

## 2 Starts, False Starts, and Getting Started: (Mis)understanding the Naming of a Professional Writing Minor

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### **INTRODUCTION: NAMING AS RHETORICAL DISCIPLINARY/PROGRAMMATIC ACTION**

After several years of planning and development, the University of Wyoming Department of English now offers an undergraduate minor in professional writing. In thinking about our program, we have become increasingly conscious of the ways in which the name of this program, simply the “professional writing minor,” functions within our institutional context, a relatively small (approximately ten thousand undergraduates) state university and a traditional English department offering both undergraduate and graduate (MA and MFA) degrees.

All programs have names, but most, including our own, are not particularly noteworthy. Save for some notable exceptions in recent years (for instance, Central Florida’s doctoral program in “Texts and Technology”), most writing programs that identify their mission as distinct from composition or creative writing, regardless of size or status, rely heavily on a familiar word bank for their program titles: “rhetoric,” “communication,” “writing,” “technical,” and “professional.” But while this uniformity has helped fashion a quasi-recognizable disciplinary identity in “nonacademic” writing and communication, it also deflects attention from the significance of signification. Awash in the hundreds of questions and issues that come with envisioning a program, teachers and administrators may move uncritically past this vital step in the development process, reaching for terms in the word bank without sufficiently considering their implications and the multiple lenses through which those words will be read.

Much, it seems, is at stake when naming a program. Robert Johnson points to a name’s ability to make things “unforgettable”; however, he acknowl-

edges that the process of naming is complex and fraught with competing motives, asking, “Is the naming of programs a determinist enterprise that takes on a life of its own? Or are we being creative in our endeavor to associate thing to thing, spiritual fact with embodied form?” Johnson recognizes the need to let local factors guide naming but cautions against promising more (or less) than can be delivered: “. . .should we think twice about *unnaming* ourselves in the process of trying to embrace too much?” Generally speaking, the implications of program naming have been inferred from broader conversations about connections between program development and institutional politics (Cunningham and Harris; Hayhoe, et al; Latterell; MacNealy and Heaton; Mendelson; Rentz; Sides; Sullivan and Porter) and intersections between disciplinarity and professionalism (Faber, Savage).

With their focus on larger programmatic and disciplinary issues, many of the aforementioned authors typically address program naming in tangential fashion, although some acknowledge what might be at stake when naming a program or, in some cases, an entire field of inquiry. MacNealy and Heaton suggest that the name “Professional and Technical Communication” may best represent the field’s scope and hope for acceptance: “. . .if we want to enhance our image among those outside the field, the term ‘professional’ might be a better choice than ‘technical’ because it is more inclusive and it sounds less mechanistic.” (55). Dayton and Bernhardt’s 2003 survey of ATTW (Association of Teachers of Technical Writing) members asked respondents what the field should be called, offering a variety of fixed-response possibilities from which to choose. The top three choices included: “Technical Communication” (39%); “Professional Communication” (32%); and “Professional Writing” (10%). However, in an open-ended follow-up question, respondents offered still more alternatives and noted the importance of having a name that communicated clearly to outsiders but that acknowledges specific contexts (29-30).

We know, then, that naming—of the discipline, of programs—is a contested process. But beyond being a critical choice in the early stages of a writing program, we believe that a program name is a powerful site from which to begin examining a program’s history, politics, and function—a program name tells a compelling story. We argue that any study of naming becomes, in part, a study of 1) historically-situated program development, and 2) program execution, one test of a name’s veracity and scope, as well as the implications of its signification. Thus, in this chapter, we trace the development of the professional writing minor at the University of Wyoming through a narrative chronology that constructs a constellation of the voices (writing faculty, other English department members, administrators, and students) giving shape to the minor as it currently stands; specifically, we examine our “starts” and “false starts” before turning to

the present challenges of “getting started.” In doing so, we map the vast array of connected and disconnected questions, concerns, and values that come into play when a program of this kind is developed and named. We believe that the archaeology of a program name can be uniquely generative as a site of research, a catalyst for institutional critique, and, consequently, a means of reclaiming a name and program. And while we acknowledge the power of more abstract conversation about naming, we assert that a local focus might yield more granular insight into this highly contextualized process, insight that has the potential to enrich—and complicate—our sense of the complexity of both naming and program development.

### **FINDING OUR OWN VOICES: WINDOWS TO PAST, PRESENT**

In approaching the question of program naming, we prioritized the two broad currents identified above: 1) historically situated development and 2) program execution. To that end, we crafted a quasi-ethnographic approach to researching our name and the issues and events that both precipitated and emerged from it. In short, we compiled information and perspectives through examination of:

- our own personal narratives written from the perspective of writing faculty deeply invested in planning, teaching in, and overseeing the program
- semi-structured interviews with past and present members of the English Department (faculty, students, administrators), many of whom played an integral role in the development and launch of the program
- files and archives containing a variety of documents pertaining to the minor (e.g., course approval forms, meeting minutes, related grant proposals, email correspondence regarding the curriculum, computer classroom, etc.).

As writer-researchers, we represent both a historical cross-section of the writing history at UW and the range of responsibilities for program execution at our university. All of us are situated in the Department of English. Some of us work as academic professional lecturers (APLs), which are extended-term teaching positions (six-year renewable appointment and opportunity for promotion). Others are assistant and associate professors, respectively, in writing-related fields.<sup>1</sup> Some of us have a significant measure of professional writing experience outside the academy in addition to experience in other fields; others have

focused more specifically on writing in academic contexts. All of us have taught a variety of courses in our department's professional writing minor, served on a range of writing-related committees, and worked together on various writing-related initiatives in our department or on campus.

At UW, we have constructed a minor designed to capitalize on the range of experience and expertise that we, as teachers, bring to the program. At present, the professional writing minor consists of eighteen credit hours and emphasizes flexibility. Students are required to take two three-credit core courses:

ENGL 2035	Writing for Public Forums
ENGL 4000	21 <sup>st</sup> Century Issues in Professional Writing

In addition, they choose two of the following three-credit courses:

ENGL 4010	Technical Writing in the Professions
ENGL 4020	Editing for Publication
ENGL 4050	Writer's Workshop: Magazine Writing
ENGL 4970	Professional Writing Internship

Finally, students select two writing-intensive elective courses, typically related to their major course of study and connected to their career objectives.

### **CHRONOLOGY: CONSTRUCTING OUR PAST, CONSIDERING OUR PRESENT**

In the sections that follow, a series of narratives describes the myriad conditions, values, and beliefs that gave rise to a program named, somewhat serendipitously, the "professional writing minor" and demonstrates some of the consequences of this naming choice for various stakeholders within our institutional context.

#### **Starts (1986-1993)**

It would be inaccurate – and unfair – to suggest that nothing occurred toward writing development at the University of Wyoming prior to 1986. Tilly and John Warnock began their careers at UW during the 1970s and their impact lingers to this day. Of writing at UW and across the state, one colleague recalls, "I think it was an outgrowth of the Warnocks ... they were a major, charismatic force in the department, (and) not just within the department but in the uni-

versity as a whole.” Another colleague recalls their development of the Wyoming Writing Project, the Wyoming Conference, and the Writing Center during the seventies and early eighties. Their collaborative essay, “Liberatory Writing Centers” (1984), both defined and helped establish university writing centers nationwide, and Tilly’s *Writing Is Critical Action* (1989) is still commonly cited in composition scholarship. In essence, the Warnocks were the first real representatives of composition and rhetoric—as we would define that discipline today—at UW, and were strident advocates for its acceptance.

The late 1970s also begat a pivotal course on campus: Scientific and Technical Writing (ENGL 4010), the name of which, interestingly, would be changed to “Technical Writing in the Professions” in 2001. As shall be seen, tracking 4010’s permutations constitutes a primary, connective thread through our narrative. If nothing else, one colleague notes, “I’m sure that (4010) proved the existence of a clientele” for an upper-level writing course beyond that era’s requirement for only two semesters of “freshman” composition. Twenty years later, meeting the needs of that “clientele” would, in part, spawn the professional writing minor.

On the other hand, the advent of Scientific and Technical Writing almost immediately raised two counter-considerations. The course was developed within the English department from a direct request by the College of Engineering – to enhance their students’ writing skills – but the College of Business quickly came onboard and began requiring it of their majors. For obvious reasons, the course was immediately consigned to the “service” bin, with the result that very few English faculty members cared to teach it. This attitude was administratively underlined when the Dean of Arts and Sciences subsequently refused to accept work in this area for tenure or promotion deliberations. Because of this, and because the course was too advanced for graduate assistants to teach, 4010 was progressively shunted to temporary lecturers.

And then there was that *name*—“Scientific and Technical Writing.” Clearly, when marketing or accounting majors began queuing up for the course, it lost any technical edge or scientific facet it might have contained. Indeed, one faculty member who developed the original version of 4010 thought to himself, at that time, “This really isn’t a scientific and technical writing course ... we ought to call it ‘professional writing.’”

This brings us to our primary timeline from 1986 to present; we chose 1986 as a starting point for one simple reason: that year, two hundred attendees of the Wyoming Conference on English (co-chaired by the Warnocks) overwhelmingly adopted the “Wyoming Conference Resolution,” arguably the most important document concerning post-secondary writing in our professional lifetimes. With its focus on personnel issues, today the Resolution seems akin to a

union's grievance against management. However, by concentrating on *people*—on those who teach and develop writing—the Resolution served as a cornerstone for comprehensive writing curricula across the country. Indeed, the Resolution helped make it possible to develop writing curricula by emphasizing improved working conditions, such as compensation and workload, for those who would develop and execute such programs. But as we now know, few of these achievements came smoothly or without some sort of price, and writing development at UW was certainly no exception.

Without fanfare – and with virtually no attention from other department members – our assistant chair began a “cohort group” for 4010 instructors in 1987. The group's initial function was twofold: to supply mutual support for those teaching this demanding course, and to improve consistency without limiting academic freedom. The cohort group's overall success was confirmed by one colleague who joined the department a few years later: “The group... seemed to feel a justifiable sense of ownership of the course and pride in its high quality and had reached a (general) group consensus on standards and assignments.” Certainly these were no small accomplishments, but they frequently played second fiddle to larger topics within the group. For instance, for several years, the group maintained a running discussion of gender issues in the technical writing classroom, such as why male instructors were often evaluated as being “tough but fair,” whereas our female colleagues were raked for being “too tough,” “unfair,” or “a bitch.” (Combined with being stuck in term-limited positions, teaching a devalued course, and working in an “unscholarly” discipline, this gender bias formed what one colleague dubbed a “quadruple whammy.”) Under the circumstances of the times, it was invisible work performed by an invisible group, but it “... solidified and brought together the APLs (lecturers) in the department who were working with 4010.”

More visible by far were the events of 1990-93 and the English department's response to them. First, UW's administration mandated development of a new University Studies Program (USP), and central to that plan was replacing the previously mentioned two-semester “frosh comp” requirement with writing courses labeled WA (first-year), WB (sophomore/junior), and WC (senior/capstone). After review and approval, any college, department, or program on campus could teach any of these multi-tiered writing courses. The English department reacted by appointing a six-person Writing Committee and charged this group with qualifying, quantifying, and separating these different levels of written discourse.

All of this was rather momentous. The new USP simultaneously recognized writing's central importance to a meaningful education *and* opened the door to writing across the curriculum (WAC) for the first time at UW. In

the eyes of the university's administration, at least, those who taught writing were suddenly elevated from second-class citizenship to being significant contributors. And while the Writing Committee's official function was to determine what constituted WA, WB or WC writing only within this department, it was tacitly understood that our delineations ultimately would apply to all writing courses, campus-wide. One lecturer remembers, "We were considered 'the pros' when it came to writing, so we got to call the shots." Therefore, through the act of defining, this small in-house group *named* writing at UW.

This section would be incomplete without mentioning a Department of English retreat held in the fall of 1993. This gathering produced the departmental decision to formulate a "writing program," that focused on neither "academic" nor "creative" writing at its core and sparked the need for someone to develop and direct such a program. However, individual recollections of this event are varied. One participant remains convinced that this portion of the retreat's agenda was orchestrated to the point of crafty manipulation ("... it was a nifty bit of stacking the deck"); two others would contend all of this "just happened" with little to no forethought or planning; and at least one department member can recall precisely who catered the food – and nothing else. One might suspect that the clarity and tone of these memories depended on the individual's proximity to writing and writing instruction, but that could be mere conjecture.

### **False Starts (1993-1998)**

By the end of this period of "starts," the value of Scientific and Technical Writing (ENGL 4010) was clear on paper, at least regarding numbers, as evidenced by a University Studies document authored in part by the English department chair in 1991. This document focused on the fact that freshman composition and ENGL 4010 made up most of the department's course offerings and helped keep the department viable in the eyes of the rest of the University; indeed, in the eyes of our department chair at the time, 4010 helped "justify its [the English department's] existence and size to the outsider." Thus, the worth of these two writing courses in the larger university context was becoming clearer.

The aforementioned WAC movement of the early 1990s played to mixed reviews campus-wide but had significant implications for the APLs charged with much of its implementation, as well as for the way in which the department was perceived vis-à-vis writing on campus. A former chair, now a dean, believes that the department's involvement in WAC showed that "...we in English are 'good soldiers'" to the university at large. She also believes that because of WAC our writing teachers got more respect campus wide because of a heightened presence, if not necessarily in our own department. For Writing Center personnel,

nearly all of whom were English department APLs, these WAC-focused years were busy. In addition to full course loads, most APLs were assigned to the Writing Center for five hours a week to work with clients and perform extensive outreach for the Center, often preparing and presenting numerous workshops and seminars each week to help guide the campus-wide implementation of WAC. In the end, however, APLs could claim little if any meaningful professional credit for this tremendous outlay of individual and collaborative time and effort; it was just expected. Ironically, but politically foreseeable, it was the relatively invisible, relatively powerless temporary writing instructors who were charged with helping to improve the level of writing integration in the entire university.

When some WAC courses around campus were later dropped, departments typically directed students to 4010 to meet graduation requirements, and so course enrollments continued to burgeon. However, some English department faculty felt that this type of writing was too far outside the domain of traditional English Studies and a threat to the very identity of our department. In consequence, English majors were not allowed to take the technical writing course for credit in the major. One senior lecturer says, “The problem we’ve always had with the perception of 4010 is that people always saw it as a service class for people outside of the English department and of course, as you know, it wasn’t allowed to be counted for an English major... people saw it as being like fill-in-the-blank kind of writing and I guess they didn’t see it as “real writing” ... they just saw it as a real sort of pedestrian writing.” Another faculty member notes, “...the course...has always had this marginal relationship to the department. I mean, it was so striking and odd to me that for a while that course didn’t count toward the major ...that was one 4000-level course that ‘non-professors’ ...could teach.”<sup>2</sup>

While ambivalence toward the role of technical and scientific communication remained, the department moved to build upon its decision at the 1993 department retreat to start a real writing program at UW by making a professorial hire at the assistant level in rhetoric/composition in 1994. After a honeymoon year to “get her feet on the ground” the department expected the hire to open a new chapter in our freshman writing program, especially in the development of teaching assistant (TA) training, as graduate TAs taught many of the composition courses. Unfortunately, the professor’s perceived overall resistance to guiding the program and her self-confessed anger at the political situation regarding the overall attitude toward writing resulted in her resignation after two years. In her time here, however, this professor helped lead the technical writing instructors more fully into the world of computer technology and computer-mediated instruction through workshops and training sessions with her and outside consultants.

In the ensuing two-year gap between the departure of one rhet/comp professor and the hiring of another, there seemed to be growing consensus regarding the need for a “tenure track presence... to give a new writing program legitimacy.” Throughout this tough time, the technical writing cohort hung together, trying to keep spirits up, lives intact, and eyes looking forward as the professionals that members knew they were. The cohort kept abreast of new trends, technology developments, and the national debates about the many aspects of the discipline. The one thing members did not formally discuss, however, was a professional writing minor. Although the 4010 cohort group would later play a central role in constructing the minor, at this juncture, it was just “too pie in the sky” to have any real hope it might happen.

### Getting Started (1998-2000)

However, in the October 1997 *MLA Job Information List* the UW English Department publicly indicated its intention to develop a writing minor and sought a senior faculty member to serve as a “point person” for the new minor and the first-year writing program. The department’s intention to hire at the senior level indicated an awareness—born during the years of “starts” and “false starts”—of the political complications inherent in coordinating or developing writing programs within a department holding a traditional literature view of the English Department’s curricular geography (Sullivan and Porter 393). One senior literature professor, to whom a former department chair attributes the idea of developing a writing minor, also points to a generational shift in the department in which a cohort of faculty “came out [of graduate school] with a much different notion of what “English” meant for our students, and not just students who were going to show up in our English classes because of their great love of literature, but students who were actually living and working in English.” She explained in an interview that “for us, thinking about writing as a part of a student’s education wasn’t an add-on. We saw the integration.” She believes this integrative vision among some faculty members paved the way for the 1998 hiring of an Associate Professor of Composition and Rhetoric and for a significant store of goodwill among the literature faculty toward a possible new writing minor.

Perhaps understandably, considering the departmental history and hierarchies, in the early stages of developing the minor, some of the department’s lecturers were more wary than their literature colleagues about the hiring of someone who, although appropriately credentialed with a doctoral degree, had less nonacademic experience with technical and professional writing than most of them did. The new hire, Kelly Belanger, brought to the position a generalist

background and interest in collaborative program development that proved a relatively comfortable fit with a department whose literature and creative writing faculty had only a nascent sense of composition, rhetoric, or professional/technical writing as fields within English Studies, each with their own bodies of scholarship and intellectual traditions. Along with research interests in composition, computers and writing, business communication, and literature, she also brought entrepreneurial experience from having developed a new writing program for unionized steelworkers in Ohio and, with business partners, a coffeehouse/café. This generalist background to some extent mirrored the generalist strengths of the department's richly experienced APLs. Even so, early on, some members of the 4010 cohort greeted the new "point person" with skepticism that made it difficult for the team and their appointed leader to see their common interests in advancing the status of writing in the department. One senior APL proved a valuable intermediary, "translating" between other APLs and thus helping to clarify their overlapping goals. As the longtime leader of the cohort group put it, "I think we had the perception that something like [a writing minor] couldn't happen."

Although we can't identify the particular meeting or discussion during which we settled on the term "professional" to characterize the writing minor—indeed it seemed a name simply "in the air" that we gravitated toward—notes from a June 2000 Wyoming Conference on English writing workshops suggest that some members of the technical writing cohort group pondered early on the implications of the term "professional." One note taker mused, "Professional writing is an umbrella term. Business writing/com, tech. writing, and scientific writing are all subsumed under the larger term 'Professional Writing.' Which of these terms work best for what we want to teach?" A senior APL explains, "We weren't trying really to narrow our program because first of all we're all kind of generalists.... And I think that we felt comfortable with a more general name, or general title, under which we could see ourselves as instructors. Professional writing minor seemed just right."

The scope of the minor broadened even further when the proposal for the minor went before the department in Spring 2000. Literature colleagues argued for including literature, creative writing, and any designated WAC courses as electives in the new program. These arguments reflect what a former department chair identifies as the initial impetus for the minor when it was first discussed during the 1993 retreat—to draw in more students to the English Department, including its literature courses. Rather than debating the boundaries of the minor or exploring what benefits clearer articulations of what the minor courses could offer intellectually as well as practically, the department agreed upon a big umbrella for the minor and moved forward quickly to approve it.

Settling on the term “professional,” with its ever-expanding connotations, not only reflected the generalist background of faculty teaching in the minor, it also responded to a range of desires, anxieties, and assumptions on the part of the English Department and its faculty. While some, even many, faculty members might have welcomed more sustained discussion at least behind the scenes, the department appeared willing, even eager, to approve the minor without further discussion, perhaps for practical reasons of its own. Perhaps anxious not to go the way of impoverished, diminished humanities departments with no service course responsibilities, some faculty saw the new “professional” writing minor as a commodity to package and sell, a product more practical and marketable than its literature or creative writing courses. One colleague described using the term professional as a “packaging maneuver.” And in the early 1970s, teaching technical writing courses had seemed a wise career move for one literature professor we interviewed, who feared for his career in light of declining English majors. Another literature professor interviewed denied that his support for the minor had anything to do with concern about the viability of the English Department or major. Instead, he saw the minor as a way to address the perceived illiteracy of engineers and agronomists while potentially drawing them to take a few literature electives and the “richer experience” those courses offered. But his quick denial of any concern about English Department enrollments belies the reality that more majors and minors translates to more faculty hires, a larger budget, and more influence for the department in the university.

Only one literature professor strongly expressed concern about “the validity of a Writing Minor in the first place.” When the proposal for the minor went before the department’s curriculum committee, few wanted to debate questions he raised about whether “the minor value[s] praxis above the quest for pure knowledge” and whether “writing’ as defined by the minor represent[s] a field of knowledge or a set of skills?” The discussion closed down quickly after a counterstatement claiming that “as far as praxis goes, schools like Engineering are already structured around the concept of praxis. As well, elements of our literature courses can be considered to be skill-based.” Minutes from the meeting record that “we (committee members) did not resolve disagreements on this issue.” More to the point, the brief discussion begged the question at the heart of the matter—whether courses in writing, rhetoric, and communication are legitimate areas of intellectual study in a research university or whether these courses and those who teach them merit the adjunct and secondary status constructed for them by the English Department’s curricular geography.

Unfortunately, much of the intellectual work that took place in creating the professional writing minor remained invisible to the literature faculty and even to the department chair at the time. The former chair recalls that

“somebody might have mentioned to me that Kelly and some of the others – the academic professionals, I guess, were talking about [a writing minor], but I don’t recall ever getting anything official you know, and I thought, let the discussion go. People should talk about things like that.” What the faculty didn’t see, or caught only glimpses of, was two years of intensive work that involved three major grant projects: one to develop a computer classroom, another to develop a sophomore-level WAC course into a foundational course for the new minor, and a third to develop the minor itself through a Center for Teaching Excellence (CTL) Grant that funded a retreat, a series of workshops, and an assessment survey of the English 4010 course. A senior APL remembers the English 4010 survey project as “the first time we were really coming together as a group of 4010 teachers and realizing that we had something that was a fairly good course—very important to the university—and the fact that we were teaching most sections meant that it was very important to the English Department, even though our majors weren’t eligible for it.”

Meanwhile, the CTL grant application reflects the cohort group’s determination that courses in the minor be intellectually rigorous, grounded in relevant discourse theories:

As part of our Academic Plan, the Dept. of English is developing a new, interdisciplinary minor in Professional writing. The minor will prepare students from a range of disciplines for writing-related careers and deepen their understanding of the social, political, linguistic, and rhetorical nature of written discourse.

Despite this “mission statement” avowing the intellectual underpinnings of courses in the minor, we’ve learned through this project that some of our literature colleagues remain unconvinced of the minor’s place within a liberal arts tradition. As one colleague observed, “a lot of us on the lit faculty had a general sense of things that went on in professional writing overall but no sense of the kind of intellectual history or the intellectual debates animating the field. I think a lot of people didn’t even know it existed because they thought it was more of a ‘toolkit’ minor.” She added, “I think that was a real failure on our part for a long time in the department to even recognize that there is an intellectual history to this stuff, not just...it’s not like becoming a mechanic or wrenching or something...it was an odd...it was a slow education for me.” In truth, the failure has been mutual. In our zeal to “get started,” those of us working on the minor underestimated the challenge and importance of bridging the gaps between our own and our colleagues’ understandings of what professional writing and, more

broadly, rhetorical education and scholarship can entail. As long as this gap remains, the future of the minor rests on unsteady ground.

### **Staying Afloat (2000-present)**

Navigating the waves of resistance and tides of support, we have reached a relatively calm harbor where our minor rides nicely in the water. We have a strong set of courses that are well received by students, taught with competence and creativity by our tenure-track and APL faculty. We continue to teach most of our courses in the Humanities Resource Center, more commonly called a computer classroom, housed in the building in which the English department resides.

The minor attracts students from across campus who tailor their elective choices to match their career expectations or their interests. At present we are unable to articulate, exactly, what it is the professional writing minors as a group expect as a career payoff for their efforts. However, many of us have heard students express comfort with the title “professional,” as it connotes what they’ve studied, not what it leads them to expect. Students don’t seem burdened with questions of semantics and what role word choice plays in our department’s administrative plans, staffing decisions, or interaction with the university as a whole. For this reason, our minor could largely be labeled a success: we have departmental support, strong collegiality among writing faculty, and student enthusiasm. What more could we want?

We would not be doing a service to our various constituencies if our answer to that question was “nothing.” Instead, we continue to seek clarity in our goals and objectives in order to foster departmental and university support. We know the educational bazaar represented by students who chose our minor is going to mean we’ll have to deal with various expectations on the part of students and their major departments. One teacher reports that in her recent 2035 class (the introductory course in the minor) she had computer science majors, physics majors, a business major, and somebody in biology or botany or forestry, and “all of them were interested in the professional writing minor. Their major doesn’t have that focus, but whatever they end up doing, they like to write and really want these skills.” One English major decided to declare the minor because “I had no idea what I wanted to do with my degree. It (the minor) seemed to diversify my choices, instead of being limited to just teaching, which is what you often hear is ‘the only thing you can do with an English degree.’”

Faculty expectations of the minor vis-à-vis student outcomes also vary. One colleague suggests that the minor might “get them [students] jobs, and get

them prepared for those jobs. It would get them official certification that they could carry out into the world that they had not only done some writing, but that they'd thought about it and gotten some training in thinking about writing for a variety of contexts in the professional world." But others in the department are still uncomfortable that English is in the business of getting students ready for jobs. States a former department chair:

The worry that I had was that by creating this analogy (calling the minor "professional") that there would be an implicit promise of where you go through this and there is a profession of technical writing and you can – you will – get a job in it. And I began to worry that students would in a sense get the idea that they were entitled to a job.

He goes on to support some form of employability in the majors and minors we turn out. He sees the role of the minor as:

...producing writers capable of learning to write software manuals, or capable of learning to write grant proposals for whatever agency, or capable of learning to write contracts as paralegals. I don't mean that you'd have a minor in writing software manuals. What you would have is a certain fundamental grounding and awareness of writing software manuals, that there are certain conventions in legal writing, there are certain conventions in grant writing....

Uncertainty over how we should prepare students inevitably spills over into how we should hire teachers to do the preparing. In 2002 we hired a second tenure-track rhet/comp person expected to be a major player in the minor, and in 2004 we hired an APL expected to teach 4010 through our Outreach school and run the professional writing internship program.

One tenured literature professor who was involved in searches for a second tenure-track rhet/comp position phrased the uncertainty like this:

...you could tell with each potential candidate, the meaning of what the professional writing minor would be would change because it would be, 'oh, here's somebody who's amazing at web design, and that's what our professional writing minor needs.' But then it would be, 'Here's somebody who does science studies. That's what the professional writing minor is.'

During that process, which took place before we began this research, these sometimes contradictory senses of need were not sufficiently recognized or articulated. The analogy of people grasping different parts of an elephant and not understanding they all have the same creature in their hand is oft-used for a reason.

Our minor accommodates many interests, but that part which we each claim as our own causes us to claim stakes in a territory that is only part of the whole.

The first year of our search for the second rhet/comp position produced no job offers, but in the second we found a candidate who fit what we could agree were our needs. Michael's degree was in technical communication and rhetoric, and he was looking for something that would allow him to pursue that interest. He explains what he expected from a program called "professional writing" and how that compares with what he found: "I saw a 'professional writing' minor and immediately associated it with technical writing—the terms are/were often used nearly interchangeably in the professional literature; it was my hope that I could participate in the minor by finding a technical communication niche." The uncertainty the department felt was in place not only for the hiring of tenure-track professors. Indeed, in the course of the recent APL hire, we continued to disagree about what our needs were and which job candidates best met them. Should we value technical skills? Broad training in rhetoric? Professional writing experience? In each case, the lack of consensus regarding the name "professional writing" turned the job search into a heuristic for understanding the field and our program.

Some final thoughts as we reflect on where we are at this time. We've realized through this research project that what started out as an English department service course (4010) has turned into a viable and exciting minor for our students. In turn, our APLs and tenure-track faculty have a stronger sense of professional purpose. While it is true that the naming of the minor raised issues for debate, that debate is a healthy one because it takes place among an increasingly respected writing faculty within the context of the larger department's view of its purpose and identity. The result is better integration of our once-perceived disparate needs into a department that, for now, at the worst, accepts what we do and at the best, celebrates it.

### **UNCOVERING A HISTORY OF NAMING: LOCATING KEY THREADS**

We started this project with a key assumption: naming itself is a generative process, and examining a name and its historical context can yield important insights about that context and the way in which a name functions. While we remain somewhat unsure of the exact moment in time when "professional writing minor" was minted as the program title, by examining our history, we are able to reconstruct not only a rationale for the name but also the significance of the naming context—the politics, decisions, attitudes, and actions that spawned the development of the program itself. We recognize, too, the process

of naming and investing a name with meaning as a claiming of sorts. Constructing a history of our name permits a reclaiming, an opportunity to look back and move forward mindful of this heritage.

### **History and Development: A Service Course Heritage**

What does our history tell us? For one, our “professional writing minor” exists in a context where writing has, in some ways, been historically marginalized or, worse, de-professionalized. We can see that in our particular institutional context, professional writing has a lineage traceable to the early days of a politically charged course, ENGL 4010. As a service course at the heart of the department’s commitment to writing on campus, it has long generated credit hours and revenue for the department but has not always been fully embraced. Given its role as the department’s most prominent non-creative, non-literary writing course outside of freshman composition, 4010’s history no doubt conditioned the development and perceptions of the professional writing minor. As noted earlier, the idea of a minor or writing program of some sort fermented informally for years in the 4010 cohort group, and it seems possible that the minor’s historical connection to 4010, while lending credibility to the minor campus-wide, may now consciously or unconsciously compromise how members of our department see it and its function within the department. It is difficult to ignore the fact that advanced non-creative writing study was traditionally offered only through 4010, a *service* course with all the attendant baggage of such purpose. By association, the minor—which includes 4010 as an elective—cannot help but evoke thoughts of service and utilitarianism. Consequently, the specter of “toolkit” and its associations with intellectual—even moral—bankruptcy looms.

Service courses, as we know, are frequently taught by adjuncts and lecturers whose job security is oftentimes in question, and the residue of 4010’s service history lingers. At the center of the 4010 story, and by association the professional writing minor, is the group of people who have traditionally taught it: extended-term and temporary academic professional lecturers (APLs). While APLs gained presence and influence around campus in the mid-1990s with the emergence of WAC on campus, much of their work was done through the Writing Center (housed outside of English); thus, much of the APLs’ work was rendered largely invisible, which, in turn, failed to raise their profile or the profile of devoted writing instruction in the English department. The staffing situation was only further complicated by the elimination of funding previously earmarked (in the wake of the Wyoming Resolution) for additional extended-term APLs; when these funds disappeared, the department turned to a growing roster of temporary lecturers working on one-year contracts. Until Kelly arrived in 1998, then, the segment of the faculty with the least “professional” status in the

traditional academic hierarchy—regardless of teaching success or professional writing experience—conducted the vast majority of advanced writing instruction in the department.

### **Naming and Program Execution at Present: Our Faculty, Our Students**

This history has implications for the present and future success of the minor. In terms of our most immediate teaching needs, we continue to rely heavily on APLs, mostly extended-term, but occasionally—and more and more frequently in 4010—temporary lecturers. Again, concerns arise about “professionalism,” as these temporary lecturers—although typically outstanding, if inexperienced teachers—often bring indirectly related or unrecognized professional and academic credentials to professional and technical writing instruction, in addition to having no job security and thus little time or incentive to seek additional credentialing, experience, or professional development. As a department, then, we need to think honestly and creatively about staffing solutions. And given the aforementioned uncertainty that many of those charged with hiring faculty in professional writing have brought to previous job searches, it seems clear that the challenge remains for our department to continue to raise the question of what “professional” means in our context—and how we will envision, staff, and deliver a “professional” course of study.

For our students, we need to think carefully about what our name communicates given the role it plays in marketing and recruiting. Who is our target audience? Does the minor deliver what it is supposed to? What do students think that is? One colleague notes reservations about the minor’s suitability for English majors, a constituency we hope to reach:

It’s just that I think they’re [courses in the minor] less useful to English majors than I had anticipated they might have been when we started. And maybe it’s because the problems you have to address for the guy who wants to be a rancher who’s trying to learn how to write reports are not the level of the person who wants to be the editor of a professional journal, for example.

One student, a graduated English major, shares this concern: “I think that sometimes, being already an English major, I felt that I wasn’t getting quite as much from the required classes in the minor as other students might that are not already majoring in the field.”

The same colleague suggests an important interpretation of our program name, clearly related to his belief about the minor’s relevance to English majors: “The problem with it is that it’s not professional writing. It’s writing

for people with different majors. People who are not going to become professional writers.” In conducting our research, it seemed that at least some colleagues felt a similar sense of conflict and read or constructed the minor as a site where “professionalization” is the ultimate outcome. To put it in Couture and Rymer’s terms, some faculty members expect the minor to graduate “career writers,” rather than “professionals who write” (4-5). The distinction is meaningful here because it gets to the heart of the program’s purpose and audience. If the minor is designed to develop “career writers,” genuine writing professionals, it would seemingly exclude much of the external, interdisciplinary population of students who we believe 1) give it vitality and 2) stand to benefit from it. On the other hand, if the minor is designed and directed toward “professionals who write,” some, at least, seem to see our own English majors as excluded. “Professional,” here, is clearly ambiguous, and one can easily see the curricular complications that emerge. However, the ethical dimension of this confusion cannot be ignored: we must be certain that we are delivering the kind of instruction that benefits all of the students we invite; otherwise, we need to send out fewer invitations.

### **“Professional” Writing and the Challenge of Dissensus**

We would like to make a few final observations about our minor’s name, starting with the interesting paradox surrounding “professional”: it evokes concerns about “practical,” which is often seen as uniquely odious in English settings even as it evokes feelings of status—however authentic—among students, some faculty, and, we would guess, administrators. The implicit link between “practical” and a market economy can feel problematic to some, even as it excites others. One colleague, arguing for a more unified approach to literary and rhetorical education, notes about the minor:

I think you’ve tried to subdivide or isolate a certain set of literary skills that don’t necessarily depend upon a rich wealth of allusion or nuance.... if the extent of their power of allusion is the Microsoft homepage, then you’re really working with a ceiling you’ll never rise above. I don’t think you can be really “professional” if your range of knowledge isn’t beyond that kind of ceiling .... If all the allusions we make are to consumer values, then we’re not advancing; we’re not professional. We’re not advancing the knowledge of our community.

To this colleague, achieving “professional” status means more than being practically prepared to join the workforce; indeed, “professionalism” is in some ways

synonymous with liberal education and the intellectual discovery it implies. But again, other students, colleagues, and administrators may well hold a positive view of the practical dimension of “professional writing” (only one part of it, we would argue) as a necessary step toward a successful career and the status that follows. So, while “professional” is oft-hailed for its generality and the breadth it accommodates as a naming word, we must constantly be attuned to the very different ways in which students, faculty, and administrators will encounter it. We need to seek ways to unite the different goals these constituencies locate in the term “professional.”

Optimistically, this variety of interpretations may well open the door to many possibilities for our program structure. However, this lack of consensus can lead to manipulation as well. Unlike composition and rhetoric or technical writing, for that matter, “professional” floats just above the surface of significance—it remains general and resists deep treatment of any *particular* kind of writing or communication. This absence of narrowly defined specialization can make it difficult, for instance, to argue for tenure-track faculty and extended-term APL lines, stalling deep investment in writing research.

More frustrating still is the fact that the term “professional” lets the minor be administratively manipulated, which may be simply unavoidable. Initial rumblings about a general “writing minor” turned at some point to a “professional” writing minor, which no doubt plays better at higher levels of administration even as its signification is relatively ambiguous. Again, this is to be expected to an extent. As one colleague notes, “I wouldn’t expect there to be a real deep signification in this notion of professionalism, except that it’s really kind of ‘hitching on’ to the cultural values of the early twenty-first century. Within the university we tend to live with an awful lot of euphemisms and packaging.” But while this is true, it is frustrating that, for instance, connecting professional writing to the mission of the department’s new MFA might be, as one colleague put it, “...largely rhetorical performance for the academic plan and academic affairs,” if we are unwilling to work tirelessly to understand and professionalize the working conditions of those who teach in the minor that goes by the same name or fully acknowledge the intellectual depth of this emerging part of our English Studies “profession.”

## CONCLUSION

Names are important to program developers, but we believe they become even more crucial as a constituency gets farther away from the program. If we assume, for instance, that writing faculty and program developers enjoy the

most intimate relationship with the program (perhaps a self-centered assumption, but one that makes intuitive sense) and, indeed, oftentimes are charged with the task of naming itself, other constituencies might be seen as existing—and thus *interpreting*—the program at some degree of removal. Other department members use their reading of the name, for instance, as an inroad into departmental conversations that can shape program direction and expectations. Similarly, students interested in enrolling in the program may rely disproportionately on the name to determine whether the program is relevant to their interests and career goals. In each case, these constituencies rely more heavily on the name for interpretation and decision-making than do those charged with developing the program. As the first interface many have with the program, a name matters.

Are the stakes lower for us at UW because we are talking here about a minor, not a major or graduate program? Perhaps. But we would argue that the core issues surrounding naming vis-à-vis program development and execution remain roughly the same. Any writing program must carefully consider the range of interpretations and expectations various constituencies will bring to bear on its curriculum and, significantly, its institutional role. Are these expectations at odds with one another? Which expectations can realistically be met given resources like faculty, funding, and goodwill?

Moreover, the ethics of recruiting students to a particular name must be of chief concern to *any* program. Students deserve to know what particular courses of study—minor, major, or graduate—can do for them in both their intellectual development and their preparation for a career. Naming—and operationalizing a chosen name—is central to this, as a program's label heavily conditions marketing and recruiting, as well as advising. Advisers, particularly those in other departments, frequently rely on either a limited understanding or a markedly different discourse when helping students make curricular decisions. These differences must be considered and accounted for. If signification must lack precision, writing program faculty members owe it to students and advisers to make as much information available as possible. We believe that examining that signification's history can go a long way toward developing a more robust shared understanding for all of these constituencies.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kelly Belanger took a position as an associate professor at Virginia Tech University in fall 2005.

<sup>2</sup> In fall 1993, a change in status to extended-term Academic Professional Lecturers (APL) was implemented for qualifying temporary lecturers in the department. This position had a tenure track of sorts and lacked the previous term limits in keeping with the vision of the Wyoming Conference Resolution. For the English department, this change stabilized the ranks of instructors teaching heavily enrolled required composition courses. The original plan was to hire twelve APLs, four at a time over three years, but within two years of its inception, the dedicated funds for APL hires were rescinded and absorbed into the university's general fund; APL hires now competed with professorial hires for the same pot of money. Over the initial two-year hiring period, eight APLs were hired; only three members of that original group remain. Since then, four other APLs have been hired, with three still here, but these hires have been made at large intervals of time and often on a need-to-hire basis to fill critical gaps in other department offerings. One APL notes, "The English department has NEVER fulfilled, or even approached, its goal of twelve APLs."

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