

Beyond the Water Cooler

Creating a Scholarly Publication Dedicated to Programmatic Issues in Technical and Scientific Communication

A Proposal
for a CPTSC Journal

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Submitted by

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Abstract: This document proposes that the Council of Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC) create a new academic journal to provide a venue where issues relevant to the creation and administration of academic programs can be explored. In this proposal, we include an overview of the proposed journal, an analysis of recent scholarly discussion of programmatic issues, and a description of the journal's content and publication logistics.

A CONSPICUOUS GAP

Even with such notable publications as *Technical Writing: Theory and Practice* (Fearing & Sparrow, 1989), *Foundations for Teaching Technical Communication: Theory, Practice, and Program Design* (Staples & Ornatowski, 1997), and *Computers and Technical Communication* (Selber, 1997), a significant gap in discussions about programmatic topics remains, as each of these important edited collections devotes only a few chapters to program direction and development.

Equally noticeable is the lack of programmatic discussions in technical and scientific communication (TSC) and related journals, despite the increase of programs during the last 25 years. Whereas some articles have described curriculum issues from a program perspective (e.g., Selber and Johnson-Eilola, 2001; Selber, 2004), and some articles and chapters have discussed issues that directly affect programmatic issues, most articles in our field seem to focus on teaching methods such as service-learning (e.g., Matthews & Zimmerman, 1999), activity theory (e.g., Spinuzzi 1996), historical studies (e.g. Brockman, 2002; Tebeaux, 1997) or specific topics like engineering writing (e.g. Winsor, 1996). Although important to program administrators, these scholarly works do not directly facilitate or document our programmatic work. No one journal in Technical Communication or in related disciplines exists solely for discussions about programmatic issues. Even *Writing Program Administration: Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators*, the lone journal devoted to programmatic issues in writing studies, does not include any topics, issues, or problems related to technical communication. On the WPA journal website (<http://wpacouncil.org/journal/index.html>), links to related Rhetoric and Composition journals conspicuously exclude any journals related to technical communication even though many technical communication scholars have rhetoric and/or composition backgrounds. And although the *Bulletin*, a publication associated with the Association of Departments of English, published frequently about Technical Communication in the 1980s, those articles have ceased in recent years. Whether this absence is due to a lack of article submissions or a conscious decision on the part of the editorial decision-making process, the outcome is the same.

PROGRAMMATIC ISSUES, TOPICS, AND PROBLEMS

Although several scholarly venues offer spaces where programmatic issues relevant to TSC might be explored, the available literature seems disproportionately small given the significance of administration to the professional responsibilities of community members. A significant percentage of faculty postings connected to TSC academic appointments list administrative work among the expectations and responsibilities of the position (70% of the positions listed on CPTSC.org in 2004, 80% in 2005, 57% in 2006) As technical communication program directors face challenges as diverse as shrinking budgets, legislative mandates to demonstrate accountability, and the effects of a changing global marketplace on student job placement rates, the current supply of helpful articles is insufficient.

Only in the important area of assessment does the volume of articles aimed at technical communication program administrators seem more adequate and timely, with many publications of general interest to faculty (e.g., Huot, 2002; Slevin, 2001). Articles that directly address technical communication program assessment are published primarily in technical communication journals (Allen, 2004; Carter, Anson, & Miller, 2003; Cargile Cook; Eubanks & Abbott, 2003; Johnson, 2006; White, 2001); this already impressive lineup includes an upcoming *TCQ* special issue on program review and assessment edited by Kirk St. Amant and Cynthia Nahrwold (November 2007).

Other topics of interest to technical communication program administration, some of which have been addressed in publications of potential interest to program administrators, include curriculum and program design (Allen and Benninghoff, 2004; Johnson-Eilola & Selber, 2001; Porter, Sullivan, Blythe, Grabill, and Miles, 2000); student job placement (Rude & Cargile Cook, 2004); corporate and community

alliances (Abbott, 2004; Guzy & Sullivan, 2004; Hansen, 2004; Mehlenbacher & Dicks, 2004); and certification (Rainey & Turner, 2004). Technical communication has always had at least a *de facto* role in the writing across the curriculum movement, so the literature that informs and advances that field is of at least passing relevance to technical communication (Johnson-Sheehan & Paine, 2004; Young, 2003; McLeod & Maimon, 2000; Parks & Goldblatt, 2000). And historical accounts (e.g., Cunningham, 2004) are always helpful in situating the current state of the field within a sustained context.

In short, the few relevant articles that have been published are scattered among several journals (primarily *TCQ*, *JBTC*, *CCC*, and *College English*), edited collections, and electronic forums such as the WAC Clearinghouse. Moreover, the mission statements for these journals lack specific reference to programmatic issues in TSC (see Appendix B). The fact remains that in the technical communication discipline, most discussions about programmatic issues seem to take place on listservs, in hallways, and, of course, at the annual meeting of the CPTSC. Juxtaposing this dearth of sustained publication in technical communication program administration against the growth of CPTSC and the importance of the annual conference to the development and sustainability of the community, we clearly see that the time is right to launch a journal to help build and sustain this vibrant community and facilitate the sharing of research, ideas, and information.

A CPTSC JOURNAL

The annual meeting of the CPTSC provides an excellent connection for this enterprise; creating a peer-reviewed academic journal is timely and consistent with the mission of the CPTSC:

The primary purposes of the organization shall be to (1) promote programs in technical and scientific communication, (2) promote research in technical and scientific communication, (3) develop opportunities for the exchange of ideas and information concerning programs, research, and career opportunities, (4) assist in the development and evaluation of new programs in technical and scientific communication, if requested, and (5) promote exchange of information between this organization and interested parties. Said organization is organized exclusively for educational purposes.

The CPTSC mission represents an important step toward recognizing the emerging significance of programmatic activities and scholarship in the technical communication community. Given CPTSC's mission and focus, creating a journal as part of its organizational structure seems not only appropriate but also necessary given the lack of scholarly venues for specific programmatic topics and the situation of many program directors as lone personnel struggling with programmatic issues in Technical Communication.

We propose that the CPTSC launch a journal available on the World Wide Web as a vehicle to promote discussion, research, and opportunities concerning technical communication program administration. This multi-purpose journal would simultaneously serve the following purposes:

Promote research. Most program directors conduct unsponsored research as a regular part of their work. Such research, which Christine Hult (1997) calls the "scholarship of administration," would be of interest to others in the field. Moreover, the Council sponsors annual research projects, the results of which are presented at the annual meeting. At present, no CPTSC or other venue is available for further promoting that work. The Journal could provide such a forum.

Promote programs. The Journal would provide a space to share relevant information about academic programs. Although the STC and ATTW both provide listings of academic programs, neither offers program directors the opportunity to provide significant detail or analysis.

Promote exchange, program development and evaluation, and communication with other parties. The Journal would meet these goals by providing a space where such issues are both significant and emphasized. Given a space where scholastic discussions of such issues are welcome, the community will take advantage of that opportunity.

Although the annual meeting offers the membership a valuable site for exchange, the structure of the venue limits the nature and complexity of discussions. Rarely do participants choose to extend their work in the *Proceedings* that result from the meeting. And if they do, article-length revisions are generally not accepted (an issue discussed by the executive board on its listserv during February 2007). The Journal would offer a site where scholarly articles and well-developed reports on continuing work are not only welcome but encouraged.

The Journal would also welcome deeper examination of the theoretical implications of programmatic issues, thus recognizing the emerging significance of programmatic work as the scholarship of administration in the TSC community. Specific departments and special issues would guide contributors in the development of appropriate and useful materials, and support the activities of developing professionals by providing a space where new and aspiring members of the professoriate submit their work for publication and recognizing emerging scholarship by publishing relevant dissertation abstracts. In short, the Journal will reflect and extend the roundtable format and collegiality of the annual meeting of the CPTSC.

CPTSC JOURNAL SPECIFICS

As noted previously, the Journal will be devoted to issues and problems associated with programmatic issues in Technical and Scientific Communication.

Content

Each issue of the Journal will include several content areas:

Scholarly articles (3–5) and book reviews. The articles and book reviews will focus on various programmatic issues from both theoretic and practical perspectives. During the first year, specific leaders in the field will be invited to submit articles that identify and discuss gaps in scholarship. The Journal will publish general issues for the second and third years after which special issues may be solicited.

Special/topical columns. The columns will provide a forum for new discussions or continue discussions begun at the annual meeting. Suggested columns include a program directors' column, a professional development column, and an editorial board column.

Program showcases. Program showcases written by program directors or others that highlight one program will be included in each issue. These brief articles can potentially help establish programs, infuse new life into existing programs, and suggest to new program directors how to conceptualize a successful program. No other journal in TSC or related fields offers such extended program descriptions.

The developing scholars' forum. The developing scholars' forum affords an opportunity in each issue for one graduate student to describe his or her dissertation research and explain its significance for technical communication program administration. These brief articles could benefit emerging scholars by jump-starting a publication agenda as well as benefit new and established programs by previewing the contributions of future colleagues.

News, announcements and calls for papers. The announcements and CFP columns are collegial spaces for discipline-related content.

Publication Format

The journal will be published in digital format on the World Wide Web in both HTML and PDF. Future issues of the journal could include more multimodal texts. Initially, the Journal will be housed at the University of Nebraska at Omaha to facilitate development and production. The website URL will include the journal's name.

Publication Procedure

The journal will be published twice a year (March 1 and September 1). Generally, the editorial process will involve three activities: review, copyediting, and production. Review Board members and the editors will review manuscripts to determine publication readiness. Manuscripts will be emailed to two members of the Review Board and to a third in the event of disparate opinions. Once a manuscript is accepted for publication, editors will copyedit and proofread. Finally, manuscripts will be produced for the online environment and published. Each of these activities will likely take 3–4 months each.

Review Board

Because the journal will be a refereed publication, the editors will be responsible for maintaining a sufficient body of community members for conducting blind reviews of submissions. Review board members will be asked to serve for at least three-year terms at a time.

Editorial Board

The editorial board of the Journal would be made up of the following community members.

1. The Editors of the Journal
2. The three Members at Large of the CPTSC
3. The Past President of the CPTSC (by invitation)

We recommend including the Members at Large for two reasons. First, these community members are already charged with maintaining the timeliness of the annual meeting, and therefore must be alert to the community's scholarly dynamics. Second, these members change, providing the editorial board with a regular renewal of vision and focus. For similar reasons, we would invite one or more past presidents (including Way-Past Presidents) to serve on the editorial board. At times, additional members may be solicited as reviewers based on their special interests or expertise.

Qualifications and Support

The three of us (Bridgeford, Kitalong, and Williamson) offer our services as the initial editorial team. We bring significant experience to this project, including service on the Executive Board of the CPTSC, experience editing and managing publications (journals, books, and web resources), and experience directing undergraduate and graduate programs.

Tracy Bridgeford is the current Chief Technology Officer for CPTSC and the Book Review Editor for TCQ. She has served as Associate Editor for *Computers and Composition* (1997–1999), guest edited (with Michael Moore) a special issue of TCQ on *Techne*, served as a reviewer for a special issue of TCQ on Civic Engagement, and currently serves as a reviewer for *Kairos*. With Karla Kitalong and Dickie Selfe, she edited *Innovative Approaches to Teaching Technical Communication*. At the University of Nebraska at Omaha, she created and directs a Graduate Certificate in Technical Communication.

Karla Saari Kitalong directs one of the largest writing programs in the country at the University of Central Florida in Orlando. A past member-at-large of the CPTSC executive board, she teaches in UCF's technical communication BA and MA programs and in the PhD program in Texts and Technology. Her research centers on visual rhetoric and documentation usability; forthcoming publications include an analysis and critique of photo manipulation, a discussion of media representations of online teachers, and a pedagogical article on information graphics.

Bill Williamson has served as Associate Editor for *Computers and Composition*, as Associate Editor for the *CCCC Bibliography of Composition and Rhetoric*, as Technology Officer for the CPTSC, has been involved in the CPTSC community since 1994, has served as a submissions reviewer for two academic journals and three edited collections, and has seventeen years of experience in academic administration at the university, college, department, and program levels.

Each of our institutions has offered support for this project: hosting the publication (UNO), providing a collaborative digital workspace (SVSU), and providing electronic publishing expertise (UCF). All three institutions offer collegial support and editorial staff support for the production process.

Appendix A: Bibliography of Programmatic Scholarship

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Appendix B: Mission Statements of Significant TSC Journals

Writing Program Administration Journal

WPA: Writing Program Administration publishes articles and essays concerning the organization, administration, practices, and aims of college and university writing programs. Possible topics include the education and support of writing teachers; the intellectual and administrative work of WPAs; the situation of writing programs, within both academic institutions and broader contexts; the programmatic implications of current theories, technologies, and research; relationships between WPAs and other administrators, between writing and other academic programs, and among high school, two-year, and four-year college writing programs; placement; assessment; and the professional status of WPAs.

Technical Communication Quarterly

Articles published in TCQ are both theoretical and practical. Practical articles have a sound basis in theory, while theoretical articles have some industrial or pedagogical application. Articles cover a range of topics that include ethics; dialogue between academicians and practitioners; educational connections between secondary, two-year colleges, undergraduate, and graduate; pedagogy; rhetoric; linguistics; business/industrial communication; organizational communication; intercultural communication; text design; graphics; audience analysis; electronic communication; and documentation issues as they pertain to technical communication.

Journal of Business and Technical Communication

The Journal of Business and Technical Communication keeps you informed about the latest communication practices, problems and trends in both business and academic settings or sectors. This important publication covers written, oral and electronic communication in all areas of business, science and government. Created over a decade ago to meet the growing demand for research and analysis in this expanding field, the Journal of Business and Technical Communication provides you with information you can use today. The journal covers topics of fundamental interest and key issues such as: · Managerial communication · Collaborative writing · Ethics of business communication · Technical writing pedagogy · Business-communication education · Gender differences in writing · International communication · Graphic design · Ethnography and corporate culture.

Varied, Comprehensive Scholarship

A valuable resource for educators, researchers, scholars, managers, technicians and practitioners, the Journal of Business and Technical Communication offers you a wide range of scholarship that probes current problems and methods, including: · Articles... essays present the latest - and often controversial - results of research in professional communication. · Approaches and Practices... short articles list instructional tips and industrial how-tos. · Commentaries... opinion pieces address issues of importance to the profession. · Book and Software Reviews... critical examinations cover the book and software market. · Comments and Responses... exchanges between readers and authors add insight to recent work. · Annual Index... alphabetical listings of authors and titles provide quick and easy reference to valuable information.

Journal of Technical Writing and Communication

The Journal of Technical Writing and Communication strives to meet the diverse communication needs of industry, management, government, and academia. For over thirty years, the Journal of Technical Writing and Communication has served as a major professional and scholarly Journal for practitioners and teachers of most functional forms of communication. Our purpose is to publish a thoroughly solid journal that performs as the needed bridge between academia and the world of practitioners. Our editors, board members, and authors bring their ideas from the classroom, the laboratory, and a variety of corporate and industrial settings to provide our readers with valuable, provocative, and successful methods, techniques, theory, and case studies.