy Mortician and memoirs that include Caitlin Doughty’s 2015 Smoke Gets in Your Eyes: And Other Tales from the Crematory, but it is also evident in the statistics of students in mortuary college. According to the American Board of Funeral Service Education (2019), in 2017, nearly 65 percent of graduates from funeral director programs in the United States were female.

This trend has the potential to inform STEM fields interested in attracting and retaining women and has the potential to impact curricula and program administration for these fields.

To speak to these two intersections between mortuary science and TPC, Arduser reported on early findings from an ethnographic study of students and instructors at a mortuary science college and professionals in the funeral industry.

References


RHM Professional Writing with Medical Scribe Training

Barbara Hefferon, Louisiana State University (Emerita)

Rhetoric of health and medicine (RHM) scholars have yet to address the possibility of having our field interact with those of health informatics and medical scribe training. Yet complaints by doctors and patients alike continue to pour in regarding having to spend office or even hospital visits interacting more with the computer screens than their patients’ faces. One potential solution now being employed in some health and medical settings is the use of scribes; they are then the ones interacting with the computer screens, while the physicians have been able to return to their patients’ sides to examine and discuss health situations with them. While on the surface, this solution would seem ideal, studies are just now coming to the fore, and the results have been mixed.

The small studies consulted by this presenter include those from 2015-2018. The numbers of scribes and clinical contacts have varied. Most of these have been reported in journals whose audience is health professionals. The journals include both general journals such as JAMA, as well as smaller journals in specialized areas of medical practice. Most also say much of the same things: this type of solution helps ease the problem of physician-patient interaction, but these studies differ on their assessments of the drawbacks.

In my experiences and interviews with physicians, I have found dissatisfaction and frustration on the parts of some scribes, patients, and physicians. Ideally, these groups often seem to say, those who report good experiences are those whose scribes have been already trained as pre-medical undergraduate students and have some background in anatomy, physiology, biology, and biochemistry. In addition, pre-pharmacy students also have some advantages. Some of the studies have reported that a number of their scribes go on for physician assistant education. However, other doctors and those I have talked to have experienced lesser trained scribes, those who have taken courses (often online) of only three-week or six-week duration. As a patient in a gastroenterological facility, I had a scribe, after the doctor left the room, express frustration. I asked her why, and besides her boss being critical and not helpful to her, she felt her training was inadequate. Because I had a health background, I offered to help. I ended up spelling many of the medical terms and suggesting ways to improve her understanding of medical terms.

With my increasing interest in the topic, I explored several programs for scribal training and began to see a possible role for RHM scholars within our universities. Could we help coordinate better programs that included interdisciplinary work with health informatics and medical terminology courses with our work in technical communication and science/medical writing? I would see this possibility of great interest to universities seeking to use summer classroom space, create more online courses, and prepare undergraduates for jobs.

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Rhetorical Theory and Brute Facts: The Rhetoric of Science in Scientific Writing Courses

Zachary Lundgren, East Carolina University

In 1979, Carolyn Miller advocated for the humanistic value of technical writing courses. Contesting the positivist view of science, wherein “scientific rhetoric becomes the skill of subduing language so that it most accurately and directly transmits reality” (p. 610), she relied on the philosophy of science to help us rethink the relationship between science and the humanities. Instructing scientific and technical writing students to write clearly, concisely, and objectively fails to incorporate the fullness and complexity of writing and language, which, of course, at its core is a human endeavor. Science, Miller argues, is rhetorical and its search for truth “or the knowledge for which science seeks, is thus the correspondence of ideas” (p. 616). As such, this method of inquiry, like art, war, or politics, is subject to perspective, bias, and cultural reference.

And yet, science is unique because it would be difficult to claim that it is an entirely rhetorical pursuit. Gross (1990) notes that “after analysis, something unrhetorical remains, a hard ‘scientific’ core of untranslatable scientific meaning” (p. 33). Even the most skilled rhetorician, upon tripping, is unable to persuade their way out of gravity. For Gross (2006), gravity should be considered a “brute fact,” a core of realism, much like how “no theory of physics can ignore flight; no theory of biology can turn its back on sex; no optics can dismiss refraction” (p. 42). Yet, despite these brute facts, this core of realism, scholarship within the rhetoric of science has shown the importance of persuasion and perspective in the construction of scientific knowledge and facts. Before Galileo, the geocentric model was a scientific fact. Before Einstein, there was no quantum theory. In considering the role of rhetoric in science and the development of facts and truths, Crick (2014) notes that “truths are not so much discovered as fought over, that the caretakers of knowledge in any age are bound up with structures of power and authority” (p. 7).

Thus, science and scientific communication present a unique challenge to rhetoric scholars and instructors in technical and scientific writing. Where do we draw the ever-shifting line between realism and relativism? How do we show our students the humanistic qualities inherent to a scientific writing course? How do we apply the tools of rhetorical examination to scientific texts without, as Latour (2004) warns us, becoming mere iconoclasts?

This presentation further developed Miller’s call for a humanistic approach to the instruction of technical and scientific writing courses; however, it also called for a more focused, specific application of rhetorical theory, that relies on the rhetoric of science to provide unique insight into the nature of language and persuasion in scientific texts and writing. Building from foundational texts within the rhetoric of science (including scholars such as Feyerabend, Haraway, Keller, Kuhn, Latour, and Mol), this presentation examined the advantages provided by these texts, scholars, and arguments, and considered how this nuanced approach to rhetorical theory can help students explore the unique positionality of scientific work and knowledge. This presentation included suggestions for specific scholars and texts to incorporate within scientific writing curriculum. In addition, it also included writing assignments that work towards a more beneficial rhetorical understanding of science and scientific communication.

References


Using Design Thinking to Teach Innovative Problem-Solving in the Professional Writing Course

Scott Wible, University of Maryland, College Park

In the 2018 issue of Programmatic Perspectives, J. Bay, R. Johnson-Sheehan, and D. Cook demonstrate that by integrating design thinking methods into their university’s general education technical communication course, they have been able to teach students “how to be more empathetic to the needs of others; how to be more confident in situations that require creativity and innovation; and how to reframe existing problems and apply new technologies . . . to solve complex problems” (p. 188). My presentation built on their work by describing a multi-year collaboration at the University of Maryland between the Professional Writing Program, which I direct and which delivers the upper-division general education writing course to all students, and the Academy for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, which works with both programs and individual faculty to integrate design thinking methodology into undergraduate courses.

At its core, design thinking is a theory and method aimed at creating products or solutions through direct, regular engagement with people: interviewing people about their experiences, observing people, and testing prototype products or solutions with them to get immediate feedback. Indeed, it was this active orientation toward problem-solving that initially prompted me to connect with the Academy for Innovation and Entrepreneurship on campus. Our Professional Writing Program, at its core, emphasizes students’ learning how to use writing to solve real-world problems, but I knew that we did a better job of teaching students how to write proposals in support of their solutions than we did teaching students how to actually discover and design those solutions in the first place. Our curricular and pedagogical collaboration with the Academy has helped us address these concerns.

I discussed this curricular and pedagogical experiment in detail in my presentation as a means of explaining how design thinking methodology’s active orientation toward defining and solving problems can deepen our understanding of how writers and writing create and shape knowledge. Our professional writing course redesign at the University of Maryland illustrates in a more grounded way what we can learn about teaching inquiry, invention, and problem-solving processes by attending to and engaging with scholars and teachers in design thinking and innovation studies.

Reference

Teaching Project Management: Preparing Students to Shape the Workplace

Jessica Lauer, University of Wisconsin—Whitewater
Joanna Schreiber, Georgia Southern University

This presentation addressed the question: How do interdisciplinary collaborations with the sciences, arts, medicine, and/or other humanities-based disciplines impact our pedagogy? Project management is an essential feature in many technical and professional communication (TPC) courses and has seen growth as a stand-alone course in TPC programs (Melonçon & Henschel, 2013). Project management is a workplace knowledge and practice that affects many disciplines and professions, including business, engineering, healthcare, and TPC.

In this presentation, we examined project management as an interdisciplinary workplace knowledge and practice. Aligning with Spilka’s (1993) argument that our pedagogical goals should be about improving rather than accommodating existing workplace practices, we argued that our role for teaching project management and incorporating it into our programs ought to be focused on preparing students to shape this knowledge and practice, not simply to adopt existing methods. Drawing from a recent integrative literature review, we asked ourselves if we are preparing students to shape project management practices or if we are simply encouraging familiarity with the status quo.

Method

We incorporated data from a recent integrative literature review (Lauren & Schreiber, 2018) of project management in technical communication. Lauren and Schreiber’s study identified 326 texts in technical and professional communication venues that addressed project management from 2005 to 2016, narrowing their analysis to 128 that substantially addressed project management in TPC. One of the major themes that emerged was teaching project management in TPC. We further analyzed the data collected from these results, particularly the data collected about TPC and teaching project management. We then buttressed these findings with a rhetorical analysis of efficiency management texts written for managers—such as Martin and Osterling’s (2014) Value Stream Mapping—to illustrate the essential role of TPC practices as shaping project management as well as opportunities to shape project management methods and frameworks.

Using techne as our framework, we examined the results of these two studies from a programmatic and pedagogical perspective. We argued that project management understood strictly from the perspective of skills and tasks is project management as technique, an impoverished techne (Dunne, 1997; Wild, 1941). We argued that the ancient approach to techne, techne as epistemic (Atwill, 1998; Wickman, 2012), helps to position project management as a flexible knowledge instead of a skill to be acquired. We build from scholarship that has explicitly linked rhetoric and project management practices and methods (notably the work of Rebecca Pope-Ruark) as well as scholarship on the importance of techne to knowledge work (Wickman, 2012), to interdisciplinary work (Brady, Johnson & Wallace, 2006), and to the critique of efficiency practices (Moeller & McAllister, 2009).

Audience Take-Aways

This presentation interrogated current approaches to teaching project management and advocated for an approach that views students as active shapers of workplace knowledge and practices. We concluded our presentation by sharing strategies for how project management might be taught and incorporated programmatically as a techne, or a flexible knowledge, rather than a static skill. We
invited discussions on how programs can incorporate these approaches in their programs and how individual instructors can design courses that foster students’ capacity for knowledge building in the workplace.

References


A Multi-Layered, Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Program Development

Kaitlin Clinnin, University of Nevada Las Vegas
Ed Nagelhout, University of Nevada Las Vegas

Many scholars of technical and scientific writing do not have the luxury of participating in an independent program or with a large contingent of writing scholars; instead, many of us labor as a small (and often marginalized) cohort within an English department. But that does not limit the opportunities available to us for creative program development in technical and scientific writing.

With six failed attempts to secure approval for a legitimate concentration in the English department, we altered our approach to develop a single program in technical and scientific writing by building a “program” that integrates as a key interdisciplinary component across our department.

This panel described our successful and not-so-successful efforts to build interdisciplinary writing connections across campus through the first-year composition (FYC) program, the business writing program, a reimagined Writing and Rhetoric concentration in the English major, and a new set of English undergraduate interdisciplinary minors (Science Writing, Technical Writing, Professional Writing, and Digital Humanities). Through these outreach efforts, we can begin discussions with colleagues across campus about writing in their disciplines and their courses in order to establish more research and pedagogical collaborations around disciplinary writing and better supporting students’ short- and long-term professional communication goals.

Kaitlin Clinnin discussed first-year composition as a potential site for more interdisciplinary writing, drawing on a recent pilot program to develop FYC for engineering majors. Clinnin also discussed how integrating interdisciplinary writing into FYC can meet both writing and engineering disciplinary outcomes, help students transfer writing knowledge to new contexts, and also mitigate some of the perennial concerns of program administration such as scheduling and labor.

Our future plans for programmatic re-vision in the English department are tempered by our experience developing and maintaining a business writing program, only to see the Business College remove the course as a requirement for their majors. Ed Nagelhout described the history of the program, the steps that led to its removal from the business major, and the lessons learned from programmatic failures to maintain sustainable and reciprocal interdisciplinary connections.

Developing new interdisciplinary minors offers programmatic opportunities to collaborate in sustainable and reciprocal ways with colleagues in the Colleges of Science, Engineering, Allied Health, and Nursing. Denise Tillery described a flexible, multi-layered, and multi-disciplinary cohort of minors that will allow us to develop an innovative curricular plan, build on our core program principles, create assessment plans that drive interdisciplinary development, and meet the needs of specific scientific or technical majors, as well as serve the majors in our new Writing and Rhetoric concentration.

Together, the panelists and audience brainstormed and generated creative ideas for small technical and scientific programs to collaborate with colleagues on their own campus. To initiate conversations, prompts included:

- What strategies can we employ for flexible curricular development?
- What current programmatic problems may an interdisciplinary approach solve?
• What programmatic problems may emerge, and how can we proactively respond?
• How can we collaborate sustainably in these endeavors?
Session 2
Crafting Relationship: Cross-disciplinary Internships, Experiential Learning, and Faculty Support Structures

Trinity Overmyer, Purdue University
Carrie Grant, Towson University
Sherri Craig, West Chester University of PA

Increasingly, technical and professional communication (TPC) programs are tasked with preparing students for the workforce through a gentle praxis balance. Faculty help students bring together theoretical and practical considerations, and often faculty act as mentors during internships as well. TPC programs have long had an investment in how internships operate (Kramer-Simpson, 2018; Bourelle, 2014; 2012; Henze, 2006). Bay (2006) argues for an internship practicum to help guide students through structured opportunities for reflection and advice. Kramer-Simpson (2018) argues that although recent scholarship addresses poorly structured and supported internships, little research considers the daily routines and dialogic practices that shape interns’ professional development. In addition to establishing interdisciplinary partnerships within the university, it is equally important to examine community and industry partnerships that facilitate student internships. To this end, we presented a supportive model structure and documentation for faculty working with interns and their community and industry partners. This case study followed two internships that emerged from service-learning courses, but our investigation of mentoring and structure in internships has relevance across programmatic internship configurations. We investigated the challenges of a relationship triad among interns, organizations supervising interns, and faculty mentors.

Summary

Trinity Overmyer addressed the challenges our TPC interns and non-TPC interns face as new professionals. Undergraduate internships are often students’ first foray into the professional world, where they must translate the specialized skills learned in coursework to real world contexts. There are understandably growing pains as students move from completing assignments with explicit directions and rubrics to becoming independent professionals who self-regulate and motivate their own work. The challenges of this transition are made more acute by the rising popularity of remote internships. With less in-person, hours-clocking supervision, students must find individual agency, and supervisors need new strategies for accountability.

Carrie Grant discussed the obstacles that organizations face managing student interns, particularly in TPC writing positions. Student internships can work symbiotically, offering professional experience to students and bringing organizations much-needed new talent. However, if these organizations are not prepared for the unique challenges of managing students, experiences can be dissatisfying for all concerned. Based on our two cases, Grant argues that TPC programs have the opportunity and responsibility to help build the organizations’ capacities to manage and engage with student interns in writing-focused work, by creating more robust structures into internship programs.

Sherri Craig outlined the opportunities faculty across the disciplines have as mentors alongside organizational managers during student internships. It is important for interns to have a touchstone in the academy to relate the skills and projects developed professionally directly back to coursework, which helps students see their TPC work as an important part of their larger professional goals and
practice. Based on the structure and documents created for our interns, Craig discussed how mentors and managers differ, and constructs the faculty mentor’s role as a guide, helping students reflect on their projects and the landscape of the organization in light of TPC theory, practice, and coursework.

In the end, We came together to share practical methods for addressing these challenges and collaborations, including document models of internship agreements, feedback forms, progress memos, and schedules that conference attendees can use and reflect upon after the panel.

References


Integrating Cultural Proficiency: Aligning Technical Writing with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Core Curriculum

Brad E. Lucas, Texas Christian University

In their Diversity Committee report, Jones, Savage, and Yu (2014) note that CPTSC is “proving to be an ideal forum for scholars interested in diversity and social justice in technical and professional communication,” despite their challenges in identifying TPC programs, or even specific courses, with objectives and outcomes related to diversity and social justice (p. 135, 144). Recently, scholars have continued to explore definitions of diversity, arguing for TPC to be inclusive rather than merely diverse (Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016; Popham, 2016) and consider “issues of diversity at several levels, including race, culture, language, and location” (Gonzales & Baca, 2017, p. 277). While CPTSC has engaged directly in these issues since as early as 2003, many universities across the country are just now implementing wide-scale curricular decisions that embrace diversity and social justice as more than just talking points for promotional purposes.

This presentation outlined the working guidelines and framework for a pilot offering of a technical writing course. The course was redesigned to align with a university’s newly approved core curriculum "essential competency" in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), a competency placed on par with mathematics, oral communication, and written communication skills. The course itself draws from work in intercultural TPC pedagogy (Corbett, 1996; DeVoss, Jasken, & Hayden, 2002; Hunsinger, 2006) and introduces students to perspectives on culture and cultural identity that are flexible, dynamic, and account for localization and complexity (Matveeva 2008). Students are tasked with identifying connections in their own majors and minors to support faculty across the disciplines who want to implement DEI into their teaching. Aiming to serve "all students’ major fields and professional interests," the course specifically challenges students to adapt Randall Lindsey’s “Cultural Proficiency Framework” (2017) for stakeholders in their own and companion disciplines.

Guided by the emerging outcomes for DEI, students position themselves as cross-disciplinary consultants to collaborate with faculty members to promote the university's mission of citizen-leadership in the global community. Put simply, students work with faculty members from across disciplines toward a better understanding of how to develop DEI in the university’s core curriculum. Beyond repurposing Lindsey’s Framework for both lay and disciplinary audiences, students ultimately recommend approaches for evaluating the skills (not just awareness) of diversity, equity, and inclusion learned in the university’s core curriculum. That is, they take up a wider variant of the question posed by Han Yu (2012): “How do we assess students’ learning of the skills required for successful intercultural technical communication?” (p. 168).

Beyond presenting the use of Lindsey’s framework to CPTSC members, the presentation aimed to prompt discussion of strategies for adapting to changing and emergent curriculum demands during politically turbulent times, inviting implementation strategies for diversity initiatives more specifically at the course level and program development more generally.

References


Social Justice as an Interdisciplinary Bridge: A Case Study on Tiny Houses and Technical Writing

Erin Trauth, High Point University

For new professional, technical, and scientific communication undergraduate programs, it can, at times, be challenging to delineate program aims to—and fit within—the university. Interdisciplinary efforts are one way to introduce new programs to other university departments, but, sometimes, these collaborations can be difficult to forge for new programs in the earliest stages of defining and establishing themselves within the frameworks of the university. Competing efforts for university resources and attention can further complicate these challenges. Courses with a social justice focus, however, have the potential to showcase the work of professional, technical, and scientific communication courses, students, and programs; encourage interdisciplinary collaboration; generate university interest; and serve the local community in positive ways (Jones, Savage, & Yu, 2014). With social justice as a course and programmatic emphasis, the program and its aims may diffuse quickly across the university. Further, such courses can help students grow ethical and critical thinking skills that translate well across disciplinary boundaries (Walton, Colton, Wheatley-Boxx, & Gurko, 2016), thereby making the larger objectives of the program easier to communicate and connect with other programs and with the university.

In this presentation, I discussed an undergraduate technical writing course offered as part of a new professional writing minor at High Point University. The course is a first attempt in the new program to tap into a social justice theme through service learning work with a local, non-profit housing development. “Tiny Houses and Technical Writing” was designed to help teach core genres of technical and professional writing to undergraduate students and aid the non-profit organization, Tiny House Community Development, in its quest to alleviate homelessness and provide a sense of community and pride for people experiencing homelessness in the Greensboro, High Point, NC area. Similar to Habitat for Humanity, Tiny House Community Development offers homes to those in need—on a tiny scale (typically homes of 500 square feet or less); the organization serves as a sustainable model of a low-cost, quick-build solution for communities experiencing high levels of homelessness and overloaded shelters. The course focuses on creating instructional documents, reports, and brochures for the organization in order to help it streamline communications, increase build productivity, and communicate its mission to the local community. In the Spring 2019 semester, the organization utilized course documents in a grant competition and won $12,000 in funding; the course also sparked several new collaborations, conversations, and publications across the university.

In this presentation, I described this course model, its results, its impacts, its challenges, and its reach at the university and in the local community. Particularly, I discussed how this course is now paving the way for interdisciplinary collaboration in ways that proved more challenging before this project. This presentation led to a brief discussion on how social justice-focused courses and programmatic themes can potentially serve as connecting bridges for interdisciplinary understanding and collaboration for undergraduate programs in professional, technical, and scientific communication—particularly new programs seeking a place and identity in the university.

References


Building a vernacular: Defining a “wicked problem” through interdisciplinary document production

Michelle Sidler, Auburn University

In many ways, rural America is being left behind, but one of the most vexing challenges is a lack of affordable, quality housing. The rural housing crisis, particularly in the South, results from factors as widespread as post-reconstruction policy, poor farming practices, persistent poverty, and the demise of manufacturing. By most measures, the crisis is a “wicked problem” (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Grabill, Blythe, & Riley, 2008)—a problem that is seemingly “complex, unpredictable, open ended, or intractable” (Head & Alford, 2013). Like all wicked problems, it denies “efforts to delineate [its] boundaries and to identify [its] causes” (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

The first step in addressing a wicked problem is defining and explaining it—creating a vernacular language to conceptualize the problem. That is where we come in. We are a pair of technical communication faculty, and we have been working on an interdisciplinary team that features Auburn architecture faculty who administer a design/build teaching program called Rural Studio. Rural Studio has spawned a research, policy, and philanthropic program called the 20K Initiative that is bringing together government, NGO, and industry partners to tackle the rural housing crisis for low income residents. We technical communication faculty have been charged with creating a suite of documents intended for various types of audiences, from potential home owners who know little about issues like mortgages and homeowners insurance, to NGOs who have been helping prospective home buyers in local communities, to national funders and policy makers. But, we have come to realize that these documents might not be sufficient to address the problem and more importantly, that we do not understand the problem well enough to produce them.

Even the issue of audience is complex: to whom is this information most effectively targeted? For example, we have also been tasked with involving undergraduate and Masters students in our technical and professional communication programs. They, too, have had to negotiate these multiple audiences. My presentation detailed one of those experiences and how the students were made to complete multiple drafts of project descriptions because their interdisciplinary “client,” the 20K initiative team, continued to change its mind about the descriptions’ purposes and audiences.

This experience also lead to a more complex understanding of invention in public document production (Grabill, Blythe, & Riley, 2008). Throughout the process of creating the project descriptions, the 20K initiative team expanded its understanding of what information the descriptions should contain and to whom the descriptions should be targeted. The resulting descriptions were incomplete, muddled, and lacking a clear purpose. But, the document production process was effective in that it led to further invention in discussions about the challenge of rural housing, the 20K initiative’s goals, and the proper place of documentation in addressing the problem.

References


“Science, Art, and History: Multidisciplinarity in a Communications Media Department at a Liberal Arts University”

J. J. Sylvia, Fitchburg State University
Rob Carr, Fitchburg State University
Charles H. Sides, Fitchburg State University

The Department of Communications Media at Fitchburg State University is, by design, a multidisciplinary department. Consisting of majors in film & video production, marketing and advertising communication, game design, graphic design, theatre, and technical theatre, we are filmmakers, designers, game developers, artists, sociologists, rhetoricians, historians, photographers, actors and directors. We are, as the largest department at Fitchburg State University, academics and working artists collaboratively devoted to the future success of our students. The purpose of this panel presentation was to explore and share recent pedagogical developments, based on our commitment to multidisciplinary education, that expand our students’ knowledge and awareness of the role communication plays in the wide array of professions pursued here: navigating the world of posthuman design in which most of our students will spend careers; design-centric pedagogical approaches for client-based coursework, using regional art museums; and the historical foundations of community-engaged rhetoric that can shed light on current public and professional discourse challenges.

Posthuman Approaches to Communications Media

J.J. Sylvia, Fitchburg State University

Drawing on posthuman theory and methods that span the fields of rhetoric, communication, philosophy, computer science, and science & technology studies, this presentation argued for the application of a posthuman media studies approach in the classroom. Students learn how to create media and professional communication that decenter the human and account for the distributed agency of both human and nonhuman actors, incorporating metastable orientations at micro and macro scales. I demonstrated how the histories of these fields impact communications media today and then offer examples of collaborative student projects that expand the horizons of students’ creative and productive work through the lens of posthuman design.

Exhibition Catalog Production as an Interdisciplinary Construction Zone

Robert I. Carr, Fitchburg State University

This presentation revealed the interdisciplinary synergy achieved by collaborative student teams and their clients in the production of professional caliber exhibition catalogs for a regional art museum. This productive synthesis of student photography, graphic design, and written communication, applied to disciplines spanning art history, museum curation, and communications media, offers new ways to think about inter-disciplinarity and the benefits thereof in coalescing educational and professional environments, including museums, galleries, and multimedia marketing more generally.

Have We Really Become Coarser? Public Rhetoric in the Founding Era and Beyond

Charles H. Sides, Fitchburg State University
Understanding the evolution of public rhetoric is instrumental to technical and professional communication pedagogy, whether it be analyzing changes in documentation style from proscriptive approaches common to our discipline’s early years to relational approaches common today (Sides, Technical Communication Frontiers: Essays in Theory, ATFW, 1994) or analyzing changes in political rhetoric across our republic’s history. This presentation compared political invective from the election of 1800 to the election of 2016 as an example of professional discourse.
Standing on the Shoulders of Others – Programmatic Borrowing from the STEM Disciplines

Kenneth R. Price, Texas A&M University-Kingsville

The discipline of scientific and technical communication has always closely aligned with the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) disciplines. Our programs can benefit from borrowing their most effective programmatic practices and methods.

Preparing scientific and technical communication students to enter seamlessly into a knowledge-based workforce requires a new model of education and training, a model of lifelong learning that other STEM fields have adopted to keep up with the rapid change in technology. In addition, scientific and technical communication programs can benefit from the observation and application of other STEM programmatic practices, including assessment; academic persistence, especially at Hispanic-serving institutions; core competencies; learning outcomes; standardized curriculum; and academic credentialing.

**Problems**

Our discipline has no national standards to ensure consistency:

- Consensus of core competencies – Without national core competencies, assessment is almost impossible.
- Programmatic nomenclature – Certificate, concentration, BA, BS, MA.
- Course offerings – The courses a program offers directly depend upon the expertise of the instructors and their willingness and ability to stay current with technology.

**Possible Solutions**

A possible alternative is to have a national standards board, similar to the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET), comprised of a network of professional communicators from academe, industry, and government.

Like the ABET, a professional communication standards board could assist programs with national standards to ensure professional writing students enter the workplace job-ready.

- Internationalization of the discipline – With colleges and universities expanding their international course offerings into Southern and Eastern Asia, as well as into Oceania countries, some fields have called for a single set of international accrediting standards.
- ED assuming authority for accreditation – The United States Department of Education is moving toward becoming entirely responsible for accreditation, taking this authority away from accreditation agencies and academic institutions.

Further justification for a national standards body include the following:

- The growth of the for-profit education sector – As for-profit higher education continues to expand into the discipline of professional communication, there is a need to understand similarities and differences between this sector and nonprofit higher education.
- Articulation and transfer credit – A governing body would provide for uniformity among programs by determining standardized curriculum as it relates to the transfer of credit, licensure of schools, and certification and credentialing of students.
- Best practices for effective teaching – A national standards board would help disperse ideas and effective practices within the discipline, as well as create proven educational models to prepare professional communication students for careers in the discipline.

In this presentation, attendees participated in an important conversation about issues in scientific and technical communication programs, with programmatic accreditation, standardization, and professionalization being the primarily goals.
The Conundrum of Data Analytics for Audience Analysis

Nupoor Ranade, North Carolina State University

Nearly all businesses maintain an online presence using social media accounts and company websites. Direct communication with customers has become easier in terms of access. However, audience analysis has become difficult due to the variation of information requests. To understand audience behavior and to analyze information consumption, companies pull abstract data and conduct research to extract knowledge using different tools. How is data analytics used to track user engagement? How do the parameters used to track engagement differ with the purpose of the site? How can knowledge about user behavior be used to create engaging content? While learning about user experience and participation, technical communication students need to consider these questions that lie at the intersections of marketing, data analytics and statistics. The goal of this presentation was to compel technical communication instructors to find overlaps among these fields to answer these questions.

Customer experience research project

This talk was based on a research conducted using Google analytics at SAS Institute, a data analytics company based in Cary, North Carolina, on their online documentation website known as the Help Center. Google Analytics tracks and reports website traffic by sharing users’ behavioral characteristics like session duration, pages per session, and bounce rate (Plaza, 2013). During the research, it was observed that the same data can mean different things for different teams in the company. Therefore, looking at the data from a technical communication lens can be tricky.

Interdisciplinary collaboration 1: Marketing

In marketing, popularity of the company, product or service is based on the number of visitors (hits) on its social media page. However, for product documentation, the same data could mean that the product functionality is not intuitive which is why people seek help from documentation. This phenomenon implies re-evaluations of product design and quality.

Interdisciplinary collaboration 2: Data Analytics

Google Analytics is a powerful tool which tracks web page views, visitors, and time on page, giving rise to a big data set which is difficult to analyze. Practitioners use tools like Big Query to extract useful information from this data. Without a background in data analytics or a related field, it becomes harder for students to make efficient use of all that data. An understanding of tools and strategies to code big data will prove beneficial for analyzing user behavior on these sites.

Interdisciplinary collaboration 3: Statistics

Statistical information is abstract. We have adopted works from statistical research for teaching data visualization to overcome challenges of reading abstract data. For example, Tukey’s work for visualizing quantitative information, Tukey’s research for a modern statistical approach called exploratory data analysis, Cleveland’s methods for visualization techniques for statisticians, and so on. Statistical knowledge is useful to create behavioral context, allowing the joint exploration of statistical and sociological patterns in data.
Such research reinforces the need to establish better communication between technical communicators, computer scientists, designers and statisticians. Instructors of technical and scientific communication must find ways to lead interdisciplinary collaborations to prepare students for workplaces. This discussion proposed strategies and challenges for doing so.

References
Identifying Gaps in Industry Expectations and Classroom Standards

Ann Marie Francis, University of North Georgia

The idea that engineers need better written communication skill is not new. The industry has noted that the new graduates lack the ability to communicate well: a skill that is desired in entry-level engineers and required for those wanting to move into upper-level positions (Todd & Magleby, 2005; Prados, Peterson, & Lattuca, 2005). It is not just the industry that notes the need for engineers to become better communicators. Engineering faculty and administration have also made public statements that engineering education is not properly preparing students to work in professional settings (Prados et al., 2005).

While the need for strong communication skills is not questioned, the characteristics of quality writing is not always the same for the industry and the classroom, which can create problems for new graduates entering the workforce (Dannels, 2003). Research is emerging that considers industry standards and how those standards can be applied to the classroom. Conrad (2017) compared writing in professional civil engineering jobs and academic writing in civil engineering courses, noting that for faculty to better align with industry standards, they must understand what those standards are. Others agree, including Giroux and Moje (2017) who studied the literacy practices of engineers to help bring those practices to the classroom. In an effort to continue the discussion, this presentation compared what characteristics the industry and instructors of professional and technical writing use to define quality writing. Drawing on a study by Cunningham & Stewart (2012), which researched the criteria professional engineers consider essential in effective writing, the presenter shared data collected on the characteristics of quality writing as defined by instructors of introductory professional and technical writing classes. The presenter explored gaps and considered ways to bridge those gaps.

References


The Benefits, Challenges, and Future of Interdisciplinarity for Small Technical Communication Programs

Teena A. M. Carnegie, Eastern Washington University

Discipline-based curriculum has been the bedrock of higher education throughout the 20th and 21st century, derived largely from an industrial-era need for specialization (Ashby & Exter, 2018; Holley, 2017). Problems faced today by a globalized society, however, often require more diverse interdisciplinary perspectives (Palmer, 2001). According to a survey of 400 employers conducted on behalf of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), employers believe that both field-specific and interdisciplinary knowledge is needed for long-term career success. When hiring, the majority of employers “place the greatest value on demonstrated proficiency in skills and knowledge that cut across all majors” (Hart, 2015, p.1). Yet, much of higher education remains entrenched in a discipline-based structure even as it gives voice to the value of interdisciplinarity (Holley, 2017).

While interdisciplinarity is of value to all programs, for small technical communication programs with one or two faculty and limited resources, an interdisciplinary approach to curriculum can be a particularly effective way to build a major. Lone ranger administrators (Sapp, 2006) can build on a core set of courses used for a technical communication minor, emphasis, or certificate by using courses from other disciplines, such as visual communication design, communications studies, journalism, business and marketing, and computer science. Such an interdisciplinary approach, has several advantages. It allows technical communication programs to develop beyond the English department where the majority of such programs are housed. It allows programs to be more responsive to the changes in the field, as changing the curriculum does not necessitate the development of new courses but rather the addition or exchanging of courses by pulling on course offerings from other programs (Carnegie & Crane, 2018). Such an approach also benefits students by enabling them to build a broad range of skills and knowledge from a variety of fields as well as the “cross-cutting skills” that apply across fields (Hart, p2). In addition, it benefits faculty by providing opportunities for them to build connections with faculty in other disciplines.

While many advantages accrue from an interdisciplinary curriculum, such an approach is not without challenges. The entrenchment of the discipline-based structure in higher education creates many barriers to maintaining interdisciplinarity and to achieving the benefits that it promises. Programs often revise curriculum and course schedules independently of other programs. Without clear lines of communication between programs, such changes can undermine interdisciplinarity. While decreasing budgets should encourage interdisciplinary collaborations, they can often have the opposite effect. Decreasing budgets result in decreasing numbers of course sections. Fewer sections result in full course sections, and, as a result, programs may add prerequisites or priority registration for their majors, making it difficult for students from other majors to access the courses. In addition, disciplinary ethnocentrism can develop, creating tension rather than collaboration between students from different disciplines and building barriers to faculty collaboration.

In this presentation, I discussed with participants my experience building and maintaining an interdisciplinary technical communication program, highlighting not only the benefits and challenges but also raising questions about the future of and best practices for interdisciplinarity.

References


Looking Around Corners: Digital Humanities and TPC

Mitchell Ogden, University of Wisconsin–Stout

In 2010, responding to an advisory board’s desire for graduates who could “look around corners” to new, emerging digital technologies that could provide unforeseen solutions to unforeseen challenges in technical and professional communication (TPC), the technical communication program at the University of Wisconsin–Stout added a concentration in digital humanities (DH). What may seem an unlikely pairing has been a productive expansion of the program, leading to new ways to engage core TPC skills in the classroom and in the workplace.

With a history as long as microcomputing, the field of digital humanities brings a wide array of digital tools and technologies to investigate, interpret, and curate humanistic work from history to dance and from linguistics to art. Digital humanities is exploratory and experimental—pushing ahead towards the innovative application of analytical, algorithmic, and visualization tools to answer sophisticated research questions. DH engages big data, complex information, and artifacts that are at once textual, visual, and temporal—all endeavors that align naturally with the current directions in TPC.

This presentation outlined the productive connections between digital humanities as an augmentation of the core TPC curriculum. I reviewed a sampling of our students’ DH projects—including class-based and capstone projects—over a nine-year history that demonstrates how this interdisciplinary connection has provided meaningful direction and identity for our program. DH has attracted new students to TPC and has also helped our program sustain a progressive vision for engaging cutting-edge and emerging media—like augmented and virtual reality—that are helping us look around the corners of the TPC field.

Insomuch as DH is often misunderstood as it negotiates complex and contested boundaries across an interdisciplinary terrain, I offered our experiences in defining and articulating digital humanities for our students, vis-à-vis new media, media production, digital writing studies, and others.
Building a Brain Trust: Lessons from a Living Interdisciplinary Curricular Design Repository

Johanna Phelps, Washington State University Vancouver

In summer 2018 at a geographically dispersed land-grant R1 in the Pacific Northwest, a branch campus technical and professional writing (TPW) program was awarded an Open Education Resource (OER) grant to develop materials for the institution’s technical and professional writing service course. In part, these funds supported the development of an open-access repository of pedagogical tools. Now used by instructors across the distributed campus system and supplemented by course deliverables produced by graduate students in a TPW practicum, the repository is increasingly impacted, too, by the interdisciplinary partnerships with the institution’s Colleges of Business and Engineering.

This presentation responded to CPTSC’s 2019 call to articulate how interdisciplinary collaborations with the sciences (and business) impact the field’s power and identity. Specifically, as a foundational premise of our program identity, one which serves a nontraditional student population, we recognize the necessity to iterate the repository each semester and offer transparency to our multidisciplinary program stakeholders. With their guidance, we add and revise while at the same time incorporating voices from our nonprofit collaborators. The repository serves as a functional aspect of program identity; the curriculum development and administrative practices related to our core curriculum and student outcomes are manifested therein. Moreover, as a living, open-access environment, the repository is a mechanism to develop and share best practices for multidisciplinary service course program administration with other members of the field.

Because our program is foundationally situated within multidisciplinary, global, and community engagement programming, and our courses are delivered f2f, online, and in hybrid models, the materials in the repository have utility for many CPTSC attendees. Moreover, we further refine the materials each time a particular component is implemented in the classroom, ensuring the content remains at the forefront of disciplinary practice. Taking this into account, we have dubbed the repository the “brain trust,” because it encompasses and solicits multitudes of voices: those of our nonprofit partners; colleagues in mechanical and electrical engineering, computer science, business, and the humanities; instructors trained in fine arts, literature, American studies, editing, and rhetoric and composition graduate programs; and our diverse graduate students, who are exposed to TPW pedagogy through the lens of social justice.

Attendees received a timeline of the process of development, a brief overview of programmatic research possibilities with such OER spaces, details of ongoing practices at the institution related to the repository, and methods for maintaining such repositories publicly while assessing access and use. The presenter’s closing comments regarding transparency, replicability, and impact with multidisciplinary partners invited discussion, given the unique contexts of attendees’ student populations, geographic locations, interdisciplinary partnerships, and pedagogical approaches.
Moving Forward, Looking Back: An Actor Network Theory Trace of a B.S. Proposal

Julia Romberger, Old Dominion University
Virginia Tucker, Old Dominion University

Twenty years ago, a mid-sized state university created a B.S. in Professional Writing in its online program external to the English department. Once deemed viable, it was to be rehoused in English, as other such programs were rehoused in their disciplinary departments. Despite ongoing success as one of the most attractive distance learning degrees at the undergraduate level, the program is still not officially in-house. It has repeatedly gone up the administrative chain in the university, only to be rejected just before moving on to the state approval level. To better understand the history before making a third proposal to change this situation as requested by the institution, we developed an Actor-Network-Theory trace matched with network analysis as seen in Read and Swarts (2014). We felt it would be beneficial to do a Latourian trace, which as Read and Swarts note, “provides a way to see how, moment to moment, a network articulates and holds together,” to better focus on the constantly evolving nature of this particular problem as it is returned to its origination point again and again for differing reasons. Such a trace does not dismiss certain instances as politics but situates them within a series of actant relationships. Nor do technologies get dismissed as resources but, importantly in an online degree program co-existing with an on-campus B.A., have an agency, influencing action occurring in the network. The network analysis allows for snapshots of the work at pivotal moments to be examined in more detail and for patterns to be identified. We argue that the nomenclature of Actor-Network-Theory can assist program administrators by shedding light on the wide range of agents that impact program proposals and barriers to implementation that often go beyond just resource allocation.

To this end, narratives from our own experiences with attempting to move this program, along with documentation including proposals, emails, and notes from each of the attempts thus far were examined in light of changes to institutional, programmatic, and departmental mission statements. Traces and network analysis snapshots were presented, and it was suggested that to make sense of this data and to be able to use it to assist in moving forward with a third revision, stasis theory can be used in order to better marshal the information into a usable, distributable form. Classical stasis theory suggests patterns of meaning. The results would then be readily shareable with all human actants involved in the process of proposal revision at the department level.

References

| Session 3 |
Does Scrum Project Management Affect Outcomes in Groupwork?

Erin Friess, University of North Texas

Collaborative activities have long been hallmarks of technical communication pedagogy and practice (Rainey, Turner, & Dayton, 2005). Agile and Scrum (a particular type of Agile) are project management methodologies that favor incremental delivery and cross-functional team structure with standardized meetings. Over 85% of software developers use Agile and over 63% use Scrum (Stack Overflow). Further, Agile and Scrum are taking hold in more traditional business environments (Gothelf 2014; Rigby, Sutherland, & Noble, 2018). However, Scrum as a project management process in technical communication has generally been understudied (Friess, 2018; Pope-Ruark, 2014).

This presentation presented initial findings from a classroom-based quasi-experimental study. Four sections of an upper division technical communication course at a large public university participated in the study, with two instructors each teaching two sections. For a two-phase group project (a survey development and a report on the collected data), all four classes received lectures on the best communicative practices for group work (Lam, 2016). All four classes also had their teams determined by CATME software, which aims to “prepare[...] students to function effectively in teams and support [...] faculty as they manage their students’ team experiences.” All groups were asked to use Slack as their collaborative medium. Two sections (one per instructor) received additional lectures on Scrum and how Scrum would be implemented in their class, with particular attention paid to the meetings and user stories associated with Scrum. Students in the Scrum intervention courses held kick-off, daily stand-up, and retrospective meetings. The team selected a ScrumMaster who maintained the Scrum board on Slack and regulated the daily stand-ups. At the conclusion of the project, the students completed a survey that specifically addressed issues such as communication, empathy, and work quality.

This presentation reported findings from this study. Specifically, it addressed the degree to which a Scrum intervention affects student work and perceptions of student work and the degree to which a Scrum intervention affects students’ perceptions of empathy.

We discussed with the attendees their experiences in interventions in the standard group project as well as their experiences with how empathy affects student perceptions of group work and outcomes. We also discussed how relevant Scrum could be for technical communication courses.

References

   https://insights.stackoverflow.com/survey/2018#top


Teaching Students to Communicate as Technical Communicators in the Interdisciplinary Space of Social Media: Ways Forward in Interdisciplinary Education

Stephen Carradini, Arizona State University

Technical communication (TC) speaks in a unique voice, as technical communication teaches approaches, stances, and skills related to specific types of communication-based knowledge work (Brumberger & Lauer, 2015). This unique voice has not fully developed when it comes to social media, as few textbooks have appeared to supplement strong work in journals (Kimme Hea, 2014; Pigg, 2014; Vie, 2017) and research monographs (Potts, 2013). Other fields have developed full-length textbooks to teach professional social media faster than technical communication has. This situation makes many technical communication social media courses de facto inter/multi-disciplinary and raises a question: How do technical communication teachers teach technical communication students to use social media as technical communicators in light of the fact that many of the full-length resources on teaching social media come from other fields?

This presentation offered four suggestions to answer that question.

The first way forward is to foreground technical communication principles or program goals when assigning and discussing inter/multi-disciplinary texts about social media. The teacher can frame the reading by noting where alignment with technical communication principles exists and where underlying tensions (such as profit motive at the user’s expense) do not align with technical communication stances. This approach can also be an exercise where students identify what aspects of a textbook do or do not fit with the goals of technical communication.

The second way forward is to eschew textbooks altogether (a stance that is gaining steam for reasons of cost and sustainability). The teacher could curate and synthesize technical communication work on social media in technical communication (e.g. assigning Technical Communication Book of Knowledge (TCBOK) content, journal articles, and chapters of TC textbooks), then supplement these materials with duly-framed interdisciplinary work. This approach can be financially positive for the student but loses the benefit of pedagogical and thematic consistency that a single unified text offers.

The third effort could be done with or without a textbook: Teachers of social media technical communication could crowdsourcingly and interdisciplinary content by sharing assignments, articles, activities, blog posts, or other materials whose goals are resonant with those of technical communication. Using the ATTW listserv or a more centralized permanent location to house these materials could stabilize disciplinary and interdisciplinary work resonant with technical communication goals.

Finally, the field could develop a set of pedagogical goals or ideas for social media in technical communication, drawing on best practices from other fields but focusing on the unique voice of technical communication. This could be a white paper, journal article, web page, or some other sort of work.

These four ideas preserve the interdisciplinary elements of social media but focus them toward the specific voice of technical communication. These ways forward will help programs and individual courses hone their work on social media so that students can learn what it means to communicate as a technical communicator in the interdisciplinary space of social media.
References


Do Students Read Anything At All? Tracking Students’ Use of OER Through Google Analytics

E. Jonathan Arnett, Kennesaw State University

This presentation discussed research using Google Analytics to track students’ use of a free, open, online textbook that was created for and is used in TCOM 2010, the introductory-level technical communication course at Kennesaw State University (KSU).

Open Educational Resources (OER), or “teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use or re-purposing by others” (Atkins, Brown, & Hammond, 2007), are increasing in popularity in higher education, particularly due to the high cost of textbooks. The average college student spends somewhere between $600 and $1200 annually on textbooks (College, 2015; National, 2016), and many students rebel by not purchasing required textbooks, especially for courses outside their major.

The engineers and computer science students who populate the TCOM 2010 course at KSU exemplify this problem. In response, a group of faculty members at KSU applied for an Affordable Learning Georgia Textbook Transformation Grant, which they used to create an OER suitable for introductory-level technical communication courses.

Existing research into OER suggests that students in TCOM 2010 will see positive results. They will likely save money, view the OER in a positive light (Delimont, Turtle, Bennett, Adkhari, & Lindshield, 2016; Jhangiani & Jhangiani, 2017; Iloffsky, Hilton, Whiting, & Ackerman 2016), and pass their classes at higher rates, which will in turn lead to higher institutional retention, progression, and graduation (RPG) rates (e.g., Hilton, 2016; Hilton, Fischer, Wiley, & Williams, 2016; Croteau, 2017).

Given these likely benefits, state and federal government agencies have spent a great deal of money encouraging OER development and use. At least 24 states have laws supporting OER use (SPARC, 2018b); multiple community colleges (e.g., Tidewater Community College, 2018) have developed “Z-Degree” programs in which students will not buy any books over the course of their associate degree programs; and in the FY 2018 omnibus budget bill, Congress appropriated $5 million for developing OER (SPARC, 2018a).

Thus, it is clear that OER are popular. Even so, a central question remains unanswered: Do students actually use the OER they are provided?

This proposed presentation addressed this gap in the literature by using Google Analytics data to describe students’ actual usage patterns of a web-based OER assigned in the TCOM 2010: Technical Writing course at KSU. Data analyzed included:

- new user and total user sessions per semester,
- mean sessions per user,
- number of pages read per session,
- mean time spent completing readings,
- bounce rates,
- paths to access the OER,
- types of devices used to access the OER,
- access patterns related to due dates for assigned readings, major assignments, and quizzes.
References


Developing an ESL-Specific Technical Writing Course: A Multi-Layered Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Laura Wilson, University of Cincinnati
Teresa Cook, University of Cincinnati
Dora Cheng, University of Cincinnati
Lora Arduser, University of Cincinnati

Growing numbers of universities have developed international ties and institutional partnerships with universities abroad, leading to an increased international enrollment on campuses across the country. In 2013, the University of Cincinnati’s (UC) College of Engineering and Applied Science (CEAS) established a partnership with Chongqing University (CQU) to offer a five-year joint co-op program. This dual-degree enrollment program then extended its interdisciplinary reach by creating an additional partnership between UC’s CEAS and the English department. Engineering and professional writing faculty from UC collaborated with advisors from CQU to create specialized sections of technical writing for the CQU engineering students; the demanding interdepartmental research and pedagogical shifts required to tailor these technical writing courses for ESL engineering students justified a full-time hire at UC to help train the professional writing faculty in best practices when working with multilingual students in technical writing. This panel’s presentations led the audience from the start (fall 2017) through the takeaways after year two (spring 2019).

Summary of Presenter Topics

Topics of discussion included writing as a social and cultural practice (Connor & Connor, 1996); differences in interdisciplinary teaching strategies (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999); classroom interaction and appropriate feedback (Ferris, 2011); and the effects of this work on programmatic assessment. Attendees learned approaches to adapt activities and assignments to best serve ESL students in technical writing classrooms.

Laura Wilson discussed the process of making contact with UC’s College of Engineering and Applied Science and Chongqing University, determining staffing needs, revising pedagogy to best serve the students, and bringing in an expert speaker to prepare the instructors (who were not specialized in teaching technical writing to ESL students). She also discussed the impact of interdisciplinary partnerships on programmatic assessment.

Teresa Cook, a faculty member who taught one of the specialized sections, discussed the initial development of the course materials: syllabi, assignments, classroom activities, and grading rubrics. She shared the challenges she experienced and how she had addressed them. These challenges included peer/peer and student/instructor classroom interactions, appropriate feedback, cultural definitions of plagiarism, and setting realistic expectations.

Dora Cheng, another faculty member who taught one of the specialized sections, discussed the pedagogical changes made throughout the term to adapt the teaching and learning of this interdisciplinary classroom, based on the challenges discussed earlier in the presentation. She also detailed the role of the teaching assistants assigned to support each instructor.

Specifically hired for this interdisciplinary collaboration, Lora Arduser shared her research in working with multilingual writers and the success’s she saw (and didn’t) from implementing recommended changes in the second year of this interdisciplinary partnership.
The panel then opened a discussion for the speakers to share their thoughts on the continuing issues raised by a growing international population, and how further interdisciplinary efforts will have a substantial impact on technical writing pedagogy.

References


Locating Interdisciplinary Collaboration in Health and Medical Contexts

Daniel Kenzie, North Dakota State University
Russell Kirkscey, Pennsylvania State University--Harrisburg
Christina LaVecchia, The Mayo Clinic

Scholars in technical and professional communication (TPC) have long considered the institutional location of programs (Dragga, 2010; Rentz, Debs, & Melonçon, 2010; Maylath, Grabill, & Gurak, 2010) and individual faculty (Ford, 2019). They have also examined interdisciplinary collaborations that TPC teachers, scholars, and practitioners undertake (Brady, Johnson, & Wallace, 2006; Duin et al., 2018; Russell, 2007). However, these topics remain underexplored for the rhetoric of health and medicine (RHM), even as that field grows and continues to elaborate its identity (Angeli, 2019; Scott & Melonçon, 2019). This panel addresses the need to further articulate the locations and nature of and collaborative relationships within health and medical contexts, as RHM (and its relationship to TPC) continues to develop. This panel’s speakers discussed their work within, or collaboration with, a health or medical unit. We reflected on the affordances and constraints of those interdisciplinary locations, particularly as opportunities for applying TPC expertise. In discussion, we invited attendees to consider how to prepare future TPC specialists to work directly with(in) heath/medical units, how health-related positions and collaborations are initiated and sustained, whether and how to update scholarship on institutional location and interdisciplinary collaboration for health-specific contexts, and whether and how speakers’ remarks fit attendees’ own experiences.

Daniel Kenzie discussed his recent move from an English department to a pharmacy program, highlighting the opportunities and challenges of such a move. In particular, he focused on how he situated a general education, upper-level writing course within a pharmacy program’s curriculum and assessments, including impact on the course’s goals, pedagogical practices, and stakeholder perceptions. He also briefly touched on writing-related faculty development within a pharmacy program as well as access to research sites and collaboration opportunities. Scholarship on the integration of communication technology in health care has gained administrative and financial support recently.

Russell Kirkscey discussed his leadership of an interdisciplinary team at a large research university developing a smartphone app for shared decision-making. Collaborators on the project include physicians at a medical school, computer scientists, and undergraduate students. Topics centered on grant writing, agile development, usability testing, and training opportunities offered by the National Science Foundation and National Institutes of Health.

Michael Madson described an interdisciplinary collaboration in an adult emergency department, where wayfinding has been a challenge for patients, visitors, and non-emergency department staff. After sharing results of the team’s “messy” but successful interventions, the presenter suggested implications for technical communication pedagogy, emphasizing the value of mixed methods research, project management skills, and tolerance for ambiguity.

Christina LaVecchia shared her experiences at an academic medical center, where she has held a postdoctoral fellowship in a healthcare services research unit and created a workshop series on scientific writing for postdocs and PhD students. She shared strategies for collaborating and creating opportunities in health and medicine spaces, as well as what she has learned about their needs—and how we can meet those needs with our disciplinary and pedagogical expertise.
References


Using Interdisciplinary Teams to Teach and to Win Grants

Pam Estes Brewer, Ph.D., Mercer University

Interdisciplinary teams are often used for teaching and can be used to accomplish a variety of goals, from using art to teach STEM principles (Krigman, 2014) to giving under prepared students a lift so that they can be successful at university. Pam Estes Brewer collaborates regularly with colleagues across disciplines and continents to teach and to win grants. In this presentation, she shared two of her many projects—one teaching and one grant winning. In the teaching project, she worked with colleagues from arts & sciences, business, and education to teach virtual teaming principles to students while the students also achieved course objectives in technical communication, finance, and educational leadership (Brewer, Mitchell, Sanders, Wallace, & Wood, 2015). In the grant project, she worked with colleagues from technical communication and university libraries to win and complete a state department of transportation grant (Goode, Croft, Brewer, 2019).

Dr. Brewer summarized these successful projects and shared ideas for how to find, build, and take such projects to completion. Attendees received ideas for constructing interdisciplinary projects and for promoting a culture of interdisciplinary work in their own programs that can result in teaching excellence, grant awards, publications, and university recognition.

References


Multidisciplinary Constructions of Professionalism

Veronica Garrison-Joyner, George Mason University

Each semester, teachers of technical and professional communication (TPC) must contend with their own definitions of professionalism and those of their students. Overly broad definitions of professionalism can lead to inappropriate language use and a failure to attend to the rhetorical situation. When too narrow, static definitions of professionalism, which either fail or refuse to recognize social and historical context, have been used to reify Eurocentric prioritization and workplace discrimination. While TPC scholars continue to discuss the ways in which the act and field of technical communication is far from objective (Haas, 2012; Jones, 2012; Longo, 1998; Zappen, 1987) conversations around preparing students for future work in professional settings contribute to an idea of professionalism that does not account for the social or historical considerations of the term (Melonçon and Schrieber, 2018; Tovey, 2009).

Instead, many of the most direct arguments troubling traditional notions of professionalism can be found on organizational websites and popular blogs (Baptista, 2015; Rios, 2015). In Everyday Feminism, Carmen Rios (2015) describes professionalism as “a tool of the elite to keep workforces ‘in their place’” (para.9). This presentation explored community-engaged research in a technical and professional writing course as a multidisciplinary activity in which students construct an idea of professionalism that is rhetorically grounded in their material, historical, and social contexts. The presenter suggested that an over-emphasis on expediency and profit in support of academic/professional interdisciplinary partnerships in the fields of medicine, science, technology, and business has kept TPC practitioners on too tight a leash in terms of professionalism and professional behavior/presentation.

In contrast, interdisciplinary partnerships with community-based organizations can help expand students’ and educators’ notions of professionalism in multiple contexts. In this way, community-engaged research in a TPC course allows for a multidisciplinary approach to professional behavior, one in which students learn how to interrogate notions of professionalism as they present themselves in the intersections of different disciplines and identities. Bernadette Longo (1998) asserts that “recognition of an organization’s participation in cultural contexts enables a critical study that can illuminate assumptions about the inevitable roles of technical writing in our culture at given historical moments—roles such as information conveyor or technology mediator.” To that effect, this presentation provided an opportunity for attendees to reflect on and revise personal and institutional definitions of professionalism as they relate to our roles as TPC practitioners.

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Equitable User Experience (UX) internships in Silicon Valley

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Melconçon & Henschel’s (2013) survey of programs in technical communication (TC) found that half of the respondents required an internship course. Internships connect students to a diverse range of industry partners (Doubleday, 2001), integrate nonprofit communication with service learning (Youngblood & Mackiewicz, 2013), familiarize students with interdisciplinary workplace environments, and offer an opportunity to iterate curriculum to balance core competencies with emerging trends (Carnegie & Crane, 2019). However, scholars have identified concerns like inconsistent hour and task requirements (Stanton, 2017) and lack of preparation in navigating workplace cultures (Pickering, 2019). At our own campus, a liberal arts college in the Bay Area of California, we noticed several social/economic factors that created barriers for students:

1. high costs of living
2. existing diversity gaps in the tech industry
3. intense competition for paid internships
4. the development of a new Professional Writing minor requiring an internship course

Our revised and expanded internship is a paid, for-credit user experience (UX) course designed to give lower-division students opportunities to gain theoretical knowledge and skills to make them confident and competitive in the future. In addition to securing funding to pay interns, locating this internship in-house is another important equity move, providing access to students who do not drive, are not offered the opportunity to engage in project-based work early in their college careers, or lack pre-existing industry connections to locate internships via their own networks.

In our presentation, we summarized the social and economic reasons for adding an internship course aimed at lower-division students, while sharing administrative and interdisciplinary challenges we had along the way. Attendees left with sample course content, timelines, query letters for soliciting funding, and a sample organizational diagram designed to facilitate the development or revision of internship courses at their own institutions. For the presentation and discussion, we focused on the following questions:

- What courses should be revised, expanded, or added to core curricula in technical, professional, and scientific communication to better reflect interdisciplinary efforts?
- What social/political/economic factors are affecting our efforts in interdisciplinary work, and what do these factors mean for the future of programs in our field?

Internship Overview

In consultation with the director of the College’s Director of Special Programs, we built our internship to reflect internship standards developed by the National Association of Colleges and Employers. Specifically, our internship partners teams of students with institutional units as clients on UX projects in which a team consults, designs, and tests a unit’s digital presence, culminating in a proposal to the client. Students’ hands on UX work is supported by theoretical and practical readings on aspects of human-centered website design ranging from planning and researching to testing, iterating, and future-thinking project maintenance. Students gain technical practice with software as well as rhetorical awareness and conceptual discussions of the contexts and systems in which those
technologies are embedded. Students produce portfolios documenting their methodology and process as UX designers, positioning them to apply for future internships, jobs, and other opportunities that leverage their work in English 198C.

References


A “Major” Dilemma: Comparing Interdisciplinary Contours of Résumé Design Across Institutional Contexts

Daniel Liddle, Western Kentucky University

Résumés, along with other job application materials, are consistently studied and assigned in technical and professional communication (TPC) courses. As such, we may find ample discussion of résumé writing and design in textbooks (Markel, 2017; Johnson-Sheehan, 2017) and intermittent calls to update our pedagogical approach to match contemporary practices, including trends in visual design (Popham, Lee, Sublette, Kent, & Carswell, 2016) and the need for “searchable” content (Diaz, 2013; Killoran, 2009). As many TPC scholars have argued, one of the fundamental difficulties of a résumé assignment in a TPC context is the standard for what makes a “good” résumé are so dependent on temporal, personal, and disciplinary contexts (Culwell-Block & Sellers, 1994). Though the design needs of these divergent contexts complement the rhetorically grounded focus of TPC, they also present a potential touchstone for disciplinary interchange between TPC and students’ home-disciplines.

Randazzo’s (2016) “critically reimagined” approach to teaching résumé writing and design responds to this complexity by assigning students to conduct primary research on résumés and application materials in their respective disciplines. This approach is intended to formalize students’ navigation of the contradictory advice about résumé design while also relieving the instructor from the need to understand the trends and nuances of résumés across all disciplines. In the process, students learn to recognize and describe the conventions of their own discipline as a part of joining a professional community, rather than finding a specific “right” version of a résumé.

This presentation described how the affordances and limitations Randazzo’s approach could shift depending on the institutional context, primarily considering the distribution of majors within each class. I began by describing my assignment sequence for the job documents unit -- which followed Randazzo’s suggested approach -- taught across eight sections from 2014 to 2019. I discussed how my experience generally reinforced Randazzo’s argument for the value of a practical research-driven approach to résumé design in TPC.

However, I also discussed the potential difficulty of applying this approach at different kinds of institutions, specifically as those institutions required different sets of majors to enroll in TPC service courses. From my experience, I argue instructors in TPC should have some knowledge of disciplinary trends in résumé design, even as we asked students to explore and synthesize specific details of those trends as individual research projects. It is useful to consider, for example, that there are some disciplines in which the “job documents” amount to nothing more than a set of text fields, or that some fields will require students to design incredibly complex, artistic documents.

The primary takeaway of my presentation was to argue for balance between complete responsibility and a lack of interest in disciplinary conventions within résumé design. I noted this is particularly useful for instructors who are about to change (or had recently changed) institutional contexts. To synthesize this argument and save presentation time, I provided a handout with general categories of majors and corresponding readings, lessons, including the advice I have learned from adapting to different majors.

References


Inviting Collaboration to Develop an Engineering-Specific Technical Writing Course: Building Relationships and Altering Genres

Katie Rieger, Oklahoma State University

Administrators have been inviting collaboration whether cross-departmental or outside of the university for decades. In recent years, research regarding this collaboration has become more central to administrator and faculty work, especially as it relates to bolstering TW programs (Mathison, 2019).

While the concept of inviting collaboration may not be a new trend in TW, I propose a pragmatic framework for developing a discipline-specific course. This framework is partially based on faculty feedback, discipline-specific literature, and community partner needs (for those who opt to create community projects as an element of the course) as well as from works such as Feminist Rhetorical Practices by Kirsch and Royster (2012). I argue that an ethics of care has been one of the defining factors in creating mutually beneficial relationships with engineering faculty and community partners.

In this presentation, I briefly shared how the need for this course originated; the roadblocks and catalysts encountered along the way; development of the course, and how an ethics of care mindset was crucial to each of these stages.

The best is yet to come: Teaching the course

Next, I discussed the intentional decision to alter common TW genres to meet the needs of the course, students, faculty, and community partners; and I discussed the actual teaching of the course.

I posited that the reevaluation of teaching standard TW genres in favor of alternative genres to better collaborate cross-departments and with community partners may be beneficial. All new genres were based on feedback from engineering faculty, literature, and community partner needs. Specifically, I glean from the struggles and successes of this beta course especially as it relates to three of the main projects: soft skills portfolio, genre-analysis, and community-project. I also briefly described the main outcomes from each of these projects, as well as provided a handout detailing each projects description and desired outcomes.

Critical reflection

Finally, I presented reflections from developing the beta course, provided narrative data from student feedback about the course, and shared limitations of the study and possible future areas of research. I briefly illustrated how instructors and program directors could take this model back to their own classrooms (information provided in handout). Lastly, I opened the floor to discussion with a few pre-prepared lead-in questions.

At the end of the presentation, each participant received a link to a Google Doc with an abbreviated literature review; a roadmap to developing this course, and suggested course projects, so they could get a better sense of how to incorporate this type of activity at their institution.

References

Exploring ABET Assessment as a Means to Build Collaborative Partnerships for Technical Communication and Engineering

Xiaoli Li, University of Dayton
Liz Hutter, University of Dayton
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Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, Inc (ABET) requires that undergraduate engineering programs self-evaluate according to a set of seven student learning outcomes (SLO). One of these outcomes (SLO#3) directly addresses students’ rhetorical competence by citing their ability to “communicate effectively with a range of audiences.” Furthermore, Carter (2010) suggests that “technical communication teachers should take advantage of the extensive and continuous assessment instituted by ABET to seek out opportunities” not only for “improving students’ writing and speaking,” but also for “elevating the status of communication in engineering programs” (p. 105). Although several studies in technical communication (Henschel & Melonçon 2014; Melonçon, 2012; Melonçon & Henschel, 2013) found that many engineering schools require a technical communication service course for undergraduate engineering majors, at the University of Dayton (UD) our six ABET-accredited engineering programs encourage but do not require their students to take a technical communication course. Given ABET’s recognition of rhetorical principles in engineering education and the variability among engineering programs to require technical communication coursework, we pose the question: How might technical communication programs use the ABET criteria and accreditation process to collaborate with engineering programs? Since ABET does not prescribe how institutions must implement and assess the student learning outcomes, there is much latitude for defining how technical communication programs might participate more impactfully in the ABET Accreditation process. We anticipated our presentation would engage conference participants with a range of institutional and programmatic experience in building and fostering more intentional collaboration between engineering and technical communication faculty.

We discussed the study design of a research study in progress at the University of Dayton to identify and examine the ways the ABET learning outcome related to rhetoric and communication (i.e., SLO #3) is positioned at the institutional, programmatic, and course levels. Using a case study approach, our study analyzes course, curricular, and institutional documents intertextually for evidence of how the ABET outcome related to technical communication is articulated and assessed across UD’s undergraduate engineering programs. Supplementing this analysis the study includes interviews with ABET evaluators who discuss the role of the ABET technical communication outcome and their assessment practices within each program. When the study is completed we plan to discuss how, at the course level, a shared understanding of the ABET communication outcome can positively impact classroom activities and assignments to explicitly address professional communication skills and, at the program level, a shared understanding of the ABET communication outcome can guide the vertical alignment of communication competencies in undergraduate engineering curricula. Thus, rather than forcing writing and communication into an auxiliary status in engineering assignments and course design, our study will emphasize how foregrounding ABET criteria might create shared knowledge that allows rhetorical competencies to hold a more central position in engineering and technical communication collaborations. In doing so, our study aims to fulfill what St. Amant & Nahrwold (2007)
see as the primary advantage of collaborative program assessment: “[A]n opportunity to develop an educational system that provides students with practical skills (‘knowing how’) and theoretical knowledge (‘knowing what/why’) needed to succeed in the 21st century workplace” (p. 410).

References


Adopting a Disciplined Interdisciplinarity in Technical Communication: A Puerto Rican Example

Janice Cools, Missouri Western State University

This presentation highlighted the current state of technical communication at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez, the STEM campus for the University of Puerto Rico (UPRM) system. The engineering and other science departments have requested that second semester composition courses be replaced with a report writing technical communication course, while the English department as a whole, but more specifically those who teach writing have rejected this approach. They see this mandate from the engineers and the other sciences as an imposition which will disrupt what and how they teach. They believe the engineering departments are imposing on their ability to teach critical thinking skills and close readings. In the English department, there are only two technical communication courses offered—a report writing course, which serves as an introduction to technical communication, and an advanced technical communication course. The move by the engineering and science departments appears to suggest that these departments believe their students do not need more humanities course, despite research to the contrary.

At the heart of this ongoing situation in Puerto Rico is what is at the core of this conference—how to make technical communication more interdisciplinary. UPRM needs a version of technical communication which addresses the needs of the engineering, agricultural, and other science departments, but one which allows the English department and especially the composition teachers, who teach writing through literature to achieve some of their objectives for how writing should be taught.

Adopting what Charles Bazerman (2012) calls a “disciplined interdisciplinarity” can be a solution to this problem. A disciplined interdisciplinarity involves choosing a “path that finds discipline in our questions and goals, allowing us to draw on the resources of many disciplines” (p. 8). It reduces the monotonic approaches to teaching writing (p. 10). Applied to technical communication, a disciplined interdisciplinatory approach requires a pedagogy that is not caught up in turf wars, but instead one that positions technical communication as a connecting tissue between disciplines. Such an approach would be especially useful for students who neither minor nor major in technical communication but choose to take a course or two. In this presentation, I offered two strategies for how such an approach might be realized—(a) incorporating more creative writing strategies and (b) incorporating ethnographies, especially autoethnography and digital ethnographies into our teaching.

Ethnography is by no means new to technical communication. It has been proven as a useful tool especially for understanding the workplace. For example, Susan Katz describes her use of ethnography to study “newcomers learning to write in two diverse organizations” (p. 23). The issue though is that while teachers of technical communication utilize ethnographic approaches in their own research, there is little focus on how it can be put into pedagogical practice in and can be used to teach cross disciplinary approaches in the technical communication class. I argued that creative writing and auto ethnographic and digital ethnographies are transferrable skills which are useful across and beyond disciplines. A disciplined interdisciplinarity approach would not only be useful in a Puerto Rican context but holds implications for how we might transform our teaching especially in introductory technical communication courses.
References


Posters
“Program as Product: UX and Writing Program Design in Technical and Professional Communication”

Christine Masters, Francis Marion University
Gracemarie Mike Fillenwarth, Rowan University

In this poster, we discussed the implications for treating professional writing programs as “brands” or “products” that may be improved through user experience (UX) methods and offer suggestions for implementing UX strategies at the programmatic level. While the bulk of UX research and practice occurs in business and industry (Lauer & Brumberger, 2016), elements of UX are not entirely foreign to higher education or not-for-profit organizations. We draw similarities between the familiar, institutional assessment practices used in higher education and the UX methods used by practitioners in business and industry. However, UX methods require us to view students as users or customers of an educational program instead of as the products of an educational program. Applying UX studies to writing program design would involve mapping out students’ progression through a program and measuring how they perceive the program’s value or “brand” beyond what can be gleaned from end-of-semester course evaluations. Student feedback has been gathered regarding program qualities, including topics such as the comparative usefulness of specific courses, the clarity of program requirements, and opinions on program branding. This poster visually explained the methodology, methods, and preliminary results of a study that analyzed student experiences by approaching writing programs as products.

Even though universities often apply marketing strategies to recruitment and retention, framing higher education as a product still can be highly problematic. According to a recent study by Bunce, Baird, and Jones (2017), students who approach education with a consumer-oriented attitude tend to have lower academic performance. With this point in mind, and while avoiding the potential pitfalls of approaching students as users, this poster explained how educational programs can be compared to other systems that apply design thinking to improve user experiences while valuing the complexity of educational practices and without implying that higher education is a commodity.

The study outlined on this poster provides an avenue through which UX feedback can serve as an additional rationale to program stakeholders, particularly university administration and accreditation boards, who often like to see evidence of student opinion and representation in program decision-making. UX adds another resource beyond programmatic assessment practices such as student evaluations and employer surveys, complementing practices that map students’ conceptual abilities and knowledge to workplace expectations (Herschel & Melonçon, 2014).

The key elements of our study illustrated on the poster include a conceptual framework for applying UX design thinking principles to writing programs as brands or products, a journey map of select persona based on our typical students’ goals, and the initial results of the research.

References


From the Fields to the Writer’s Desk: Adapting the Process of Structured Decision Making as a Teaching Tool for Technical Communication

Evelyn Dsouza, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

In this presentation, I offered a contribution to our field’s ongoing efforts at incorporating interdisciplinary connections into our teaching practices. This work is informed by my graduate studies in natural resource science and management. In a course on natural resource law and the management of public lands and waters, I was introduced to structured decision making (SDM), an approach to problem-solving that has been authored and promulgated by ecologists at the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) National Conservation Training Center and the US Geological Survey (USGS) Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. Their model, based on decision theory and risk analysis (involving such fields as cognitive psychology, facilitation and negotiation, applied ecology, and economics), is intended to ensure better outcomes for conservation and environmental protection—even when there are many decision-makers or difficult tradeoffs involved (USGS, n.d.). In its various environmental applications over the past twenty years, stakeholders use SDM to guide the selection of variables and management priorities through a process of clarifying problems, defining objectives and measures to evaluate the meeting of those objectives, estimating consequences and evaluating the trade-offs among the potential alternatives, and selecting the best available choice to maximize management benefits (Ralls & Starfield, 1995; Neckles et al., 2015). SDM has gone on to inform collaborative approaches to governance in the forestry sector (Johansson, Sandström, & Lundmark, 2018) and a broad array of situations in environmental management (Gregory et al., 2012).

As a teacher of technical communication (TC), I hope for my students to practice many of the essential skills implied or imparted in SDM: problem definition and the articulation of project objectives in team or individual settings, the responsive translation of information for new audiences and appropriate audience analysis, the communication of research-based recommendations in professional and organization contexts, and an awareness of the networked nature of people, texts, places, and things, to name a few. While SDM does not cite rhetorical theory as a basis for its formation, I am quite inclined to see the connections to rhetoric, a major foundation of technical communication (Boiarsky, 2016; Brizee, 2008; Giles, 2010; Grabill & Simmons, 1998; Simmons & Grabill, 2007; Stratman et al., 1995).

In my teaching and research, then, I ask how can SDM be adapted for the TC classroom? While not every student of technical communication may be writing for purposes of natural resource science and management, I argue that this point of contact in interdisciplinary dialogue can yield versatile outcomes and benefits for TC training and practice at large. In a symbiotic turn, how, too, might rhetorical theory also enhance the process of SDM? I explored these questions in my presentation and solicited feedback from other instructors, especially concerning the design of a decision-making unit in my own class, Technical and Professional Writing. The topic was of interest to those who are concerned with the integration of both qualitative and quantitative methods in TC curriculum, as well as with teaching TC for civic and STEM purposes.

**References**


Incorporating UX into TPC graduate curriculum through HCI: Potential collaboration for future interdisciplinary studies

Samantha Cosgrove, Iowa State University

How can collaborations with human-computer interaction (HCI) impact technical and professional communication (TPC) research and pedagogy? More specifically, how can user experience (UX) as an interdisciplinary area of research lead to collaborations between HCI, TPC, and other fields? This presentation first used a comparative analysis of HCI and TPC to outline current trends in curriculum across graduate programs, focusing on theories and methods of user experience. It then identified spaces for additional collaboration between the two disciplines. By continuing to explore collaborations with HCI, scholars in TPC can further incorporate UX and other HCI principles into research and curriculum.

Over the last two centuries, technical and professional communication has largely become interdisciplinary. Theories of usability, the study of the effectiveness of a product or design, has grown and intertwined with theories in technical communication since the 1970’s. Scholars began to argue that usability connects engineers and rhetoricians, and by the 1990’s, theorists such as Don Norman aligned usability, user-centered design under the umbrella of user experience (Johnson, Salvo, & Zoetewey, 2007). User experience, the interaction between user and product, encompasses how easy the product is to use and a focus on user instead of designer when developing products (Lauer & Brumberger, 2016; Norman & Nielsen, 2019). In user experience, a variety of methods are encouraged to determine what users need from design, including both qualitative and quantitative measures of satisfaction and expectations.

Human-computer interaction is a multidisciplinary field of study that brings together experts from areas such as psychology, engineering, design, and computer science. HCI addresses user needs as it pulls from multiple disciplines to better understand how the human processes can influence responses to stimuli. Approaches from fields like human factors also consider the physical constraints and affordances of the human body when designing a product or work flow, ensuring that individual differences are recognized among groups of users. User experience reaches into methods across other fields, leading to a strong connection between technical and professional communication and human-computer interaction.

Many TPC programs are already incorporating user experience into undergraduate and graduate curriculum (Melonçon, 2009; Melonçon & Henschel, 2013). Further, knowledge and application of UX has become an integral aspect of careers in technical communication (Lauer & Brumberger, 2016). Although TPC is integrating UX into their classrooms and research, more work can be done to collaborate with other disciplines that study UX, such as HCI.

This presentation compared the current state of TPC graduate programs with graduate programs in HCI to identify similarities and differences in courses, particularly related to UX. After, it identified potential courses that could be adapted into TPC curriculum. By analyzing HCI curriculum in comparison to TPC, scholars in TPC can take on new perspectives of UX through a variety of disciplines that are incorporated into HCI, ultimately leading to fruitful collaborations in research and pedagogy.
References


User-centered Design as a Pedagogical Method to Increase Collaboration, Communication, and Prepare Students for Professional Work

Jessica Lynn Campbell, University of Central Florida

User-centered design is an effective method for understanding users’ information needs and involving them in the design and development process to ensure their feedback is included in the design of the final end-product or communication. User-centered design has roots in the scholarship of human-computer interaction (Norman & Draper, 1986) and has propagated into other fields as a multidisciplinary approach to understanding users and involving them in the design and development of products that are going to be easy and satisfying to use. The practical implications of user-centered design were offered by Gould and Lewis (1985), in 1985, when providing an operational definition of usability, “Any system designed for people to use should be easy to learn (and remember), useful, that is, contain functions people really need in their work, and be easy and pleasant to use” (p. 300). Gould et al. (1985) advocate that users must be a part of the development of a system because they are the individuals who execute the work using the system. Gould et al. (1985) outlined three steps to performing user-centered design: one, an early focus on users and the tasks they perform while attending to their cognitive, behavioral, anthropometric, and attitudinal characteristics; two, an empirical measurement, whereby users use simulations and prototypes to execute their real work and record and analyze their reactions; and three, the performance of iterative design, whereby users are continuously tested and the design is changed based on user feedback.

Technical communicators are encouraged to be user-advocates and utilize user-centered design processes. In addition, numerous fields have been demonstrated the effective use of user-centered design (Norman & Draper, 1986; Taylor, Sullivan, Mullen & Johnson, 2011); however, the user-centered design process and procedures are not always taught in college coursework. In fact, as a professional technical communicator, understanding how to communicate the need for user-centered design to stakeholders, collaborating and communicating professionally and effectively with designers and developers, and being able to effectively implement user-centered design methods into real work were skills simply not taught or rehearsed in undergraduate or graduate coursework. User-centered design is a systematic, yet flexible method of collaboration and communication that aims to achieve a final end-product or communication that is effectively employed by end-users. Despite being promoted, it is not always practiced nor implemented correctly (Brunner et al., 2017; Eshet & Bouwman, 2017).

Undergraduate Professional and Technical Communication Interdisciplinary Work

Although some academics might purport that undergraduate coursework is only meant to prepare students for postgraduate scholarship, a large proportion of undergraduates enter the workforce right after graduation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). In fact, the share of the U.S. workforce who only have a Bachelor’s degree has risen steadily over the last 24 years (Brundage, 2017).

I propose a user-centered design course framed around a project that requires interdisciplinary collaboration with other college departments or the community (depending on resources available). In order to prepare students to communicate professionally, collaborate with others, and practice and rehearse the technique of user-centered design, a course that has students work on a project and employ the steps of user-centered design will have them practicing and performing numerous skills that will both support their future scholarship and enhance their professionalism.
This presentation illustrated the implementation of a user-centered design course in the core curriculum in undergraduate professional and technical communication tracks in order to enhance the technical, professional, and science and technology pedagogy and interdisciplinary effort, as well as prepare students with the knowledge and skills to perform in the professional workforce as user-advocates and communicators—in multiple contexts, in multiple fields.

References


Using Technical Electives for Offering Technical Communication Courses: Teaching Engineers Human Computer Interfaces

Joseph Jeyaraj, New York City college of Technology, the City University of New York

The technical writing curriculum has historically been divided based on clear disciplinary boundaries. Many technical writing programs located in English or writing and rhetoric departments view technical writing as firmly located in the disciplines of writing and rhetoric and, based on that, offer courses that are firmly rooted in the domain of writing and rhetoric.

However, there are areas in technical communication where subject matter expertise raises the question of where a course should be located and whose domain of knowledge should be given importance while teaching the course.

In this presentation, I used the test case of a course I taught as engineering faculty for engineering students while being qualified as a specialist in technical and professional writing (the domain of rhetoric and writing). The course, Introduction to Human Computer Interaction, was offered only for engineering majors and when they took the course, their understanding of human computer interaction differed vastly from those coming out of the field of technical and professional writing. While technical writing discourses value user friendliness in the form of easy to use interface design and clear writing as the criteria for a good human computer interface, engineering discourses consider other factors such as robustness of the interface, its ability to handle numerous hits (if it were a web based interface), etc.

While the course I offered operated as a regular technical communication course in an English department, because I was engineering faculty, it was offered as an engineering course. However, engineering programs may not allow a course to operate that way if such a course were to be offered by English department faculty out of English or writing and rhetoric departments.

One could, therefore, persuade engineering programs to include such a course offered out of the English or writing and rhetoric departments by listing that course under the category of technical electives in the engineering curriculum as well. This is a category in the engineering curriculum that offers the curriculum space for including courses that are not singularly tied to engineering topics such as algebra and calculus, but instead creates the space for offering courses that cover engineering topics with a breadth of purpose that may be missing in core engineering courses. This may enable engineering programs to consider including in the engineering curriculum courses coming out of technical writing programs housed in English or writing and rhetoric departments. This would also address the problem of having to team teach a course when a course is offered by one Department for the curriculum of another. The category of the elective creates the space for offering such a course without defining subject matter expertise as engineering subject matter expertise, something that would necessitate team teaching the course with a teacher of engineering subject matter and, as a result, possibly diluting the rhetorical instruction on human computer interfaces in the course.

Finally, using the category of the technical elective as a category for offering technical communication courses solves the problem of asking engineering students to take yet another course in what is already a packed curriculum loaded with prerequisites and core courses. It would make no additional
requirement as the course already comes out of a category (technical electives) that enables students to fulfill engineering curriculum requirements as defined by ABET (American Board of Engineering Technology).
Interdisciplinary Strategies for Cultivating Community in Service Learning–Based Professional and Technical Communication Courses

Colleen Coyne, Framingham State University

This presentation advocated for an interdisciplinary pedagogical approach that incorporates creative writing strategies—particularly the narrative practice of storytelling—to improve outcomes by creating a strong sense of community among instructors, students, and service-learning partners in technical and professional communication (TPC) courses.

Narrative practices in technical and professional communication

Several researchers (e.g., Harter & Quinlan, 2008; Celly, 2009; Patterson & Patterson, 2009; Welch, 2010; Arduser, 2016) have reported improved student learning when incorporating creative writing activities into business and technical courses. The narrative practice of storytelling is a key element of creative writing, and it underpins many professional and technical documents taught in TPC courses—such as résumés and cover letters, performance evaluations, portfolios, and in some circumstances, reports and proposals—particularly as a form of persuasion.

Classroom community-building through narrative

Narrative exercises not only improve student writing but also help build community in the classroom, which prepares students for service learning projects, particularly collaborative ones. Miller (1994) presents narrative as a relational practice in which our audience informs and influences how we present ourselves, particularly through story. Therefore, narrative is an opportunity to consider audience, relate our story, and connect to others by sharing what we know. Because storytelling is often an exceptionally personal act, students feel a sense of investment and ownership when engaging in narrative practice. As such, students can tap into a kind of expertise that develops confidence, which then allows for the further posing of questions and problems, opening up a space for students to be vulnerable (i.e., a “brave space”). I encourage instructors to participate in this process as well; alongside sharing our expertise, our own vulnerability can still be explored and expressed through story, and can therefore contribute to a more open learning environment.

Community engagement in service learning courses

Students are often hesitant at the outset of service learning projects, concerned about interactions with community partners and the populations served, their ability to create professional documents, and the potential complications of group work. Scholars of business and technical communication (Kahan, 2006; Sorensen et al., 2008; Goman, 2015) have increasingly recognized the importance of teamwork and collaborative communication in the workplace. Our pedagogical approaches to community building in the TPC classroom can help model successful cultures of communication and collaboration, thus preparing students to actively participate in and shape their future collaborative experiences—for their own benefit, and for that of their community partners (and even their future employers).

Many have observed that service learning deepens community engagement, and I argue that narrative is the vital link between the two. Narrative processes and practices are what allow for a more meaningful and lasting engagement. This also becomes a more ethical engagement—one rooted in genuine connection and care. Pennell and Miles (2009) note the capacity for service learning as fertile
ground for ethical development. By extension, the work that students do in service-learning projects cultivates inquiry and lays an ethical foundation for their work after college—regardless of the fields they will enter. The relationships they build during service learning, too, can be instrumental in their professional lives, and are foundational to their self-conception as community members who make productive contributions to society. Narrative plays an essential role in this identity construction.

**Takeaways**

In this presentation, I encouraged instructors to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to their TPC courses by adopting creative writing approaches. After offering specific examples from my own courses (including Business Writing, Grant Writing, and Writing for Online & Social Media) of narrative practices enhancing relationships in the classroom and in community-oriented projects, I provided a series of reflective exercises that helped attendees consider how they might effectively incorporate storytelling and other elements of creative writing into their own TPC courses.

**References**


User-informed Redesign of Service Course for Specialized Student Populations: Tech Comm for Medical Majors

Mary De Nora, Texas Tech University

“Rhetoric has long been concerned with public life, the public good, with the nomoi, logos, and ethoi through which people come together to make decisions” (Keränen, 2014, p. 105).

The service course, as defined by Melonçon and Henschel (2013), is arguably the most important course for undergraduate degree programs in technical and professional communication (TPC). The introductory course serves, in many ways, as a representative course for the technical communication major. To raise the bar higher yet, the service course “becomes a marker of the expertise of the field” of technical and professional communication (TPC) (Melonçon, 2018, p. 202). Enviable, technical communication programs housed within an engineering department or created to functionally serve one or two majors need not seek ways to stretch themselves to serve an inordinately broad base of majors. It is fair to say that the service course, as a general introduction to technical communication, remains extremely useful to any student taking the course. However, there is something to be said for tailoring technical communication in service of the student’s field rather than expecting a student to adapt the course content to serve his or her own field, especially in courses that integrate service learning or workplace collaborations.

At my institution, a tier-one Hispanic serving university, the service course truly serves a large and diverse body of students and majors. While I personally believe the service course to be one of the most practical and useful courses any student at our institution might take, I recognize the ways in which the course as currently designed is not a “best fit” for certain majors. In an effort to examine better ways to serve both students and the department, I am tailoring our service course for a specialized student population, medical majors. I imagine our “Introduction to Technical Writing” course as “Introduction to technical communication for medical majors.” The course would promote real learning outcomes such as writing for “real-audience needs, problem solving, and learning to communicate information that has real cultural, legal and ethical obligations” (Melonçon, 2018, p. 208). To be clear, this researcher explores how to strategically adapt the service course for medical majors, not how to create a writing in the medical fields course.

Redesign: Literature and Supporting Texts in Technical Communication

In phase one of the research, I examined ways to adapt current service course textbooks and other medical writing textbooks to the service course, as well as examining medical journals for common genre documents within various medical fields to begin to build a service course for medical majors. The medical field has recognized the need to think about the way that medical practitioners communicate with patients (Korsch, & Negrete, 1972); however, it is important to note that medical fields are experiencing a number of internal and external pressures that have changed the way institutions and boards view the importance of large-scale interaction with publics in decision-making processes (Keränen, 2014). Technical communicators have explored ways to address communication challenges medical fields experience, exploring how to build trust in technically mediated settings (Baake, 2019). In many ways, medical practitioners may need to seeks ways to major in both medicine and some form of communication as they interact with “increasingly diverse users” in different contexts (Bonk, 2015, p. 15) using highly specialized genres of communication (Mogull, 2017). Technical communication is helping to shape the way medical majors understand their own field, their work
within their fields, including genre conventions (forms, reports, visualization of data, and technology use); adapting a course to address these areas of concerns, concerns not typically addressed in detail within their own major, primes majors to address technical communication challenges and better prepares students to enter medical fields. Results from the initial phase of research provided recommendations for a number of textbooks and resources instructors and program directors might use to tailor the service course for medical majors.

**Working with Students in Medical Majors to Redesign the Service Course**

The second phase of this research was somewhat exploratory in nature; I sought to include undergraduate students in redesigning the course to meet their needs, as well as examining course sequences, outcomes, etc. in health science major programs. After speaking with students, I recruited students who were interested in providing input for developing a course to better serve their major. Together, we talked with administrators, examined course sequencing, reviewed current programmatic offerings for the medical majors. After pulling together and reviewing our field notes, research questions, and evaluation, I developed an initial adapted service course syllabus, based in part from our general service course.

After designing the syllabus, in phase three, I plan to conduct focus groups with mixed groups of medical majors. The students will be asked to review the syllabus and mark it up, indicating questions or concerns. The core assignments will be explained in detail. Students will have the opportunity to ask questions with the understanding that the course is being redesigned to meet their needs as medical practitioners. Students will be permitted to examine the potential textbooks and supplementary texts. The group will be asked to provide informative information and opinions based on the materials they review. The results from this phase will be reported in part. Upon review of the data collected in this phase, the syllabus will go through one more iteration before a Blackboard course will be built for launch in the spring of 2020.

**Building a Course, Recommending a Redesign**

This researcher-service course instructor reported, in part, on data generated through initial iterative course development and design, providing takeaways from each phase of the research. While the research is context-based, many of the findings are located in broader portable contexts (e.g. textbooks, readings, field take evidence). This research presentation sought to provide audience members with a way to rethink or to take steps to redesign the service course for specialized populations of students, thus, encouraging a way to reimagine our programs and promote conversations about user engagement in curricular design for better course offerings and better recruiting efforts.

**References**


Composing What We Code: The Promises and Perils of Creating Cohorted FYW classes for Computer Science Majors.

Tiffany DeRewal (Rowan University)
Jude Miller (Rowan University)

The seminal writing studies text Naming What We Know (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015) examines the threshold concepts of composition—essential concepts that a communicator must grasp in order to participate in a discipline. While understanding threshold concepts in the field of writing studies can be instructive for our students, understanding the foundational concepts that are necessary for effective communication in specific interdisciplinary technical and scientific fields can be equally instructive for us as teachers.

Our panel guided attendees through our journey creating a first-year, writing (FYW) course cohorted for computer science (CS) students. Specifically, we charted how the course leverages the concept of discourse communities (Swales, 1990) to forge an interdisciplinary partnership, seeking to prepare students to be more agile communicators within their academic disciplines and into their professional lives.

Our objective was to design a curriculum that would generate rhetorical situations relevant to the computing field, while continuing to adhere to the FYW program’s values. The FYW course in question, is expected to cultivate students’ research skills: students not only develop practical, functional web research and source evaluation skills, but also they are encouraged to recognize information literacy as a flexible and responsive skill set to foster informed civic engagement.

One challenge we faced was determining how to develop a research sequence—and an approach to research methods pedagogy—that is both meaningful and specific to the CS field, and appropriate for first-year students. An additional challenge was determining how to situate ourselves as disciplinary experts in a subfield of technical communication (i.e. computer science) that was, essentially, brand new to us, despite our combined decade of experience teaching a different technical writing course, for engineers.

In early planning stages, CS faculty underscored their desire to develop students’ ability to assess audience needs: in upper level courses, CS students would be working with actual clients/organizations to develop specialized software, and they would need to communicate effectively with a range of audiences. Lacking backgrounds in computer science, we sought to create a sequence of assignments that required students to communicate technical concepts to various non-technical audiences. This approach, we felt, best leveraged our own backgrounds and afforded us the space to productively prepare students to be interdisciplinary communicators.

We also worked to situate trade and popular sources as meaningful sites of discourse - no less important than original research - encouraging students to recognize the conversations about computing that are being conducted in different industries and among different segments of the public.

Our journey, then, was one of self-discovery—discovery of the affordances and challenges of interdisciplinary, technical communication courses and how to best leverage all stakeholders’ backgrounds and expertise while forging new cross-curricular partnerships.
References


Creating an Interdisciplinary Foundation: What Do We Teach in the Service Course?

Sara Doan

Creating interdisciplinary connections in technical and professional communication (TPC) first requires that we conduct empirical research to confirm our field-wide pedagogical goals for the service, or introductory, course. Service courses should teach students to solve problems using workplace genres (Lawrence, Lussos, & Clark, 2017; Melonçon, 2018; Morrison, 2017), to meet employers’ workplace needs (Lucas & Rawlins, 2015), and to become ethical and inclusive change agents (Browning & Cagle, 2017; Rachel Spilka, 1993). Along with these macro-level goals, instructors have micro-level goals for students’ learning, such as understanding audience, using plain language, and designing usable documents. These macro- and micro-level goals are addressed in my research question: To what extent do instructors’ syllabi align with instructors’ perspectives about the goals and outcomes of the TPC service course? By answering this research question, I highlight the ways that individual instructors prioritize students’ learning and what these hierarchies imply for TPC as a field.

Methods

To understand how TPC instructors articulated and enacted their pedagogical goals for the service course, I conducted instructor interviews and content analysis of instructors’ syllabi, assignment sheets and feedback on de-identified student writing to understand how their pedagogical goals and values influence instructors’ feedback practices. 17 instructors from 16 universities across the United States participated.

Results

During their interviews and feedback, many instructors embedded the rhetorical terminology of purpose, audience, context, and genre as social action (Miller, 1984) into their service courses, attempting to use these frameworks to help students better address the communication needs of their future professional lives. Conversely, instructors’ syllabi focused on teaching rhetorical terms and information literacy. This divide between genre and information literacy points to an important issue within TPC pedagogy: instructors often used rhetorical terminology and genre theory as placeholders for workplace experience that they may not have. Instructors often relegated detail and content to lower-order issues and discussed higher-order issues such as purpose or context, when content should be considered a higher-order and high-stakes issue (Boettger, Lam, & Palmer, 2017; Spilka, 2009).

Attendee Take-Aways

During this presentation, I highlighted this study’s implications for those who teach in and administer TPC programs. First, instructors with little workplace familiarity often discussed their pedagogical goals using rhetorical or theoretical terminology. These theoretical frameworks often acted as placeholders for their lack of professional experience. Second, instructors rarely discussed teaching information literacy and content-centric writing in their pedagogical goals; however, they discussed their large amounts of feedback about issues of information, detail, and content on students’ résumés and cover letters. Third, I pointed to how instructors’ labor conditions informed the perceived quality of their feedback and their adherence to their pedagogical goals. These data-driven examples enabled
attendees to understand how instructors can consistently articulate their pedagogical goals and better align their pedagogical practices with their syllabus learning outcomes as they create interdisciplinary connections.

References


International, Interdisciplinary Connections Bolstering Programs’ Curricula and Students’ Professional Readiness

Bruce Maylath, North Dakota State University
Mary McCall, North Dakota State University
Ashleigh Petts, North Dakota State University

This panel presentation highlighted how the professional/technical/scientific communication (PTSC) programs at a mid-size university in the American Midwest have integrated international collaborative projects linking students in the PTSC disciplines with those in the translation studies discipline and user-experience discipline. With an eye to the field convergence revealed in research by Gncechi, et al. (2011), the PTSC programs serve as the hub for the Trans-Atlantic & Pacific Project (TAPP), which has connected writing, usability testing, and translation classes at more than 30 universities in 19 countries across five continents during the past 20 years. TAPP collaborations have been infused at all levels from first-year writing to upper-division writing in the university’s general education program, and they have been incorporated in many of the required and elective courses in the PTSC bachelor’s, master’s, and PhD programs. In keeping with calls in the early years of the 21st century (Maylath & Thrush 2000; Starke-Meyerring & Andrews 2006; Starke-Meyerring & Wilson, 2008) for programs to think globally in every course, the following presentations involved attendees in discussions about how they can spread international collaborations throughout their programs’ curricula to provide students with the necessary mindset and skills now required of PTSC practitioners.

Building an international teaching network, bolstering PTSC programs

Bruce Maylath

This presentation quickly charted the TAPP’s growth from an initial project 20 years ago linking a technical writing course in the US and an intro to translation course in Belgium to today’s worldwide network involving a plethora of courses and several dozen universities—all without institutional agreements, administrative overhead, or reliance on funding. Its primary focus was on establishing bilateral projects involving two classes (Humbley, Maylath, Mousten, Vandepitte, & Veisblat 2005; Mousten, Maylath, Vandepitte, & Humbley 2010) and multilateral projects involving as many as seven classes in seven countries with seven languages (Maylath et al., 2013; Maylath, King, & Arnó Macià, 2013 Tzoannoupolou & Maylath, 2018).

Simulating global workplace writing practices with technical body text

Mary McCall

This presentation described the outcomes of an international collaborative assignment linking undergraduate engineering students in the US and Spain. In the first stage, students in a technical writing course at a US land-grant university synthesized transcultural and international writing practices with communicating technical information in technical descriptions. In the second stage, students in a technical writing course in English at a prominent technical university in Catalonia reviewed and suggested recommendations to the texts. Outcomes covered (1) lessons learned by students in communicating specialized knowledge to international audiences in their discipline and (2) takeaways for the instructors in building effective, interdisciplinary, international collaborations that prepare students to engage in globally-networked workplace environments.

Collaborating with global teaching partners on professional writing course curriculum

Ashleigh Petts
This presentation described the challenges and learning opportunities for students and teachers resulting from an assignment requiring international co-authoring of a proposal. The assignment linked undergraduate students in the US with graduate students in various disciplines at a university in Serbia. The project prompted close cooperation between the instructors in both countries. Attendees learned about challenges related to planning, enacting, and revising course curriculum with instructors in other humanities disciplines, as well as the opportunities afforded by teaching an online assignment with global partners.

References


Using programmatic outcomes in TPC Programs more effectively

Lisa Melonçon, University of South Florida
Jessica Lauer, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater
Johanna Phelps, Washington State University

Recent research on technical and professional communication (TPC) programs have advocated for a field-wide view, which allows TPC Program Administrators (TPC PAs) to align local concerns with field-wide concerns (see e.g., Melonçon, 2018). This alignment of the local and global ensures that students are successfully prepared for future work on the job and as citizens.

However, as the body of work that looks across the field programmatically grows, something is noticeably absent: research on program student learning outcomes (PSLOs). PSLOs are a programmatic record for both students and faculty of what students are expected to gain (obtain) and to develop while in a TPC program. This means that PSLOs form an important part of a TPC program’s identity since they highlight the framework and orientation for the program, as well as define constraints and limits. As student focused information, program outcomes become a point of transition from the TPC program to the student’s next step in their professional life. Thus, PSLOs should be an important part of programmatic conversations in TPC.

PSLOs have been minimally mentioned in the assessment literature (Allen & Hundleby, 2010; Coppola et al., 2016; St.Amant & Nahrwold, 2007) as part of the assessment process, but they have not been considered in ways that can allow TPC PAs to use PSLOs as part of a broader programmatic sustainability (Melonçon & Schreiber, 2018). Outside of a call for creating an outcomes statement (Ilyasova & Bridgeford, 2014) and a small pilot study that focused only on program outcomes as assessment (Barker, 2012), the field has not directly engaged with the issue of PSLOs.

Thus, we gathered PSLOs from undergraduate TPC programs (n=43 programs; n=348 outcomes) in the US and proceeded to analyze those systematically. The intent of the project was not to create a prescriptive “outcomes statement” but to provide data-driven information and analysis for TPC PAs to implement an informed programmatic perspective to build, grow, and sustain TPC programs. This presentation discussed briefly the importance of PSLOs to programmatic sustainability and presented the findings of a field-wide examination of PSLOs from undergraduate programs in TPC.

References


Closing the Technical Communication Gap: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Audience

Harriet Benavidez, Rowan University
Nicole Cesare, Rowan University
Patricia Coughlan, Rowan University

Too often, technical communication addresses the writer’s or speaker’s like-minded professional peers. Yet, effective technical communicators should convey information by mindfully using interdisciplinary strategies that develop clear pathways for increased informational understanding and engagement for a variety of audiences. With the 21st century’s ever-expanding global reach, today’s communicators need to adapt their technical communication to diverse audiences and purposes that successfully cross disciplinary borders. The members of this panel, using their lengthy and varied experience working with undergraduate engineering students in an interdisciplinary approach, connected communicative arts with engineering research and lab projects. This panel offered a variety of practical and creative classroom tested strategies, steps, and insights into understanding the importance of technical messaging adaptation for effective audience engagement. Attendees received the tools to develop multidisciplinary lessons that strengthen cultural appeal, clarify “tech speak,” incorporate digital literacies, conduct ethical research, incorporate community issues, and infuse creative writing into their instruction.

Harriet Benavidez

An understanding of audience is paramount to effective oral discourse. In our university’s Engineering Clinic courses, we work with students on how to speak with non-technical and diverse audiences. Through examining both speaker and listener roles and using audience analysis and adaptation, students learn to effectively bridge the gap between these roles. This connection is vital in current local, national, and global scientific/business environments.

Patricia Coughlan

An increased burden of explanation belongs to the technical speaker. Today’s engineers and scientists need to reduce the “tech speak” they use in their work environments to better connect with peer professionals and the general public. The ability to use strong organizational, descriptive, audience-centered vocabulary and analogies is essential. Using examples from a co-authored chapter on technical speaking, Coughlan shared strategies for effective language that builds understanding.

Nicole Cesare

This presentation discussed interdisciplinarity as a venue for thinking through 21st century digital literacies. Interdisciplinarity pushes us to reevaluate boundaries and best practices, strategies that also can be applied in navigating the digital landscape. Bringing these strategies into the engineering/technical writing classroom requires us to ask our students to cultivate rigor and allow for nuance as they engage the research process.

References

Managing Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Expectations: Transforming the Professional Writing Service Course

Devon Ralston, Winthrop University
Chen Chen, Winthrop University
Amanda Covington, Winthrop University

Recently, scholarship in technical communication has paid attention to the service course of professional and/or technical communication, also known as the “multijar professional writing” (MMPW) course (Read & Michaud, 2018). The editors of the special issue of Programmatic Perspectives in 2018 argued that “instructors must rely more heavily on technical and professional communication disciplinary knowledge in crafting their pedagogies and less on the disciplines served by that knowledge” (Schreiber, Carrion, and Lauer, 2018, p. 5). This invites conversations about working across interdisciplinary boundaries and the challenges of that process. Lisa Melonçon (2018) also called for more research on innovative pedagogical approaches and on how to scale those approaches across sections and institutions.

In response to Melonçon’s call, this panel presented a study carried out by a departmental working group on a new curricular model with an activity and genre-oriented approach that can better serve a particular type of the MMPW course—one in the context of liberal arts master’s degree granting institutions where the course must serve a variety of majors. This panel stimulated interesting discussions about the interdisciplinary challenges for curriculum development. We provided assignments and reflection prompts for attendees to take back to their own institutions.

Devon Ralston laid out the complexity of curriculum development in the institutional context and the history of the MMPW course, identifying the tensions and challenges of designing and revising this course due to the multiple stakeholders and interdisciplinary expectations. Ralston discussed the previous curriculum models which were based on professional modes of writing and introduced the revised model which asks students to investigate communication practices in their fields through the lenses of activity theory and genre theory.

Chen Chen presented the two interconnected assignments from the newly revised curriculum: activity analysis and genre analysis, describing the rationales for the assignment design and the scaffolding for students. Prior research has identified that one of the challenges for developing writing courses that will support effective transfer for students moving from university contexts to professional contexts is to create authentic situations in our courses that simulate real workplace settings. Students need to learn how to understand the new genres and writing activities at work (Freedman & Adam 1996; Brent, 2012). Therefore, these two assignments move away from simply teaching forms such as “reports” and “memos” to designing assignments that push students to explore writing in their professions as problem-solving activities so that they can learn to respond to new writing situations and genres.

Amanda Covington reported on the working group’s assessment results of the two assignments across multiple sections taught by two instructors. In comparison with an analysis of student reflections, we conclude that students gained significant rhetorical understandings of communication practices in their respective fields that complemented their disciplinary education in their departments/programs. All speakers collectively shared assessment instruments and invited conversations about how to adapt such measurements across disciplines and institutions.
Session 5
Interdisciplinary Partners: Results of a Pilot Mentor Program

Ann Hill Duin, University of Minnesota - Twin Cities
Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch, University of Minnesota - Twin Cities
Emily Gresbrink, University of Minnesota - Twin Cities

This presentation addressed interdisciplinarity through teaching practices that involve mentor programs between students and alumni or industrial affiliates. Specifically, we asked how can interdisciplinary efforts prepare students to work in contemporary global contexts and how do we find global partners to work with our students? We address these questions by sharing results of a pilot mentor program involving students in our technical communication programs and members of our Technical Communication Advisory Board (TCAB) and alumni.

Our mentors represent employees within global and interdisciplinary companies including science, medical, software, engineering, and other industries. Such engagement represents an innovative approach to interdisciplinary teaching, one that moves both students and workplace professionals to the center of academic practice. Industry professionals provide an intimate view of workplace trends and topics, making these accessible and relevant for students via industry-academia course projects, informational interviews, webinars, and onsite visits. In turn, our vision is that engagement with academia and students increases the effectiveness of industry professionals and their industries.

We began this mentor program because it was a strong request from advisory board members. We then asked students and learned that they were also enthusiastic about the idea. We gathered feedback about mentor and student roles and how to structure the program. In response, we provided structural parameters for the mentor program that included the expectation that each pair meet three times in a 15-week period, that they articulate goals together, and that they let us know how they decided to structure their mentor-mentee engagement. We launched the mentor program with a get-together event on campus. At which time, we shared program goals and mentor resources, and their engagement began. In this presentation, we shared results of a survey and informal interviews with participants in the program.

Interdisciplinarity through a mentor program can be seen as part of a community of practice that results from strategic interaction of students and industry professionals. In earlier research, Duin and Tham (2018) used Wenger’s (1998) three dimensions for establishing a community of practice—joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire—along with Kline and Barker’s (2012) model for academic/practitioner collaboration that suggests that “effective collaboration among the academic and practitioner communities will improve professionalism through better research, better education, and a more comprehensive body of knowledge” (p. 33). Kline and Barker emphasize that Community of Practice (COP) theory “strongly emphasizes the interactively constructed nature of engaging, belonging, and sharing tools” and “the three dimensions of community can help us to identify and understand the kinds of activities, engendered through membership in a community of practice, that lead to
We use this framework of community of practice to more carefully think through ways that mentor programs can prepare students for the kinds of interdisciplinary work they may do as professionals.

We closed our presentation by sharing results from our pilot study that provide insights regarding mentor programs and interdisciplinarity.

**References**


Entrepreneurial Communication in an Academic Makerspace

Deborah C. Andrews, University of Delaware

A growing trend on university campuses is the design and implementation of spaces—sometimes called “design studios” or “invention studios” or, more generally, “maker spaces”—that support project-oriented collaboration among students in engineering, science, art, and other disciplines.

Through an emphasis on making, these spaces also foster the face-to-face communication essential for community building and allow for the mess that accompanies innovative, iterative, and productive group problem-solving. Using the Design Studio of the Department of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Delaware as a research site, and theory and methods from both material culture studies and writing studies, colleagues in engineering, art and design, and I are looking at how—or whether—the physical environment of such a makerspace might indeed breed collaboration. I’m focusing in particular on identifying interdisciplinary collaborative communication practices emerging there, including performances and multimodal texts. The space supports problem-based learning, which theorizes that students learn best when they question and explain things with each other. Moreover, as the technical capacities once taught as core engineering skills are increasingly automated into the machinery itself, professional preparation requires increased attention to interpersonal skills and higher-order reasoning.

In addition to a machine shop and specialized lab equipment, as well as 3-D printers for easy prototyping, the makerspace offers devices for vertical and open display of writing, a key element of collaborative communication, including chalkboards as well as movable panels on wheels. What’s written on the boards establishes the team’s common ground; the team sees each other’s work as they fulfill mutual responsibilities to the project, building trust and gathering momentum and motivation. An abundance of computers, including those with large and multiple screens for group use, augment the laptops and smart phones students bring individually. Visible storage of prototypes and examples of finished projects provide inspiration and help students carry work forward across semesters. Tables and chairs, most on wheels or otherwise easy to reconfigure, as well as couches, encourage students to teach each other informally. The setting further allows teams to practice performing their expertise for audiences beyond the team, especially ones that don’t share the same context, challenging each other’s assumptions and logic. These activities require students to develop a language for talking-about-what-they-are-talking-about, that is, the meta-cognitive abilities to explain the larger context of how pieces of the project fit together.

As students advance through a series of project-based tasks in their undergraduate years, they take on greater responsibility for solving not only given, “tame,” problems but also for identifying new problems and opportunities that cross borders in the greater global marketplace. Makerspaces ultimately support entrepreneurship as students learn to develop, iterate, and refine their design and business concepts and pitch their work to a range of
audiences, including fellow engineers, potential business partners and investors, and the general public. This presentation suggested some of the challenges and dimensions of new communication practices emerging in makerspaces.
A Round Table for Global TC Educators

Xiaoli Li, University of Dayton
Tharon Howard, Clemson University
Jason Tham, Texas Tech University
Sean Williams, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs

The CPTSC's International Committee is "charged with working to facilitate relationships internationally around programs and research in technical, professional, and scientific communication." One of the CPTSC conference theme on research was "how do we find out and develop collaborations with global partners for our research."

On behalf of the international committee, we proposed to host a TC educators’ roundtable at the 2019 CPTSC conference by inviting all CPTSC members to share and celebrate their international efforts in teaching, researching, and serving the field of technical communication.

About 20 years ago, CPTSC started the tradition of hosting a roundtable at joint conferences outside the US. At the joint conference at University of Limerick four years ago, participants discussed four questions as you can see in the report from the CPTSC website. It was time we shared what we have done in the last two to three years by addressing areas of concern related to internationalizing our TC programs.

Here is a list of activities CPTSC International Committee members and other TC colleagues have accomplished or are engaged in.

- Organizing an international conference
- Presenting at a TC related conference outside the US
- Conducting TC workshops outside the US
- Teaching a class outside the US
- Conducting research outside the US (Fulbright, sabbatical, visiting or adjunct professorship at universities outside the US)
- Consulting a global company, business, or organization
- Teaching a short-term (1-6 weeks) faculty-led study abroad program
- Collaborating with other faculty outside the US in research and teaching
- Completing an international internship
- Building joint programs
- Hosting visiting scholars and non-degree-seeking students in our programs

Our ultimate goal is to create a bibliography or specific how-to for building international pedagogical partnerships. This resource would be helpful for programs in the US for recruiting students outside the US, hosting international visitors, helping students locate global internship and employment, and helping faculty members find partners to collaborate with outside the US for teaching, research, and consulting.

At this roundtable, I hoped to achieve these objectives:

- Collect more direct and specific information about what kind of research interests people
- Address the common concerns and challenges we often encounter
- Introduce the key global contact individuals and partners
• Discuss how to promote the international research and teaching, establish more partnership, and enhance the collaboration

Here is a list of our long-term partners who were involved in this discussion via Zoom.

From Europe

• TEKOM /Germany (Michael Fritz)
• University of Twente

From China

• Beijing: Gao Zhijun, Zhang Yong
• Xian: Wu Dan, Wang Xiling
• Nanjing: Guo Qing, Yu Yunye, Gao Jian
• Shanghai: Li Mei, Xie Min
• Guangzhou: Li Ruilin, Hu Zhengmao
• Chongqing: Wang Shunyu, Xi Zhongen
Just Trust Me: U.S. Collaborations with Three Chinese Universities

Jill Morris, Frostburg State University
Karla Saari Kitalong, Michigan Technological University
Marcy Bauman, Lansing Community College

Case studies in administration across disciplinary, cultural, and national boundaries

Jill Morris

Frostburg State University’s College of Business (CoB) began a partnership with the Hunan University of Commerce (HUC) in Changsha, the capital of the Hunan Province. The program would have finance students attending a 2-2 or 3-1 program and earn a degree from both institutions, requiring professors from multiple majors to teach courses on the HUC campus in addition to students visiting the US. Jill Morris presented two case studies (occurring during cohort one and two) as instructional dialogues in how American university administrators can best respond to faculty and curricular needs in similar programs. When the program began, Morris had no supervisor (not in the US, not in China) for the course being taught, which led to the course being potentially vulnerable to influence from other stakeholders—especially problematic for an English course in a CoB program. The second case study discussed how, even with bilingual administration on the part of both universities, errors in translation can cause major difficulties for instructors—especially adjuncts—and why every program involved in a partnership should have at least a part-time administrator assigned to assisting faculty.

Negotiating #allthethings: Is it what we think it is or something completely different?

Karla Saari Kitalong

At a STEM-oriented university, collaborations with Chinese universities are relatively common, typically housed in STEM departments, and often arranged by Chinese faculty with ties to their native land. Faculty from US universities (e.g. Han Yu, Daniel Ding, Carol Barnum and colleagues, Xiaoye You, and many others), who have researched or enacted writing instruction in China have usually done so in the context of an English major. However, several years ago, a company that specializes in brokering collaborations between US and Chinese universities proposed out of the blue that our humanities department enter into a collaboration with Yunnan University, a comprehensive university in Southwest China, specifically to offer technical communication instruction to students in an undergraduate major in visual design. My chair was intrigued by the unique opportunity to offer one of our BA degrees in China, and, I will say, more than a little flattered that our department was selected. Indeed, the BA in technical communication fits in well and potentially adds value to Yunnan University’s Visual Design major. Despite the apparent curricular compatibility, however, administrative challenges have emerged in at least three areas—curricular, pedagogical, and human. Karla Saari Kitalong outlined some of these challenges from the perspective of the program administrator.

Just believe me: Establishing cross-language and cross-disciplinary credibility

Marcy Bauman

Working with Chinese PhD students at the Harbin Institute of Technology is both rewarding and frustrating. At this C9 (China’s “Ivy League”) institution, PhD candidates must have three papers in English accepted for publication in order to meet the requirements for graduation, yet most have
received absolutely no training in academic writing or Western citation practices prior to their PhD programs. In response, the university devised a one-week seminar designed to fill in the gaps. Students attend lectures and receive one-on-one feedback on their works in progress. Student writing problems run the gamut from garden-variety organizational issues (“you need to contextualize your research”), quoting and paraphrasing issues, to appropriately using tables and figures, in addition to translation issues. As the sole native English speaker in this seminar, I have had to establish credibility both as a person who can talk “science” to hard scientists, and whose advice regarding organization and content is valuable despite my non-science background.

References


Building Interdisciplinary Research Partnerships with Industry Practitioners: A Call to Action

Jack T. Labriola, Kennesaw State University
Sheryl Ruszkiewicz, Oakland University
Suzan Flanagan, East Carolina University
David Young, Georgia Tech University

Constant innovations to technical communication practices mean that our discipline must produce more research with industry practitioners. Our answer to the question of how do we find, build, and maintain interdisciplinary research partnerships and projects is thus to collaborate with technical communication practitioners working in sub-fields such as technical writing, content strategy, UX, and non-profit communication, sub-fields that are most likely to employ students of our programs (Albers, 2016; Andersen & Hackos, 2018; Batova & Andersen, 2017; Bridgeford & St.Amant, 2015; Brumberger & Lauer, 2015; Getto & Labriola 2016). Based on this research and our own experiences working with industry practitioners, we argue that there is much to be learned from the different ways that academics and practitioners build knowledge. Only together can we unify academic and industry priorities to help shape programs that meets everyone’s needs for professionalization and collaboration.

Building the plane while flying it: Interdisciplinary UX research projects within the university and beyond

Guiseppe Getto

User experience design (UX) provides a variety of opportunities for interdisciplinary research and teaching. Based on several projects working to improve the usability, interface design, and information architecture of a variety of applications, Guiseppe Getto presented a workflow for finding, developing, and translating UX knowledge-making for a variety of audiences, including technical communication students looking to launch careers.

New tools in the toolkit: Building hard skill sets in the technical communication classroom through industry partnerships

Jack T. Labriola

Jack T. Labriola presented the benefits of developing educational partnerships with organizations that provide tools used by industry practitioners, including usability testing tools, prototyping tools, and documentation management tools. Such partnerships enable students to develop hard skills that can translate to jobs in UX, content strategy, and technical writing. Furthermore, they ease the burden of instructors who may not be trained in the tools themselves.

Understanding your fellow passengers: Using storytelling to bridge knowledge between interdisciplinary research partners

Sheryl Ruszkiewicz

Interdisciplinary research partnerships are effective in addressing complex issues. However, building and maintaining such collaborations can be challenging. Sheryl Ruszkiewicz presented a storytelling approach for strengthening collaborations that focuses on learning from differences, building empathy, making sense of collaborators’ experience, and unifying interdisciplinary gaps—all necessary tools to teach technical communication students.
Imagineering the ride: A model for interdisciplinary engagement

Suzan Flanagan

The classroom, which often comprises students from multiple disciplines, provides many opportunities to address the tensions between academics’ and practitioners’ knowledge-building practices. Suzan Flanagan presented a model to help technical communication students navigate disciplinary boundaries while building interdisciplinary collaborations that leverage their developing skills and expertise within their chosen fields.

Engineering fandom: Savonius wind turbines as boundary object for STEM, technical communication, and community partnerships

David Young

David Young presented findings from a piloted course that used Savonius wind turbines to introduce engineering students to local organizations advocating for alternative energy technologies. Designing information products for these turbines allowed engineering students to explore the implications these turbines have on communities engaging with alternative energy. By building courses around specific technologies, we orient students to nuanced technical communication practices as natural aspects of both information translation and technological development.

References


More than Competent: State of the Field Since Cargile Cook’s "Layered Literacies"

Liz Hutter, University of Dayton
Halcyon M. Lawrence, Towson University

Kelli Cargile Cook’s “Layered Literacies: A Theoretical Frame for Technical Communication Pedagogy” (2002) provoked examination of how technical communication skills and knowledge are not only defined but also integrated into courses or curricula. Since Cargile Cook’s publication, on the one hand, we have witnessed changes in workplace trends—global, technological, and cultural (Dusenberry, Hutter & Robinson, 2015). With these changes, a number of new literacies in the field have also been identified and/or emerged, for example, visual literacy (Portewig, 2004), global literacy (Starke-Meyerring, 2005), legal literacy (Hannah, 2011), embodied literacy (Swacha, 2018), and sonic literacy (Lawrence, 2019). On the other hand, while we can identify and examine these new literacies on an individual or situational basis, a field-wide discussion and analysis of these new literacies is generally absent or compartmentalized.

Our field has traditionally identified “core” technical communication competencies by first looking toward expectations of what the workplace requires in its employees (e.g., Rainey, Turner & Dayton, 2005; Henschel & Melonçon, 2014; Stanton, 2017). Given recent ethical, legal, and moral concerns raised by unregulated corporate practices, it is evident our students require more than conventional workplace competencies, such as those communicated through workplace artifacts (e.g., job ads & job descriptions). The emergence of new and urgent contexts within and beyond the workplace have prompted a call from within the field for our students to think critically about how power and accessibility impact communication behaviors and practices (Jones, 2016; Melonçon, 2017). Given these calls, we presented results from a field-wide, inductive study that looks to the “wisdom of the hive” to describe their classroom pedagogies and by extension identify what critical literacies in current technical communication are being developed.

References


Designing, Implementing, and Troubleshooting Interdisciplinary Professional and Technical Writing Courses

Chris McCracken, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
Marie Moeller, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
Lindsay Steiner, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Interdisciplinary courses come with both benefits and challenges for professional and technical writing instructors. This panel described the creation and revision of courses in our Professional and Technical Writing minor that have been designed with an interdisciplinary focus. The presenters offered attendees sample course models (including grant writing, scientific writing, and content writing and strategy) to help them develop new courses or improve existing interdisciplinary curricula. The panel also discussed strategies for addressing challenges associated with these interdisciplinary courses, specifically those related to implementing collaborative projects, working with community clients, and maintaining disciplinary autonomy and communicating disciplinary expertise.

Chris McCracken discussed the development and implementation of two courses—“Writing in the Sciences” and “Rhetoric, Health, and Medicine.” Both courses involve interdisciplinary collaborations with faculty and community stakeholders, and both respond to institutional initiatives to promote interdisciplinarity across the university. McCracken detailed how these courses evolved in response to some of the tensions that tend to shape interdisciplinary endeavors.

Marie Moeller discussed the creation of a grant writing course as a response to interdisciplinary demand and community needs. This course involves a semester-long collaborative client service project where students research and write a grant proposal for a local nonprofit organization. Moeller explained how the course was inspired by an interdisciplinary community research partnership. This presentation offered attendees strategies for teaching collaborative projects in an interdisciplinary professional and technical writing course. Moeller also addressed some of the challenges associated with teaching grant writing and professional and technical writing in an English department.

Lindsay Steiner discussed the creation and implementation of a course called Digital Content Writing, Management, and Experience Design. This course is one of three required courses in the new Digital Media Studies and Design minor at the Steiner’s institution, an interdisciplinary minor with courses from Art, Communication Studies, and English. Steiner described the course-embedded client service project designed to connect students with a community organization and to provide an authentic context within which students explore and practice the course content. This presentation also discussed challenges related to asserting and managing disciplinary expertise within and external to Steiner’s home department.
Co-Constructing Knowledge with Multi-Disciplinary Students: Collaboration and Creativity in TPC Courses and Alternative Sites

Caitlin Ray, University of Louisville
Christopher Scheidler, University of Louisville
Christopher Stuck, University of Louisville
Andrea Olinger, University of Louisville

Navigating multi-major technical and professional communication (TPC) courses with students from many disciplines poses challenges (Read & Michaud, 2015) but also encourages collaboration and creativity in teaching styles and assignments. Those working in writing centers or teaching multi-discipline graduate-level writing courses must also find ways to leverage the multidisciplinary nature of the interactions. In this panel presentation, two presenters first discussed strategies for teaching multi-major TPC courses through the arts and humanities (specifically, scenario-based projects based in theatre studies and critical-discourse and multimodality). Second, two presenters discussed ways multi-discipline interactions can be inherently pedagogical (Tarabochia, 2017), exploring how a health science campus writing center and graduate-level writing course teach discipline-specific writing through collaborative engagement. Our approaches affirm the value of co-constructing and reflecting upon knowledge outside of a writer’s immediate field and motivating writers to approach writing as a purposeful communicative act.

Scene work in multi-major professional writing classes: Using scenarios for success
Caitlin Ray

Professional writing textbooks and pedagogical scholarship use “real life” workplace scenarios to teach concepts like client-based interactions and genre. However, instructors of multi-major professional writing classes are not necessarily given guidance on how to successfully use scenarios with students who bring varied skills and writing goals to class. Here, Ray discussed how their background in theatre-based games informs scenario-based professional writing, provided guidance on creative approaches to such writing assignments, and ended with a handout of sample assignments for multi-major professional writing courses.

Expert exchanges and public facing communication
Christopher Scheidler

Participation in technical fields requires specific disciplinary expertise. Such disciplinary expertise, nevertheless, is often inadequate for facilitating transdisciplinary communication and, at times, a hindrance for public communication. In a multidisciplinary TPC course, the variety of disciplines is an important resource for framing the transdisciplinary and public-facing writing of technical workers and, importantly, technical communicators. Scheidler presented an assignment sequence that guides students from identifying epistemological practices of their discipline, to communicating across varied technical fields, and, finally, presenting infographics to lay-publics.

Showing your work: Collaboration and co-construction in a science writing center
Christopher Stuck
Writers new to science- and health-focused writing centers often expect the consultant to simply fix their writing with little interaction between writer and consultant. However, a primary affordance of such a transdisciplinary space is to make the negotiation process inherent to writing projects explicit. Stuck used their experience working with graduate students and faculty on a health science campus to examine the ways in which working together through writing as a purposeful, functional act, rather than an opaque produce, demystifies co-construction of meaning.

**Multidisciplinary interactions in a graduate writing course: Promise and perils**

*Andrea Olinger*

Analyzing data from a multi-disciplinary graduate writing course, Olinger explored how interacting with students from different disciplines shapes students’ writing-related beliefs in their own discipline. Olinger reviewed scholarship on how exposure to writing in different fields refines awareness of practices in one’s own field. Then, she describes the value of these interactions—discovering these practices are not universal—and some limitations—e.g., developing reified notions. Olinger concludes with ways multi-discipline TPC instructors can avoid such limitations and help students develop more nuanced notions of writing in their field.

**References**


Collaborating Internationally to Build Digital Literacy
Learning through TPC Instruction

Ann Hill Duin, University of Minnesota
Isabel Pedersen and Sharon Caldwell, Ontario Tech University
Danielle Stambler, University of Minnesota
Jason Tham, Texas Tech University
Katlynne Davis, University of Minnesota

Emerging technologies have been broadly and rapidly embraced due to their promise of increased efficiency and the allure of personalized data. Since college-educated people are huge consumers of digital products, it is imperative to foster student development and understanding of digital literacy. Based on an extensive review of documents related to digital technologies and literacy, Peter Stordy (2013) articulates literacy as “the abilities a person or social group draws upon when interacting with digital technologies to derive or produce meaning, and the social, learning and work-related practices that these abilities are applied to.” An innovative means for fostering digital literacy is students’ examination and/or curation of artifacts on emerging technologies. This panel presented reflections on an international collaboration between researchers at the University of Minnesota and Ontario Tech University. Our collaboration involved developing and implementing instructional units in multiple classes of undergraduate and graduate technical communication students at the University of Minnesota, in which students worked to curate collections for the international repository, the Fabric of Digital Life (‘Fabric’) research archive (https://fabricofdigitallife.com/). In particular, this presentation sought to highlight what we have learned as we developed this international collaborative research and teaching project.

Fostering digital literacy: Student curation in the Fabric of Digital Life

Ann Hill Duin discussed our collaborative instructional goals and the Fabric research archive. Fabric concentrates on platforms of human-computer interaction to reveal the multiple ways that embodied technologies emerge in society. As students examine and/or curate artifacts, they use instructions that guide them in learning a common language of classification to ground their understanding of technical emergence. Here a broader goal is to reveal rhetorical motivations across interdisciplinary discourses in order to study sociotechnical tradeoffs among technical innovations (Iliadis & Pedersen, 2018).

On the fabric end: Inviting and developing collaborative projects

Isabel Pedersen and Sharon Caldwell discussed opportunities and challenges in expanding Fabric collaborations beyond the Ontario Tech University and into intra-institutional and international spaces. Fabric is constantly evolving, and each new approach with collaborators has a ripple of ideological implications and technological challenges. Innovation and change means working with multiple stakeholders and experts on the Fabric end, and considering ramifications of each new project in the broader scope of Fabric’s growth as a research archive.

Using fabric in the classroom: Results from the spring 2019 pilot

Danielle Stambler and Jason Tham presented on our collaborative development of instructional units ranging from student use of the collections as a springboard for discussing their digital literacy experiences to more extensive involvement in curation of new collections related to emerging
technologies and technical communication practices. We shared results from our uses of Fabric during Spring 2019 and instructor reflections on collaboration with Fabric from the University of Minnesota perspective.

**To fall 2019 and beyond: Expanding the project and bringing in new collaborators**

Katlynne Davis discussed the experience of joining the collaboration after the initial phase, and discussed the projects underway in Fall 2019. We discussed strategies we employed as we navigated the challenges of collaboratively developing new instructional materials at a distance, lessons learned and changes made as we moved the project from initial stages into broader implementation, and our plans for inviting additional participating instructors as we expand the project into full-scale data collection and analysis.

**References**


Programmatic Collaboration on a STEM Campus

Kristine Swenson, Missouri University of Science and Technology
Sarah Hercul, Missouri University of Science and Technology
Carleigh Davis, Missouri University of Science and Technology

This panel explored the collaborative design and implementation of an interdisciplinary 2000-level course intended to act as a foundational, introductory course for new majors in the English and technical communication department at our university. This year, our university experienced a drastic decline in enrollment; this decline, coupled with the existing dominance of STEM programs on our campus, has led our department to consider opportunities for rethinking our undergraduate degrees in English (B.A.) and technical communication (B.S.). As part of this process, faculty members with expertise in literature, linguistics, creative writing, and technical communication have come together to design and co-teach a course that we are conceiving as an introduction to a more interdisciplinary major that encompasses all these areas of study. Our goal for the course is to focus on common skill sets necessary for students who plan to pursue study in any combination of the above specialties, as well as allow students to explore and begin to articulate the similarities, differences, and practical applications of all these fields of study.

Kristine Swenson began by situating the course within our university and program contexts, explaining past and present goals of this course, the student population the course serves, and our course objectives. Swenson also addressed the previous literary focus of the course, and the elements of literary analysis that were included in our current approach.

Sarah Hercul discussed the linguistic applications of the class, explaining what features of a beginning education in linguistic study we felt were important to include, and how we situate those elements to meet the broader, interdisciplinary goals of the class.

Carleigh Davis discussed the technical communication applications of the class, focusing on the inclusion of rhetorically situated writing, basic document design, and contextually appropriate adherence to style guides, and the relationship of these skills to the ethical and culturally rich understandings of texts and contexts that are integral to any study of English literature and language.
CPTSC Annual Business Meeting Minutes

10:35 to 11:35 on October 12, 2019 at West Chester University

1. **2018 minutes were reviewed and approved.**

2. **GSC proposal** (Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch, Katelynne Davis, and Danielle Stambler)
   Originally, the idea of creating a CPTSC-Graduate Organization that was somewhat separate from CPTSC was discussed, but it is now proposed as a standing committee within CPTSC.

   Proposed activities include items such as graduate student workshop/meeting, mentorship opportunities, peer-editing opportunities, maintaining a virtual presence on social media, and meeting to discuss ideas for ATTW and SIGDOC (based on a survey to gauge student interest).

   All graduate students who are CPTSC members are welcome to join the committee. Three co-chairs (Veronica Joiner, Katelynne Davis, and Danielle Stambler) will lead the committee. They will connect with Dawn Armfield to discuss promoting the committee on the CPTSC website.

3. **2020 Conference (Erin Friess)**
   Next year, the University of North Texas will be hosting CPTSC in Denton, TX from Oct. 1 to 3, 2020. We are co-locating with SIGDOC who will hold their conference immediately after CPTSC.

4. **2021 conference site proposals**
   Universities that are interested in hosting CPTSC in 2021 can submit proposals now (CFP is posted on CPTSC website). Colorado Springs and Missouri State have expressed interest.

5. **Treasurer’s report (Joanna Schreiber)**
   Last year (2018), our balance was around $88,059.17. Current (2019) balance on hand is $108,673.45.

   Membership as of October 12, 2019 is 168.

6. **Programmatic Perspectives (Susan Popham)**
   Lora Arduser is beginning as the transitional co-editor for Programmatic Perspectives. Joanna Schreiber is stepping down as the book review editor, and Russell Kirkscy has expressed interest in the position.

   The editors are exploring the possibility of getting a submissions management system, and they are soliciting reviewers.

   They are also looking at expanding their scope to include pedagogical pieces and commentaries (the last few issues have been focused on research). Tammy Rice-Bailey, Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch, and Teena Carnegie are serving on a subcommittee for assisting Programmatic Perspectives.

7. **Strategic Planning (Teena Carnegie, Cori Renguette, and Joanna Schreiber)**
   The Executive Committee is looking for ways to better serve our membership by adding value.
We spent five minutes brainstorming ideas, and we are also sending a Qualtrics survey to solicit feedback.

Ideas included:

- providing travel scholarships for graduate students
- giving mentorships
- maintaining a database of TPC programs in the country
- hiring a graduate assistant to help Dawn Armfield maintain our website

8. **Proceedings (Teena Carnegie)**
   All conference Proceedings are online since 1974 except for 1976 and 2013. Currently, the proposals become abstracts, which will be sent back to the authors for review and feedback before they are published online. The 2019 Proceedings will be available before the next conference.

   Teena encouraged authors to turn their conference presentations into full-length articles for Programmatic Perspectives

9. **Other Topics:**
   External Relations Committee: Dan Kenzie reported that the committee is putting out a survey to find out how and why programs develop relationships with industry and community.

10. **Adjournment.**