

Mutual Mentoring

An Editorial Philosophy for a New Scholarly Journal

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Everyone reading this editorial today knows that *Programmatic Perspectives* publishes scholarship that theorizes and thereby promotes sustained attention to the disciplinary knowledge-making dimensions of technical communication program administration. The idea of mutual mentoring underlies the work that this journal does to help shape a new scholarly space.

For a while, Bill, Tracy, and I operated under the illusion that we had invented the term *mutual mentoring*, but in fact, it's not a new concept. Educators (Landay, 1998), educational administrators (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2009), youth mentors (Fritzberg & Alemayehu, 2004), enterprise computing specialists (Mader, 2008), and even members of religious orders (Rexing, 2002) characterize their work as mutual mentoring. Some people use the term *co-mentoring*.

Mutual mentoring eschews the labels *mentor* and *protégé* or (heaven help us) *mentee*, preferring instead a more egalitarian relationship that Sorcinelli and Yun term *mentor partners* (2009). For us, the term incorporates several ideas.

Collaboration

As Bill, Tracy, and I prepared to propose this journal to the CPTSC executive board, and later to the membership, we discussed, among other things, how we wanted to function as editors of a scholarly journal focused on the scholarship of administration. For us, mutual mentoring captures all the nuances of the collaborative endeavor in which we are engaged. The philosophy came about in part because the three of us have collaborated together since graduate school, and we have lived the truths embedded in well-worn clichés such as “Two—or in our case, three—heads are better than one,” and “Many hands make light work.” We work together, we disagree, we battle, and sometimes (well, OK, frequently) one of us even argues vociferously in favor of a particular punctuation option. This edito-

rial collaboration is downright messy, but in the end we like it because we mentor each other and thereby learn from each other.

Theory Development

Another impetus for mutual mentoring comes from the reality that theories and practices of program administration are by no means commonly understood or valued in the technical communication field. Thus, an emphasis on program administration appears to render the journal “suspect” in the eyes of potential authors, other scholars, department chairs, and tenure and promotion committees. In fact, it’s entirely possible that CPTSC’s annual conference format may discourage theoretical development. At the conference, as most readers know, the program’s panels are formed from clusters of related five-minute position papers followed by approximately 45 minutes to an hour of lively discussion. Although this long-standing format yields a high level of engagement and generates ideas that lead to immediate action and implementation, authors may need to do considerable development to achieve the depth of argument expected in an academic journal article. If a 20-minute conference presentation needs sustained attention, consider the labor involved in readying a five-minute position paper for scholarly publication.

Because many article ideas stem from CPTSC position papers, then, each time we receive an article for publication, we are afforded another opportunity to engage in mutual mentorship as we articulate with the author what is meant by the scholarship of program administration. We read each submission not to identify reasons to reject the piece because it doesn’t comply with the journal’s guidelines, but instead to identify ways in which the article contributes, or could potentially contribute, to defining, shaping, and furthering the work of technical communication program administrators. If its contributions are not obvious to us or to other readers, we usually issue a “revise and resubmit” rather than an outright rejection. Part of the reason is that we don’t have many submissions yet because the journal is new, so we don’t want to discourage potential authors. But, more significantly, we view every submission as an opportunity to explore with the author and the peer reviewers how a particular piece *could* contribute to and help shape the field given a little rethinking and rewriting.

Relationships with Authors

A conventional mentoring approach would position us—the editors of the journal—as the experienced “insiders,” explaining to potential authors how they should revise to meet a set of well-established standards. The mutual mentor-

ship role, however, leads us to consider with the author how readers might respond to the piece. Because we are teachers and scholars as well as program administrators, we know that readers are busy administrators of various types of technical communication programs—bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree-granting programs, undergraduate minors, and graduate and undergraduate certificate programs. These readers depend on the author's mentorship as well as ours to help them situate claims within an intelligible, relevant, and thoroughly reviewed conversation; clearly explain the theory and methods employed; distill results and/or conclusions; and, perhaps most importantly, help readers visualize how the ideas set forth in the article could be applied in their programs. This is not the job of a single "insider," but of the community at large, which, as the editors of this journal, we represent.

The most visible and far-reaching mutual mentorship comes, then, in our interactions with authors through the editing process, where the power of naming is also illustrated. When we began articulating how the journal would look and feel, we originally thought that we would showcase particular articles by graduate students and early career faculty members. We called these highlighted articles "Emerging Scholars" pieces. But as we reflected on the process, through the mentorship of Laurence José, associate editor, Michigan Tech, we came to believe that we shouldn't single out early career professionals' work from that of more experienced colleagues. Besides the worry that we might be conveying a condescending attitude toward these colleagues, it has become increasingly clear that everyone associated with *Programmatic Perspectives*—authors, editors, reviewers, sponsors like Michigan Tech, Saginaw Valley State University, and the University of Nebraska at Omaha, as well as the CPTSC executive committee and the membership at large—all of us are mutually engaged in the important enterprise of forming and shaping a scholarly community. In this regard, early career scholars' ideas may be fresh and new, even if their writing needs work. On the other hand, some experienced scholars and program administrators might be more sophisticated writers (or not), but may see their work as primarily functional, as an activity separate from theory and scholarship.

By including in our editorial philosophy a willingness to give writers the opportunity to develop their ideas fully, then, we incorporate them into the mutual mentoring process. Although we acknowledge that not every article or idea is suitable for publication in *Programmatic Perspectives*, mutual mentoring encourages us to seek, in conjunction with the author and peer reviewers, the nugget that, if further developed, would provide new insights for program administrators.

Interns and graduate assistants are also part of the mutual mentoring relationship that we enjoy. For example, Laurence José is a Michigan Tech doctoral student whose assistantship is partly allocated to help edit the journal. A native of France with a background in linguistics, Laurence is in the midst of writing a technical communication dissertation and is, as such, perhaps more familiar with the program administration literature than I, at least, could ever hope to be. Laurence functions as a full member of the *Programmatic Perspectives* editorial team. Her mentorship in testing and articulating the journal's processes helps our work go more smoothly. And I've already mentioned how her frank questioning of some of our early ideas, especially the idea of the Emerging Scholars forum, helped set the journal's direction.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha also offers similar journal support through internship credits. Krystal Gabel, an English master's student and UNO associate editor, has worked with the journal for the past year. Krystal participates in the copyediting and production aspects of the editorial and mentoring process, marking up manuscripts for production, drafting responses to authors, and preparing pages for publication. Through its graduate certificate program in technical communication and its five-course sequence, UNO does offer master's students insight into the field of technical communication, but it does not fully engage students as future scholars. Working on the journal affords Krystal, and students before and after her, to engage the field through its scholarship. Mentoring activities in this relationship occur mostly in the act of copyediting practice as Tracy and Krystal discuss and debate meaning for each sentence and for the field and its scholarship. And it is through this work that Krystal has developed an interest in applying to PhD programs in Technical Communication.

The Online Venue

The fact that *Programmatic Perspectives* is an online journal affords another exigency for mutual mentoring. Although academia is becoming more accepting of online publications, there are still many pockets of resistance and suspicion. However, CPTSC does not have the financial resources to fund a printed journal, and CPTSC members are accustomed to a very low annual membership fee that supports a "no-frills" organization. Thus, electronic publishing is the way to go, and the journal would not exist were this not an option.

At the same time, the world of online publication is an interesting one, filled with questions and opportunities. So despite the risks inherent in publishing an exclusively online journal, we accommodate this transitional time frame by publishing the journal in PDF format, so that its pages

replicate as much as possible the look and feel of the standard academic journal. Like our more established counterparts, we have a double-blind peer review process.

Eventually, we hope to offer more interactive features. Already, a discussion space is linked to each article, with the intent of encouraging follow-up interaction. Although little used as yet, over the next few years, such interactivity may well be not only available and widely used but also even essential for our disciplinary community, serving functions similar to those served today by e-mail lists. Mutual mentoring among the members of the community—not to mention some kind of exigency—will be necessary to launch these interactive spaces; this cannot be achieved by mandate. Until people see a need for it, fully interactive online spaces will remain underutilized.

In the meantime, we strive, through our actions and expressed attitudes toward e-publishing, to mentor those who are skeptical about the validity and rigor of online publication, including the authors who choose to publish in *Programmatic Perspectives* as well as the reviewers, department chairs, tenure and promotion committees, and other colleagues in the academic community at large. At the same time, we seek to be mentored by other editors who have more online experience. The field of computers and writing is home to two such models. The journal *Kairos* has been publishing online in native hypertext for more than 10 years.¹ This journal provides a high-quality model for other aspiring interactive, peer reviewed scholarly journals. Similarly, the online book series edited by Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher² affords a vision of what *the book* might look like without the limitations of paper. We have much to learn from these models that represent the present and future of e-publishing

Aside from *Writing Program Administration*, the WPA journal, very little scholarly work about—or interest in—the topic of academic program administration has been manifested in the rhetoric-related disciplines. We believe that a mutual mentoring approach is an effective way to develop our community's sense of the importance of program administration work as a scholarly endeavor in its own right.

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¹ See <<http://kairos.technorhetic.net/>>.

² See <<http://ccdigitalpress.org/>>.

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