Engaging Entrepreneurship in Technical Communication using Client and Service-Learning Projects

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Abstract. This article calls for technical communication scholars and teachers to introduce entrepreneurship into their classrooms through client and service-learning projects, especially those built on a consultancy model. The growth of entrepreneurship education throughout the university provides tremendous opportunities and resources for technical communication; at the same time, entrepreneurship education cannot be complete without the skills, mindsets, and ethical considerations provided by technical communication pedagogy. By having students serve as rhetorical consultants in projects that add value to for-profit and nonprofit organizations, technical communication teachers can develop entrepreneurship-focused client and service-learning projects that benefit students, the university, client organizations, the community, and regional economy.

Keywords: action-learning, curriculum design, entrepreneurship education, pedagogy, program design, research, service-learning, technical communication

This article offers technical communication an opportunity to expand its commitment to service-learning projects by capitalizing on entrepreneurship, an area of increasing intellectual and financial significance in higher education. As we detail below, entrepreneurship and entrepreneurialism pervade both for-profit and nonprofit organizations.

1 Technical communication courses often carry titles like Professional Writing, Technical Writing, Writing for the Professions, and Business Communication (Peeples, 2003, p. 2). Thus, for the purposes of this article, we use technical communication as a "cover all" term to refer to all related fields of study, academic programs, offerings, and courses in which technical and professional communicators might work.
Unfortunately, technical communication has largely ignored entrepreneurship and its population of writers (for further discussion, see Spartz & Weber, in press). As a consequence, the field has missed out on exciting pedagogical and scholarly opportunities, not to mention the significant resources and exposure granted to entrepreneurship programs and related entities in higher education. By extending the scope of service learning to include entrepreneurship and entrepreneurialism, we provide technical communication instructors and students a way to build on traditional client-based classroom projects and research.

Technical communication pedagogues and scholars may find common ground with entrepreneurship concerning its emphasis on active, experiential, student-driven, real-world learning. Taylor, Jones, & Boles (2004) argue that action learning, which embeds education in practice, “has been identified as an appropriate method for responding to the problem-centered needs of would-be entrepreneurs” (p. 230). As we detail below, many entrepreneurship instructors employ client and service-learning projects in their courses, often with the same motivations as technical communication teachers: providing students relevant, contextual learning while strengthening organizations and meeting community needs. In fact, our field can learn much from entrepreneurial insights into active learning, especially in its consulting model for client and service-learning projects. Our field’s insight on these project types can combine with best practices of entrepreneurship pedagogy to create technical communication projects with an emphasis on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurialism. Though many pedagogical approaches can help accomplish this goal, we offer one set of criteria that might be used to distinguish entrepreneurship-focused projects from others:

1. Students work with entrepreneurially-minded organizations or those with a capacity for growth and change;
2. Students work as rhetorical consultants who advise organizations on ways to improve their institutional structures and interactions with customer and employees;
3. Projects focus on adding value in a way that benefits the organization, its employees, its customers, and its community;
4. Students undertake the kind of rhetorical tasks relevant to aspiring entrepreneurs;
5. Students explicitly reflect on how their projects added value to the organization and how their writing helped to rhetorically construct and shape the institution.
In the technical communication classroom, the traditional approach to service learning centers around sustaining community-based nonprofit organizations while maximizing the educational experience through internships and volunteerism. However, academics and researchers committed to developing entrepreneurs [and entrepreneurialism] have engaged in a range of service-learning practices; some examples include students assisting new entrepreneurs to prepare business plans, completing entrepreneurial-related tasks for nonprofit and community organizations, or providing services to Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) through consulting projects (Calvert, 2009; Calvert & Kurji, 2012). Developing and incorporating entrepreneur-focused projects that serve clients in the for-profit and nonprofit community holds many benefits for a wide range of factions—institutional and community alike. Accordingly, we call on the field of technical communication to engage entrepreneurship—specifically, through client projects and service learning—for the benefit of its varied stakeholders: students, faculty, programs, and the universities and communities in which we work.

Our call is based on an expansive definition of entrepreneurship that views it as a holistic mindset and skillset allowing people to recognize opportunity, instigate change, and unite people in collaboration to create something new. One famous definition that fits these criteria comes from Harvard Business Professor Howard Stevenson, who argues that “Entrepreneurship is the pursuit of opportunity without regard to resources currently controlled” (Schrenberg, 2012). Columbia professor Amar Bhidé defines entrepreneurship as “the purposive effort to change the status quo” (“Faculty Insights”). And Jerry Timmons of Babson College writes that “Entrepreneurship is the ability to create and build something from practically nothing” (Consortium, 2004), an ability that requires skills like sensing opportunity, initiating change, coordinating founding teams, managing resources responsibly, and taking calculated risks. Such broad definitions have led to the emergence of the term, “entrepreneurialism,” which “encompasses the skills that a person needs to start their own business” (Cambridge Business English Dictionary) but may also refer to entrepreneurial skills and mindsets applied to pursuits beyond new venture creation. Furthermore, an emerging trend in entrepreneurship scholarship is to expand the term beyond business formation entirely. Management professor Elizabeth McCrea (2010) writes that while

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Although these definitions are helpful, we recognize the potential for the term entrepreneurship to become administrative jargon with little actual meaning, much like the term “excellence” (Readings, 1996). The insight of technical communicators can help universities avoid this problem.
most people think of competitive, profit-minded folks such as Bill Gates when they think of entrepreneurship...entrepreneurship is really a process of creating new value for a target group of customers. If value and customers are defined broadly, it is easy to see that creating ‘a new museum experience’ for ‘patrons,’ or ‘good feelings’ for ‘donors,’ is not much different than creating ‘software’ for ‘businesses and consumers.’ As noted above, entrepreneurship can be found nearly everywhere…and that concept was the impetus for developing a service-learning approach to teaching the subject to undergraduates. (p. 40)

This perspective opens up the potential to apply entrepreneurialism to work done with nonprofits and community organizations.

These expansive definitions lead to an equally expansive characterization of entrepreneurship education. The Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education sets goals that move far beyond the acquisition of personal wealth: “Entrepreneurship education seeks to prepare people, especially youth, to be responsible, enterprising individuals who become entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial thinkers and who contribute to economic development and sustainable communities” (Consortium, 2004). Only one of the Consortium’s four elements of core entrepreneurial knowledge involves creating and operating a new venture; the others include recognizing opportunity, pursuing it “by generating new ideas and marshaling needed resources,” and thinking creatively and critically. Similarly, Edward Lazear (2004) uses a Stanford Business School survey of self-employed graduates to argue that entrepreneurs are better understood as generalists who know how to recognize opportunity and coordinate people than specialists in a particular business or technology. These expansive abilities require a multidisciplinary approach. Though entrepreneurship is often housed in business schools, many call for moving it beyond these confines to make it a truly campus-wide area of study (Volkman, 2004; Shay & Terjensen, 2005).³ Technical communication can be a vital part of this curriculum; in fact, we argue that entrepreneurship education is not complete without the rhetorical, communication, and ethical abilities offered by our field.

Recent developments indicate that technical communication has begun to recognize the valuable contributions it can make to entrepre-

³ Granted, some of these calls to increase entrepreneurship education border on the ridiculous, such as columnist Steve Gerber’s (2012) proposal in the Atlantic to “fire every college president with the means and resources to embrace entrepreneurship who doesn’t explore, support or start an entrepreneurship education program or partnership of some kind.”
neurship and entrepreneurialism. Faculty from various campus units at the University of Maryland, including the Professional Writing Program, the Center for Social Value Creation, the Robert H. Smith Business School, UM Ventures, the Dingman Center, and the Center for Philanthropy & Nonprofit Leadership, developed courses to reflect and build upon the entrepreneurship value-add we propose in this article. In the Spring Semester of 2013, the Department of English began to offer several service-learning courses “that complement the University of Maryland’s broader interest in ‘Fearlessly Supporting Entrepreneurship,’” which aligns with the University’s mission to make “professional entrepreneurship and innovation hallmarks of the undergraduate education experience” (“New Service Learning Courses,” 2013). This program’s course offerings not only complement the technical communication approach we advocate herein, but also evidence a burgeoning interest in connecting cross-campus stakeholders for entrepreneurship education. Such programs can serve as a model for other technical and professional writing programs wishing to incorporate entrepreneurialism into their curriculum.

Technical communication instructors and scholars would be well served to incorporate entrepreneurship as a locus of pedagogical and service-learning engagement for several reasons. Some may find the work stimulating and the opportunities interesting. For instance, as showed by Doheny-Farina (1986; 1992), entrepreneurs and SME owners make fascinating research subjects, and many important questions about entrepreneurship writing, communication, and rhetoric still await scholarly investigation. Technical communication can begin to unearth and answer some of these questions by engaging this population.

Other technical communication professionals may find themselves at a university with a prevalent emphasis on entrepreneurship (see discussions of institutions supported by KEEN or the Kauffman Foundation below), and they may want to tap into the opportunities provided by this emphasis. They may find that their work intersects more with entrepreneurship than they realized, allowing them to craft exciting interdisciplinary initiatives that emphasize the value of technical communication in new ways. Technical communication faculty at entrepreneurship-focused universities may also worry about the possibility of being marginalized by ignoring this university emphasis.

Still other teachers may find that entrepreneurialism engages the ever-increasing number of college students with entrepreneurial ambitions. In

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4 For more information, see <http://www.english.umd.edu/news/4274>.
Entrepreneur magazine, Tulgan (1999) reports that “as many as 5.6 million Americans younger than age 34 are actively trying to start their own businesses” and “more than 60 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds say they want to own their own businesses, and nearly 80 percent of would-be entrepreneurs in the United States are between the ages of 18 and 34!” (as quoted in Kuratko, 2005, p. 578-579). According to the Millennial Generation Research Report (2012), half to two-thirds of Millennials are interested in entrepreneurship, and more than a quarter (27%) are already self-employed.; an Intuit Future of Small Business Report (2007) argues that Generation Y “will emerge as the most entrepreneurial generation ever” (p. 5). Entrepreneurial pursuits involve unique opportunities, dynamic rhetorical situations, and sophisticated writing challenges that technical communication is well suited to address. Framing our classes as relevant spaces for these issues offers an often unrecognized opportunity to engage our students.

In this article, we explore the potential of entrepreneurship-centered client and service-learning projects in several ways: First, we call the field’s attention to the proliferation of academic entrepreneurship and the opportunities presented through engaging entrepreneurship and its related factions. Second, we review the scholarship from technical communication and entrepreneurship education that addresses service-learning initiatives in these separate, but related fields. Third, we discuss the benefits of expanding the range of service-learning opportunities—and embracing entrepreneurialism in our technical communication courses—to illustrate the advantages this approach can provide to our students, programs, universities, and communities.

Growing Importance of Entrepreneurship Education

This entrepreneurial emphasis within and beyond the university is represented by President Barack Obama’s November 19, 2009 proclamation supporting American efforts to promote and create entrepreneurial activity. In it, President Obama called “upon all Americans to recognize the important contributions of entrepreneurs to our economy,” declaring that “entrepreneurs are the engine of job creation in America” and that “to secure our Nation’s future prosperity, we must ensure that our entrepreneurs have the tools they need to survive and thrive” (Obama, 2009, p. 1). This Presidential call to action speaks directly to the members of today’s institutions of higher education. The creation of a significant university infrastructure for entrepreneurship education, including majors, programs, courses, centers, over 300 endowed positions, and 44 academic journals, coupled with the “legitimization” of the field by the mainstream media (e.g., Business Week

**Curricular Growth**

Over the last several years, entrepreneurial education—traditionally housed in business schools—has become one of the fastest-growing curricular areas across American universities. In the past three decades alone, formal undergraduate programs (majors, minors, and certificates) in entrepreneurship “have more than quadrupled, from 104 in 1975 to more than 500 in 2006” (Kauffman Foundation, n.d., p. 6). The staggering number of entrepreneurship programs is not restricted to undergraduate education. The Princeton Review’s 2011 annual report lists 79 United States universities that offer an MBA or other graduate degree (e.g., PhD) with a concentration in entrepreneurship (Entrepreneurship Graduate Schools section, para. 1). According to recent research regarding the state of entrepreneurship education in the United States (Solomon, Duffy, Tarabishy, 2002; Katz, 2003; Kauffman Foundation, n.d.), the number of institutions offering entrepreneurship, new-venture, or similar courses has grown in the past 20 years from as few as two dozen to more than 1,600 (Kuratko, 2004, p. 5). The development of courses in entrepreneurship has been exponential, totaling more than 5,000 discrete courses across all two- and four-year college campuses in the United States (Kauffman Foundation, n.d., p. 16). Despite this vast number of courses, very few programs offer courses that take advantage of the unique knowledge and skill-set that technical communication has to offer (Spartz & Weber, *in press*).

**University Centers**

In addition to strong curricular growth, the explosion of university-based entrepreneurship centers demonstrates higher education’s interest and investment. Established in 2000, the Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers (*GCEC*) lists some 200, ranging from well established and nationally ranked to new and emerging academic centers. The intent of *GCEC* is to “provide a coordinated vehicle through which participating members can collaborate and communicate on the specific issues and challenges confronting university-based entrepreneurship centers” (Home section, para. 1). Accordingly, the trend in many universities has been to develop or expand entrepreneurship programs and design unique and challenging multi-disciplinary curricula explicitly geared toward entrepreneurship students.
Academic Research
A principal indicator of a well-developed, thriving, and sustainable academic discipline is its research activity, including that which is associated with its pedagogy. A number of prominent universities have developed robust programs in entrepreneurial research; GCEC has also established the “21st Century Entrepreneurship Research Fellows.” This growing body of scholars cultivates a mission “to identify leading-edge research issues and domains and develop high profile research initiatives that demonstrate the highest level of scholarship to entrepreneurship centers and the academic community at large” (Research Fellows section, para. 2). In addition to the annual GCEC conference, entrepreneurial scholarly activity is highlighted at the “Babson College Entrepreneurship Research Conference” (BCERC), considered by many to be the premier entrepreneurship research conference in the world.

Entrepreneurship Funding
In addition to substantial scholarly research activities, external financial support also exists for academically grounded entrepreneurship programs and courses. For example, the Kauffman Foundation continually supports universities through its Campuses Initiative; it has provided nearly $50 million in grant money to nineteen schools as of 2006, combined with matching grants (from outside funding partnerships) totaling more than $200 million. Beyond Kaufman, over $1 billion has been granted to entrepreneurship education organizations by participating donors, including the Coleman Foundation, Opportunity International, The Deshpande Foundation, Tecovas Foundation, Templeton Foundation, and Edward Lowe Foundation (Creating the Entrepreneurship Stimulus Plan section, para. 1). This investment in developing nascent entrepreneurs has served as a catalyst to cultivate and improve entrepreneurship education.

Teaching Entrepreneurship
Teaching entrepreneurship effectively to establish its academic legitimacy remains a challenge and topic of discussion in the midst of the ongoing eruption of academic activity and resources (Kuratko, 2005, p. 579). Multiple works in the recent literature (Edelman, Manolova, & Brush, 2008; Honig, 2004; Katz, 2003; Kuratko, 2005; Matlay, 2006; Shinnar, Pruett, & Toney, 2009) discuss different approaches to entrepreneurship education. Universities also collaborate to develop such an education. For instance, the Kern Entrepreneurship Education Network (KEEN), “a collaboration of 20 universities around the U.S. that strive to instill an entrepreneurial mindset in undergraduate engineering and technology students” holds a
mission “to graduate engineers who will contribute to business success; and in doing so, transform the American workforce” (About section, para. 1). This continued commitment to extending, assessing, and improving entrepreneurship pedagogy highlights its relevance and growth. Curriculum assessment is also being conducted by related stakeholders, including the “Kauffman Panel on Entrepreneurship Curriculum in Higher Education” and the recently established (2011) “Future of Entrepreneurship Education Summit” (http://feesummit.com/index.php).

Although these efforts across the academy illustrate a holistic response to the rise in entrepreneurship education, John Hughes and Michael Hennessy of the Coleman Foundation offer the most salient pedagogy-related proposition, given the purpose of this article. Specifically, Hughes and Hennessy advocate for the integration of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurialism into the classroom setting (Kuratko, 2004, p. 10). This call is echoed by Greene, Katz, & Johannison (2004) who argue that “experiential learning is often a key component of an entrepreneurial course or curriculum” and that “entrepreneurship education needs to reflect a real-world environment” (p. 238), even if that means challenging traditional educational hallmarks. This notion is precisely one on which our work hinges. We assert that introducing technical communication students to the real-world writing and communication needs of entrepreneurs and SME owners through service learning can provide the experiential learning through which they will foster the entrepreneurialism for success in the business world at large.

Many interested parties are working to ensure that entrepreneurship education best prepares students for venture creation and opportunity recognition. Still, questions remain: Has the academy appropriately and adequately addressed the needs of entrepreneurially minded 21st century students? What meaningful dialogue and research has truly affected curricula—both in course design and programmatic scope and sequence—for this ever-growing population? According to Kuratko (2004), educators who introduce for-profit entities into curriculum design must ensure that practicing entrepreneurs delve into the real problems and issues involved with creating and sustaining entrepreneurial ventures (p. 10). One such issue includes their communication needs throughout the stages of business development. We argue that teaching students to serve as rhetorical consultants and including for-profit organizations in service-learning projects will not only alter traditional academic thinking about the value of entrepreneurialism for all students, but also facilitate a better understanding of the writing and communication needs and skills of existing and future entrepreneurs and SME owners in our local communities.
Connections between Technical Communication and Entrepreneurship Scholarship

Entrepreneurialism and technical communication can form a productive partnership through client and service-learning projects that emphasize both technical communication and entrepreneurship-related skills and mindsets. However, this connection has not fully emerged for several reasons. One is the lack of attention given to entrepreneurship by technical and professional communication. While some scholars have looked at the rhetorical operations of new and emerging enterprises (Durack, 2003; Leydens, 2008; Mara, 2008), most technical communication scholarship investigating the private sector still focuses on large, well-established corporations. Additionally, some in the field may find an entrepreneurial focus—with its perceived emphasis on profit and corporate gain—incompatible with the ideology and theory of technical communication and service learning.

Technical Communication Service Learning Projects Involving Entrepreneurialism

A handful of technical communication scholars already describe client and service-learning projects that fit well with entrepreneurialism while adhering to educational principles of service learning. For instance, Cooke and Williams (2004) describe a consultancy project that charges clients a fee to use student services. Although we aren’t specifically encouraging faculty to charge a fee for this type of work, consultancy projects encapsulate much of the approach we advocate. Cooke and Williams describe an example project with an explicit entrepreneurial focus that asks students to create a Venture Guide for aspiring entrepreneurs. Through these projects, students “experience the complexities of professional writing and recognize that there are real consequences if project work is substandard or not completed on time” (p. 148). This consultancy approach establishes both a precedent and a model for entrepreneurship-focused service-learning projects. In another precedent, Sapp and Crabtree (2002) detail a project conducted in their own department in which students wrote a grant, a policy manual, and various additional documents for a small business that serves mostly low-income women and couples. The authors are careful to note that the business has a social mission, which makes it appropriate for service learning, but this business fittingly encapsulates the idea of social entrepreneurship popularized by entrepreneurship theory. Other service-learning projects produce documents that are helpful to both nonprofit
organizations and aspiring entrepreneurs. In one instance, Bourelle (2012) asks students to write business plans and proposals for nonprofit agencies working on fundraising activities.

**Technical Communication Scholarship with a Social Mission Focus**

Despite these precedents, many technical communication scholars may worry that entrepreneurship is incompatible with the social, community-minded mission of service learning. These scholars believe service learning should, by definition, instill a spirit of public service and an awareness of social problems through interaction with nonprofit agencies. For instance, Huckin (1997) notes: “service-learning projects have three distinct goals (1) helping students develop their academic skills (in this case, writing) (2) helping students develop more civic awareness, and (3) helping the larger community by addressing the needs of local nonprofit agencies” (p. 50). Similarly, Henson and Sutliff (1998) articulate that service learning must provide more than a primer on corporate success:

> Service learning, an expanding pedagogical movement, educates students to volunteer their expertise for the benefit of society. Teachers of business and technical writing can apply this pedagogy by assigning students to write for nonprofits. Such assignments prepare students for both workplace writing and responsible citizenship. (p. 189)

To achieve a similar goal, Wickliff (1989) uses client-based projects to help students investigate and rhetorically address local public and university issues, such as wetland preservation and student accessibility. Sapp and Crabtree (2002) envision service learning as an antidote to technical communication’s overemphasis on for-profit enterprises: “In the current enthusiasm for university-industry collaborations, the study of technical communication privileges the large corporation, concerning itself almost solely with issues in the for-profit sector of the economy” (p. 416). For these scholars, service learning is a means to expand students’ awareness of social problems.\(^5\) Scholars with a laudable commitment for civic and socially-minded service learning may object that a focus on entrepreneurialism will take students away from service to community organizations in favor of increasing company profits.

\(^5\) However, Matthews and Zimmerman (1999) use student comments and reflection to argue that students do not necessarily develop an ethical sense of community through service learning.
Client and Service Learning in Entrepreneurship and Related Fields

However, scholars in entrepreneurship and in related fields such as business, management, and even engineering have also developed engaging, civically-minded, and theoretically sound service-learning projects for their students. Some of these projects partner students with for-profit enterprises (Coyle, Clement, & Kruger 2007; Hernandez & Newman, 2006; Zidek, 2012), but many develop students’ entrepreneurial skills while they serve their communities. Drawing on an expansive definition of entrepreneurialism, these projects view entrepreneurship more broadly than merely acquiring profits and enriching shareholders; instead, they define it as the identification of opportunity and the creation of value. Other scholars see service learning as a way to expand what they perceive as the narrow focus of entrepreneurial education (Myrah, 2009). For instance, Godfrey, Illes, and Berry (2005) argue that business programs too often give students a limited understanding of their roles as employees and managers while instilling a myopic focus on increasing shareholder wealth. For them, carefully implemented service learning “and the associated educational experiences, provide a partial solution to the problem of narrowness in business education precisely because the pedagogy blends academic rigor with practical relevance, set in a context of civic engagement” (p. 310). Their service-learning project asks college students to provide free financial literacy education to students in the community. Kenworthy (2010), who has students help community clients with negotiation tasks, also argues that effective service-learning experiences can broaden students’ education and community mindedness because

service-learning projects expose students to real-world problems in community-based organizations, offering students an opportunity to work with and learn from members of the communities around them. Real-world projects provide the relevance demanded of today’s university programs without compromising a theoretical and substantive context for learning. (p. 63)

Examples of these types of service-learning projects abound in entrepreneurship-related literature: Calvert and Kurji (2012) describe a service-learning project in accounting that partners students with Students for Free Enterprise (SIFE) to offer free tax preparation to low income Americans; Metcalf (2010) has marketing students operate “a collegiate chapter of a nonprofit engaged in international community service” (p. 155); and Mancuso, Aliji, Kwun, and Smith (2009) teach minority students entre-
preneurial strategies through service-learning projects. These types of projects demonstrate entrepreneurship’s engagement with service learning, but they also demonstrate that students interested in entrepreneurship likewise need projects with a more direct technical communication emphasis.

**Social Entrepreneurship, Local Economic Development, and Service Learning**

The growth in entrepreneurship service learning parallels the rising interest in social entrepreneurship, a term that encompasses for-profit organizations “driven by a social mission and guided by the impact of this mission” (Myrah, 2009, p. 7). Social enterprises have a for-profit structure, but they are primarily or largely motivated by the social impact of their goods and services (one well-known example of a social enterprise is Tom’s Shoes, which donates a pair of shoes to a child in need for every pair of shoes a customer purchases). Social enterprises use business strategies to solve social problems. Because of this social motivation, some scholars (e.g., Wessel & Godshalk, 2004) see natural ties between social entrepreneurship and service-learning education. Jones, Warner, and Kiser (2010) advocate stronger relationships between social entrepreneurship and service learning, as these philosophies “both engage students in work directed toward the public good, linking the education of students to addressing societal problems and needs” (p. 2). Many teachers and programs find that social entrepreneurship blends more traditional business education with a civic, community-oriented mindset. Myrah (2009) describes a service-learning class where “entrepreneurship was considered outside of a purely business context, and entailed linking students to the community through experiential activities that required them to apply problem solving and analytical techniques to a range of community issues and problems” (p. 5). Many of these community projects, such as designing logos, and writing manuals, marketing plans, and newsletters, would be an excellent fit for a technical communication classroom.

Other entrepreneurship scholars suggest that economic development is a significant community need, one on par with the missions of local nonprofits, especially in areas facing economic hardships and high unemployment. In this spirit, teachers at Ohio State, Iowa State, and Western Michigan University developed a service-learning rural community development project to strengthen the entrepreneurial skills opportunities of university students and community members:
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Student teams complete learning activities in partnership with rural or small community business leaders to identify characteristics of strong rural communities, and then develop competitive strategies to strengthen the local retail and service sector. The service-learning activities have the potential to produce an array of beneficial and useful outcomes for participating rural businesses, including business proposals and marketing tool kits (Frazier, 2012).

These projects can strengthen area economies and university-community relationships. As Litzky et al. (2010) argue, “service-learning reconnects a university’s resources with community needs while providing students a valuable learning experience” (p. 143). Service-learning projects that increase local economic opportunities can be a great way for technical communication professionals—especially those at publically funded universities—to share resources and expertise with the community.

Concerns about Hyperpragmatism and Corporate Mindsets

Although many service-learning advocates in technical communication may be encouraged by entrepreneurship’s interest in service learning, others in the field may have ideological objections to importing business school jargon, approaches, and mindsets into the technical communication classroom. One potential critique comes from J. Blake Scott (2004), who appreciates the potential of service learning but fears that it is often co-opted by a “hyperpragmatist” approach that gives students little power to change organizations. Hyperpragmatism arises both from an over-emphasis on training students as productive, compliant workers and from unreflective engagement that prevents students from recognizing, critiquing, and changing undesirable organizational and social forces. Scott writes:

The main goal of this ideology is ensuring students’ professional success. Although service learning comes out of a more robust pragmatic tradition, it can be co-opted by a hyperpragmatism that moves past critique, overlooks broader power relations and textual circulation, and narrowly positions students and their praxis (p. 289).

Hyperpragmatism can squelch the civic and social power of service learning. Scott proposes a cultural studies approach that positions students as partners, rather than subordinates, within organizations, and incorporates more research on social problems and greater student reflection into the curriculum.

A related concern is represented by Jack Bushnell (1999), who argues that technical communication departments have too compliantly adopted
and internalized corporate paradigms, undermining the mission of the university to foster critical thinking and ethical questioning of language use. Instead, technical communication departments treat documents and language as neutral and objective in order to train students to meet employer’s expectations. Bushnell writes:

> It is tempting to act as the bridge from industry, to bring its practices to our students so that they may successfully ‘return’ with those skills after they graduate. But this impulse ignores what our mission as college and university teachers should be: to prepare our students to be critical thinkers, and to see that communication (because of the nature of language itself) is a complex human enterprise that goes far beyond describing or informing (p. 177).

Bushnell offers a compelling critique of technical communication curriculum that too willingly adopts a corporate mindset. But, not all scholars are so wary of business paradigms. Moore (2004) argues that cultural theorists criticize corporations too strongly, especially when it comes to their emphasis on profit. Moore sees profit as a useful tool for audience analysis and value creation; he adds that academics should view themselves as cultural capitalists creating intellectual products (we would further add that as paid employees, academics are a part of their local economies). Still, cultural theory’s concerns with incorporating corporate practices provide an engaging caution for technical communication projects emphasizing entrepreneurship.

**Rhetorically Robust Entrepreneurship-Focused Service-Learning Projects**

Despite potential fears that an entrepreneurial focus may lead to hyper-pragmatic or overly corporate service-learning projects, we argue that strategically executed projects could actually open opportunities for student agency and critical reflection about corporate discourse and social issues. These projects could take cues from entrepreneurship pedagogy, which sometimes grants students significantly more agency to influence organizations. This appears to be especially true for consulting projects, which position students as experts with knowledge that can alter organizational structure. Unlike many of the technical communication projects that Scott critiques—where students simply fulfill client requests—consulting projects ask students to develop a more critical relationship with their organizations. Discussing their consulting client project, Pache and Chowdhury (2012) write:
To do this task properly, students are required to find the right balance between empathy and distance with the organization to come up with recommendations that not only take into account the organization’s constraints and opportunities but also are compatible with the organizational and sector culture (p. 503).

This balance of distance and empathy asks students to not only respond to client needs, but also to evaluate critically the organization and suggest impactful changes. We advocate a similar stance for technical communication students, who can still meet the needs of clients while taking a more reflective, critical stance on the organization.

A representative consultancy project comes from Management professors Heriot, Cook, Jones, & Simpson (2008), who had students observe organizations and offer solutions to their real-world problems. In one project, students evaluated the role of cashiers at a large retail store and recommended ways to make the position less boring and more multifaceted. Another project had students evaluate the ordering processes at a Mexican restaurant and recommend changes that decreased ordering and wait times for customers. Both organizations implemented the suggested changes, illustrating the student potential to drastically change corporate operations. While both of these projects partially rely on the kind of efficiency ethic that Scott criticizes, they also allow students to substantially affect the company. In the case of the cashier project, students changed and expanded the role of workers, which could be a memorable experience for students as they later adopt employee roles of their own.

Technical communication may be able to increase the entrepreneurial focus of its courses and accomplish its own pedagogical and ethical goals by learning from this consultancy model. In these projects, students decide on solutions to an organization’s problems or rhetorical challenges instead of being given the solution by the client. Thus, this model assumes that students possess their own knowledge that can change the client’s organization. Several types of projects, many already staples of technical communication classes, could achieve this goal. Some entrepreneurship-focused service-learning projects might involve instructors changing their own approach to service learning, while others might involve instructors articulating their pedagogical goals differently to students, clients, and university stakeholders.

One possible project might position students as usability consultants for a local small business where they can make real changes in the user-centeredness of the organization, increasing not only the efficiency of websites, products, and processes, but also allowing customers to get their
needs met and making material accessible to customers with disabilities or limited technology access. In this sense, they can achieve the empathic, yet distant perspective advocated by Pache and Chowdhury (2012). These projects can also “add value” in the sense that McCrea advocates, not just increasing profits, but also improving customer experience and access. This consultancy approach to usability-based service learning can be informed by Scott’s (2008) own approach to usability:

While user-centered design can provide a mechanism for ensuring more reciprocally beneficial learning partnerships, service-learning projects can provide rich contexts for students’ learning and trying out user-centered design. Indeed, one of the virtues of service-learning and other real-world assignments is the opportunity they provide students for adapting emergent knowledge to specific workplace or community-based contexts. (p. 382)

Another SME-centered project with potential to move beyond hyperpragmatism is the writing of policy manuals. Creating these documents—designed to help businesses operate more ethically, efficiently, and effectively—is an important rhetorical task for aspiring entrepreneurs. As performative texts with the potential to structure and even change behavior, policies have an ethical dimension that requires the writer to reflect holistically on the organization and its standards. Many SMEs and nonprofits lack the time, knowledge, and resources to create policy documents; therefore, they often function using ad-hoc, inconsistently applied policies (if any) not informed by the best legal guidelines or ethical standards. Crafting these manuals satisfies the client’s goal of consolidating employer directives for behavior, but the same manuals also require those clients to follow certain standards and to provide the student writers—and the employees of the company—with significant agency. Students who produce informed, well-researched policy manuals stand to drastically change the structure of an organization and compel more ethical behavior. For instance, they may implement harassment, affirmative action, discrimination, social media, or environmental policies that the organization lacked. The creation of such documents encourages reflection about the connections between legal and ethical standards, the relationships between employees and management, and the function of writing within organizations.

Teachers of grant and proposal writing courses can also develop an entrepreneurial emphasis by partnering students with aspiring or practicing entrepreneurs or with non-profits looking to expand their services or
client base. For instance, Belmont University offers a grant-writing course through its Social Entrepreneurship program that implements a service-learning project, partnering students with non-profits. Students at the University of Baltimore’s Social Entrepreneurship program can take an elective in “The Fundamentals of Grant Writing,” taught by the Community Studies and Civic Engagement department. Grant writing courses in technical communication programs might offer a similar entrepreneurial focus, providing valuable skills to both aspiring technical communicators and entrepreneurs (and many grant writing courses may already employ this approach). For instance, students may team with a women-owned small business to apply for grant and contract opportunities from the SBA Office of Women’s Business Ownership, EILEEN FISHER, the Make Mine a Million $ Business initiative from Count Me In, the Women Owned Small Business Federal Contract Program, or a variety of state and local sources. Similar funding and development sources exist for minority-owned business through the Minority Business Development Agency; funding for businesses in economically disadvantaged areas may also be available through the Historically Underutilized Business Zones (HUBZones) program. As many technical communication professionals know, service-learning projects in grant writing classes can also involve collecting narratives, focus group responses, or other types of data to supplement a grant proposal. Further, these projects often require students to conduct extensive quantitative and qualitative research to assess the impact of previous grant funding.

Web writing classes can be given an entrepreneurial emphasis as well. For instance, the English Department at University of North Carolina frequently offers a first year seminar on Entrepreneurial Writing on the Web in partnership with the Carolina Entrepreneurial Initiative. The catalog describes the entrepreneurial implications of the class:

This seminar will explore the current state of computer-assisted composition and help students develop new media writing projects for emerging online cultural and economic spaces. Content will range from understanding the economic dimensions of cultural production on the Web (e.g., viral popularity on YouTube and advertising-supported blogs) to developing new media composition skills necessary for success in emerging online environments, to successfully establishing online domains, and to creating virtual professional spaces.

Though the course is a first-year seminar, a similar course could seamlessly be implemented within a technical communication curriculum, where web-writing courses are commonly offered. Service-learning projects
could involve social media strategy planning and consulting, writing web content for emerging enterprises and organizations, creating documentation that allows clients’ to maintain and enhance their websites, as well as information-architecture and content-management projects. Given that similar projects are common within web writing classes and technical communication curriculum, it may prove worthwhile for some instructors to craft service learning projects that meet the criteria for entrepreneurialism introduced by this article as a way to attract a wider variety of students and position them as consultants within organizations.

Effectively conceived service-learning projects emphasizing entrepreneurialism can also address Scott and Bushnell’s concerns that service-learning projects lack adequate reflection on corporate structures and rhetorical practices. Writing for new and emerging enterprises provides students an excellent chance to witness discourse shaping an organization. In the nascent stages of a business’s development, rhetorical practices have not yet been normalized and may be more tangible for observation, reflection, and alteration. For instance, Doheny-Farina (1986) found that the composition of a business plan not only reflected but also shaped the social realities of the emerging organization. Discussions about corporate rhetorical practices may be more frequent, open, and direct. Additionally, the role of documents such as business plans, grants, proposals, procedures, permits, and policies in creating new organizations adds an additional rhetorical dimension to students’ understanding of corporations.

**Service Learning Benefits and Entrepreneurialism**

The projects that we propose here, although similar to traditional technical communication service-learning projects, offer additional opportunities for gaining the rhetorical skills essential for today’s entrepreneurially minded students. The primary distinction between traditional service-learning projects and those focused on entrepreneurship can be found in the relationship between the students and clients. As we detail above (e.g., a consultancy model of service learning), students’ major concerns and objectives during entrepreneurial service-learning projects are to add value by helping the organizations and businesses that they serve to realize their missions and objectives. As such, students don’t simply work for these organizations; they work with them in both determining and carrying out a project that unites technical communication skills and ethics with client needs, values, and attitudes.

Although student, community, and institutional benefits of service learning are documented and accepted by technical communication
scho- lars and teachers, the benefits to stu-dents across the curriculum—
and in entrepre neurship education, spe-cifically—is a burgeoning area of
inquiry. Moreover, the intersection be-tween service-learning initiatives
in technical communication and entrepreneurship education has not yet
been fully detailed.

**Student Benefits**

Engaging entrepreneurship and entrepreneurialism through service-learn-
ing projects in the technical communication classroom has the potential
to better equip all college and university students and graduates with
the skills that meet the needs of industry and the expectations of society.
Unfortunately, at present, “academic institutions and Business Schools in
particular, are often criticized for producing graduates who are technically
capable but lack the capability for teamwork, effective workplace commu-
nication, and the ability to react effectively in unstructured and complex
situations” (Calvert & Kurji, 2012, p. 5). Addressing this perceived lack of
capability needs to be a cross-curricular priority as we prepare students to
enter today’s workforce. The student benefits of service learning in gen-
eral (e.g., Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001; Palmer &
Short, 2010), in the technical communication classroom (e.g., Bowdon &
Scott, 2003; Matthews & Zimmerman, 1999; Sapp & Crabtree, 2002), and in
entrepreneurship education (e.g., Hernandez & Newman, 2006; Litzky et al,
2010; McCrea, 2010) are widely reported. For the purposes of this article,
we have chosen to detail the ways in which technical communication and
entrepreneurialism education intersect via service-learning initiatives. The
following benefits to students spin out directly from the type(s) of projects
we discuss here:

- Service learning improves communication in technical communi-
cation classes and across the curricula in higher education.
- Service learning —through an enhanced understanding of and
engagement with professional organizations and their inner-
workings—contributes to career preparation via the cultivation
of a personal identity [ethos] aligned with the complex require-
ments of the business world.
- Service learning fosters a complex and rhetorical understanding
of audience and its various participants.

If the approach to service learning we propose is beneficial for “traditional”
students, adult learners might find courses of this type to be especially
attractive. Research shows that adult students value an andragogical
(Knowles, 1980) emphasis on action learning (e.g., Calvert, 2011; O’Neil &
Lamm, 2000; Yorks, O’Neil, and Marsick, 2002), experiential learning (e.g., Kolb & Fry, 1975; Mok, 1999), and most significantly, project based learning (e.g., Von Kotze & Cooper, 2000; Helle, Tynjälä, and Olkinuora, 2006). We believe that our entrepreneurship-based service-learning model attends to the needs of adult learners who place a high value on educational approaches that allow them to put classroom theory and discussion into practice in their immediate surroundings. By working directly with SME owners and entrepreneurs in their local communities, adult learners see the measurable results of their work and value the direct applicability of what they are learning from our technical communication classes.

**Improved Communication**

Though the above outcomes are of equal importance, technical communication instructors and scholars might find the arguments regarding the communication benefits of entrepreneurial service-learning projects to be the most convincing, especially given the historical understanding of communication in business communication scholarship (e.g., Curtis et al., 1989; Flately, 1990; Messmer, 1999; Roebuck et al., 1995; Waner, 1995). For instance, Tucker and McCarthy (2001) assert that “communication skills are critical to effective job performance, career advancement, and organizational success” (p. 227). Moreover, as both Jackson (2009) and Calvert and Kurji (2012) note regarding graduates of business and management programs, while “oral and written communication skills were consistently ranked as some of the most important in graduates,” these same skills are “further noted as suffering from wide gaps in required versus actual capability” (Calvert & Kurji, 2012, p. 5-6). Although they are often seen as disparate academic disciplines, entrepreneurship and technical communication scholars agree that service-learning initiatives bolster these important skills and provide essential real-world experiences for our students.

Thomas and Landau (2002) adroitly capture the connections between business and entrepreneurship service learning and the rhetorical skills that might be fostered through a project in a technical communication course, noting that, as a result of their service-learning project, “skills in conflict resolution, communication, role clarification, goal setting, and project management” increased, while “students’ interpersonal skills were further developed” because “writing and presenting to different audiences within academia, as well as to the community, forced students to write reports and prepare presentations in a manner that could be understood by and useful to a variety of stakeholders” (Wessel & Godshalk, 2004, p. 28). As Calvert and Kuji (2012) explain while detailing a service-learning
project in their managerial accounting courses, “a communication course that incorporates SL methodology offers an effective prototype for the development of ‘soft’ skills (Sharifi et al., 2009),” especially when the “course requires public service activities, multiple oral and written communication exercises, and requires individual response to feedback from both teammates and the client, contributing to enhanced awareness and communication capability” (p. 8). For many students and instructors, then, the interaction with both group members and clients serves to facilitate improved approaches to and capabilities of communication. “Students develop[ed] their communication skills when working with the client and their teammates under a stressful and time-restricted situation” (Calvert & Kurji, 2012, p. 10). The projects we propose and the extension of technical communication service learning to organizations with an entrepreneurial focus provides an added value to not only the curricula of technical communication programs, but also to students studying entrepreneurship, business, and related fields at our institutions.

**Career-Ready Ethos/Identity**

A hallmark of technical communication education is an acute understanding and application of situated ethos/identity construction. Service-learning initiatives are instrumental in helping students develop and apply contextually appropriate identities. Projects with a focus on entrepreneurialism create a context unlike those in traditional service-learning approaches; the relationship students develop with clients who have a heightened investment (e.g., financial, social, etc.) in the success of their organizations creates opportunities for much internal and external identity negotiation in carrying out the projects.

In entrepreneurship education, “entrepreneurial self” or “entrepreneurial identity” has become an increasingly important component of the curriculum, as scholars and instructors are interested in understanding “the connection between the variety of relevant discourses that exist in contemporary societies and the everyday action of entrepreneurial actors” (Watson, 2009, p. 251). Discussions of identity in entrepreneurship conceptualize identity comprising two intertwined aspects: a self-identity and discourse-related, social identity. “Both the ‘self’ and the ‘social’ aspects of entrepreneurs’ identity are influenced by discourses existing in the society around them” (p. 251). Accordingly, service-learning approaches to inculcating entrepreneurialism position students in contexts where success is determined by their abilities to “use discursive resources in a negotiated, shifting, creative, and nuanced but often ambiguous manner” (p. 251).
Growing evidence suggests that, as Halford and Leonard (2006) put it, “while generic discourses of enterprise, profession, gender or age may be important, they are received and interpreted in the particular and complex contexts” (p. 699). Ultimately, direct contact with real-world clients leads to an acute understanding of the types of identities necessary for personal and success of the organizations. “The personal commitment of their client provided students with an insight as to their professional role and the impact . . . on client operations and the success of their business” (Calvert & Kurji, 2012, p. 10).

**Audience Awareness**

For technical communication educators, developing projects that put students in rhetorical contexts that require a fine-grained understanding of audience—and the relative stakeholders’ needs, values, and attitudes—to create successful documents is a core pedagogical objective. Client-based projects that focus on entrepreneurship are uniquely suited to this objective, as they require that students possess or “require students to possess a fuller understanding of the rhetorical situation at hand. As Cooke and Williams (2004) aptly describe, in negotiating the details of their projects, students find themselves in complex situations that demand their recognition of not only the client as audience, but also the customer, clients, or community members those clients serve:

> Students often participate in the negotiations that occur in the proposal stage of a project and meet with clients to ascertain a project’s requirements and scope. Many students have not worked in an autonomous production environment where they are responsible for negotiating the schedule for certain deliverables with a manager. Therefore, students begin to develop skills in recognizing the organization’s priorities as presented by a manager and proposing a plan to meet those goals. (p. 148)

These types of client projects provide the additional benefit of bringing “students into the workplace where they must team with professionals with different organizations and backgrounds to achieve a goal” (Tucker et al., 1998, p. 98). Students quickly learn the power of working together as their projects progress, which builds on the theoretical and classroom-centered work they conduct in their technical communication courses.

**Community and Client Benefits**

According to Michael Porter (2007) of the Harvard Business School, due to their roles as local employers, purchasers, and real estate developers,
“colleges and universities have long been important economic drivers in their surrounding communities,” and “their potential impact on the wider, regional economy has been growing dramatically” in recent years. While this is certainly the case, “few institutions have managed their role in economic development strategically . . . institutions can enhance their regional economy through a variety of targeted initiatives,” including “offering advice to startups and conducting the basic research that catalyzes and supports local industries” (Porter, 2007, p. 41). It is this type of work that technical communication is ideally suited to accomplish, and doing so through service-learning initiatives benefits all parties involved.

In addition to the more obvious benefits of well conceived service-learning projects—professional quality documents, service to the university community, increased university relations, access to further resources, etc. (Clarke, 2000)—technical communication students, faculty, and courses stand to have a broader impact on their local and regional communities by embracing entrepreneurialism. The educational and social reasons for and benefits of incorporating entrepreneurialism and entrepreneurialism into the curriculum are many. As Carl Schramm of the Kauffman Foundation argues in a comment relevant to the current economic situation in the United States, “Historically through the last seven recessions it’s been entrepreneurs who essentially restarted the economy” (Riley, 2009). Further, “with rare exception entrepreneurship is perceived to be the engine driving all economies regardless of the political system, as countries emulate and adapt the best the United States has to offer” (Peña et al, 2010, p. 3). Economic development can be considered a civic priority in its own right, especially in communities where academic institutions can generate opportunities for regional workforces with insufficient job prospects and high rates of under- and unemployment.

Although universities are major contributors to preparing this nation’s future entrepreneurs, as we first began to conduct research in this arena—building relationships with and between entrepreneurs and technical communication—we experienced some false starts, limited responses, and a perceived lack of recognition for the value that academicians and technical communication might add for existing entrepreneurs, SME owners, and our local economies. During our work with a regional Business Incubation Center, the Director attempted to explain the possible difficulties we were experiencing in gaining access to this population, noting that beyond the effect that the university itself has on the local economy, “academics are notorious for their lack of influence on regional/community economic growth” (T. Fellner, personal communication, April 8, 2012). Simply put,
many believe that teachers and scholars in higher education have done little to drive regional economic growth, and teachers and scholars do not elucidate these contributions to the public. The assumption that underpins a statement about academics failing to address economic growth seems especially salient in the current economic and political landscape where public- and private-sector employees—especially those in education—are embroiled in disputes about their relative societal value. We propose that entrepreneurial service-learning initiatives have the potential for helping mitigate this misperception by involving students as active partners in the economic growth of their communities.

For example, a study conducted by San Francisco State University (2003) measures the benefits and economic impact of service learning on the local organizations, businesses, and communities it serves. On the whole, the results show that the positive effects of students on businesses far outweigh the challenges: Service learning increased the organizations’ capacities to fulfill their missions, while positively affecting their economic status. Barrientos (2003) reports that service-learning students increased the ability of the businesses and organizations (some are for-profit, some nonprofit) with which they worked to provide services to their clients, noting that “thirty-two percent (32%) of respondents reported that students enhanced their services; 17% indicated that using students increased the numbers of clients served by their organizations” (p. 5). Further, eleven percent (11%) found that service learning “increased their ability to leverage other financial resources,” which improved their financial bottom-line (Barrientos, 2003, p. 5). Ultimately, service learning was significant to these community agencies “because it directly affected their ability to continue providing services, especially during hard economic times when more people need already scarce services and resources,” while helping “leverage much needed grant funding” (p. 6). Ultimately, the service-learning projects were instrumental in maintaining and growing the organizations with whom the students worked. While this growth is beneficial to the organizations as well as the public perception and community involvement of the university, it can also benefit students to reflect on how they added value to organizations. As we argue above, students receive unique educational insight from sustained reflection about how technical communication skills enhance and change organizations and how that knowledge adds value for the various customers and clients that an organization serves.

**Faculty and Programmatic Benefits**

In developing service-learning projects that engage real-world entrepreneurial practices, technical communication can contribute unique dis-
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ciphractical knowledge, skills, and methods. The mutually beneficial relationships built and sustained through service-learning projects cultivate faculty research initiatives that allow for research-teaching integration. For example, our research into the writing and communication practices of entrepreneurs and SME owners (see Spartz & Weber, in press) provides technical communication pedagogues—and varied institutional stakeholders—the requisite information to develop and amend curricula that more closely aligns with the values, needs, and desires of for-profit and nonprofit businesses.

This type of research promotes robust academy-industry relationships in our local communities, while facilitating cross-institutional connections between technical communication (e.g., English and Communication Departments) and programs in entrepreneurship housed in the business school or a freestanding center. Some English faculty members are already developing these connections, such as Paul M. Rogers, an English professor who, at the time of writing, serves as Interim Executive Director of the George Mason Center for Social Entrepreneurship, where he “works with other Mason faculty to expand integration of social entrepreneurship concepts and pedagogy within their teaching, research and writing” (“Staff”, 2013). Once established, these academic connections can provide technical communication educators and their departments with new and exciting pedagogical and scholarly opportunities. Specifically, we have found that articulating (and supporting) our value to entrepreneurship education not only better serves the needs of today’s entrepreneur students (by inculcating a germane and transferable skill-set), but also enhances technical communication itself.

Relationships that instructors, students, and programs build with community businesses for client-based projects often yield long-term partnerships—especially when the clients are entrepreneurially focused. As Cooke and Williams (2004) suggest in their discussion about client projects in the technical communication classroom, “when the client is a profitable business, these projects can also effectively be a starting point for universities interested in establishing formal relationships with industry through academic consultancy services,” as these projects “can introduce businesses to the university’s faculty and students and be the foundation upon which long-lasting, mutually beneficial partnerships can be built” (p. 140). These types of relationships are not only beneficial for the university, but also for our technical communication programs and the departments that house those programs. Having an extensive and ongoing body of organizations with which our students can work—not only in a service-learning
capacity, but also in internships—provides enriching educational opportunities only made possible through a focus on entrepreneurialism.

**Conclusion**

We develop here an approach to service learning that might broaden and reconceptualize the partnerships between technical communication students and the community factions with which they work. Ultimately, by conceiving of an extension to service-learning initiatives across the curriculum—one that builds on and adds to existing models for client-based projects—we highlight the myriad opportunities that exist within and beyond the university by engaging entrepreneurship, entrepreneurialism, and its related stakeholders. Not only is entrepreneurship a ubiquitous entity of the contemporary educational landscape, but it also provides the field of technical communication a way to further evidence its significance in preparing our university and college graduates for the workforce, one that necessarily values an entrepreneurial focus.

We recognize that many technical communication instructors may already conduct service-learning projects that follow a consultancy model or otherwise meet the criteria we have outlined for entrepreneurship-focused projects. In that case, we hope this piece provides them with evidence and strategies for articulating to other departments and administrators the value of this curriculum to multi-disciplinary entrepreneurship education initiatives. Other technical communication professionals may find that entrepreneurship-focused client and service-learning projects provide an engaging way to connect their pedagogies with student interests and the missions and resources of the university. And other teachers may have never before considered this relationship but may realize that entrepreneurship naturally intersects with their curriculum. A strategic commitment to seeking out opportunities to partner with entrepreneurial community organizations has numerous benefits, the scope of which we have just begun to recognize. This piece serves as a call for technical communicators to engage entrepreneurship in client and service-learning projects and to do further research on the role of entrepreneurship in and beyond the classroom.

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