

## On the Significance of *Programmatic Perspectives*

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**W**ith this, the first editorial offered by the Editors of *Programmatic Perspectives*, I seek fulfillment of two goals: to offer an observation on the significance of this moment and to discuss how we hope this publication will impact our professional community—that is, administrators of programs in professional, technical, and scientific communication.

The publication of the first issue of *Programmatic Perspectives* represents an important moment for our professional community. The journal's genesis is the culmination of a movement within the community, a response to a call to action. To our knowledge, Tracy Bridgeford, Karla Saari Kitalong, and I are the first to propose a journal for our professional community that specifically emphasizes the intellectual work of program administrators. But ours are merely three among the many voices during the previous decade that have called on the community to commit more energy to programmatic research.

At the 2004 annual meeting, Ann Brady, Robert R. Johnson, and Thomas Vosecky argued that theory and theory building ought to occupy important places in the design and delivery of professional, technical, and scientific communication programs. Theory implemented into curriculum content ensures intellectual rigor in programs. Theory integrated into the administrative process "positions us to ask probing questions: questions that could easily be displaced or forgotten when we get into the 'heat' of program implementation" (p. 83). During that same meeting, Steven T. Benninghoff asked participants to consider the way the professional community's power structures limit diversity and contribute to student struggles with the process of merging into professional cultures. Benninghoff suggested that colleagues need to think more and more rigorously about how

academic programs might be reconstructed to demystify and ameliorate for students the practices and power structures of professional culture. Arguments such as these signal the need to turn the critical eye our community typically reserves for other environments in academic workplaces and functions, to focus on understanding programmatic as well as pedagogical processes.

In 2005, at the next Council, theory and theorizing played a more prominent role, providing the focus for both the keynote presentation and the plenary session. Rachel Spilka's keynote address, "Technical Communication Research in Academic Programs: A Call for Action," suggested that theory's value among academics in our community has waned during the past two decades and that research, specifically, lacks the depth, engagement and rigor that characterized scholarly exchange in the 1980s. She argued that a weakened commitment to research, to theory building, would result in an erosion of authority among technical communicators. In contrast, Spilka urged listeners to commit to expanding offerings of research- and theory-driven courses at every level of academic programs, to anchoring programmatic and thus professional identity in the ability to critically seek understanding through disciplined research. Although her emphasis was on curriculum content, the impact she envisions is clearly on programs and local professional communities. Following Spilka's address, the plenary panel featured reports on "The State of Research in Technical Communication" by Ann M. Blakeslee and "Common Threads: What Programmatic Research Reveals about Technical and Scientific Communication" by Kelli Cargile Cook. Blakeslee and Cargile Cook examined research methods and foci in scholarly fora and academic programs, seeking a more concrete understanding of our community's research commitments and the impact intellectual engagements have on programmatic and professional identity. Their findings and recommendations echo Spilka's keynote. Cargile Cook specifically called for stronger commitments to research with an administrative emphasis on projects designed to help us understand what programs do, why they do it, if they are successful, and how local learning can contribute to the broader community.

At the 2006 Council, I met with Tracy Bridgeford and Karla Saari Kitalong to discuss the possibility of creating a new scholarly publication. We sensed an opportunity to bring together our aspirations for collaborating on an academic journal with our growing perception that the community ought to provide a forum such as *Programmatic Perspectives*. In presenting our case to the leadership of the CPTSC, we emphasized the gap in the community's scholarly discourse about administration and the community's lack of published examinations of programmatic workplaces:

The available literature seems disproportionately small given the significance of administration to the professional responsibilities of community members. . . . 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.

We argued further 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.

We hope that *Programmatic Perspectives* is a step along a path that will invigorate and sustain scholarly discussions of program administration in our community. Such study will earn us a deeper understanding of the intricacies, complexities, and diversity of challenges bound up in administration. The community of professional, technical, and scientific communicators has dedicated sufficient attention to the study of pedagogical and professional contexts to appreciate that communication is infinitely rich in scholastic possibility. This community has risen to the challenge of probing lines of inquiry that are both established and emerging. The community's growing body of knowledge is evidence of its curiosity, creativity, and tenacity.

Engaging the community in rigorous examination of and discourse about community values and practices is on its own a legitimate endeavor. However, other ends are served as well. The editors of *Programmatic Perspectives* see rich possibilities for the journal to serve as a site of enculturation for new administrators and developing professionals seeking an administrative career path. Our community's dedicated venues for collegial exchange are either too local or of limited access and durability. That is, graduate students might benefit from professional development opportunities at their institutions of study, as I and many others have. Although valuable, such experiences are local, perhaps making it difficult to translate strategies and practices to other sites, especially given that graduates do

not necessarily end up in programs like the ones from which they graduate. Such experiences might also emphasize other disciplinary values and missions (e.g., composition, communication, literature), thus making it difficult to transport the knowledge gained to the work of administering professional, technical, and scientific communication programs.

Those same students might embrace opportunities to attend annual meetings of the CPTSC. However, this forum has not fostered sustained, deep examination of the conceptual dimensions of administrative work. The annual meeting plays an important role in this process of enculturation. The format fosters collegiality and exchange, and thus fosters shared learning. However, the meetings are also for many the scholastic equivalent of an engaging hallway conversation. The Council inspires participants, restores energy, and works as a market for fresh ideas we can bring home to local tables. But we exchange ideas like perishable goods consumed in the short term—we don't do enough to make sure the folks who join the conversation later understand and appreciate the topics and perspectives that have already been probed. We must also acknowledge that doctoral studies are defined by deep scholastic investigation. The disconnect between the broader community values of collegiality and immediacy, and the disciplinary demand for creating a deep, critical body of knowledge, is difficult to reconcile.

CPTSC participants lament from time to time that new participants come to pose last year's questions. That is, we return to some questions and challenges year after year, but not necessarily with new insight. Our institutional memory is short. This is bothersome, but logical. We have not until now pursued the development of an enduring scholarly record of our discussions of program administration, one that will capture the rigor of the discourse in ways that our annual proceedings cannot adequately accomplish. Such a scholarly record will both smooth the transition of new members to the community and remind its returning members of the journey they have shared and to which they have contributed.

The editors of *Programmatic Perspectives* hope the journal will reinforce the notion that program administration is important work, both professionally and scholastically. Composition scholars recognized that administrative work is fertile ground for investigation. However, it was not always so. Program administration has emerged as a legitimate and important area of inquiry in composition after community struggles to make it so. Although the Council's existence is testament to the community's value for this professional work, *Programmatic Perspectives* will further legitimize the scholarly dimension of administration in professional, technical, and scientific communication.

As we continue the work of providing this forum, the community will have opportunity to refine and expand the scope of what it considers administrative responsibilities and challenges. Of course we invite authors to submit articles that focus directly on administrative work. However, we also invite authors to submit articles that contribute to the community's broader understanding of administrative and programmatic issues. That is, we invite you to examine and reflect upon the richest possible range of cultural forces and intellectual engagements that might inform and impact the ways administrators conceptualize and accomplish their work. This is a forum where the community can explore issues such as those it has framed and discussed in other forums. But this journal is also a forum in which the community can expand and redefine what it means to examine its work from programmatic perspectives.

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