

## 15 A *Techné* for Citizens: Service-Learning, Conversation, and Community

James Dubinsky

*“It is a natural mistake to think that reverence belongs to religion. It belongs, rather, to community.”*

— Woodruff, *Reverence*, 5

In *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Joan Didion attempts to understand the grief she experienced and explain the emotional and practical tasks she faced in a year that began with the sudden death of her husband. He suffered a massive heart attack, hours after visiting their only daughter who was lying, near death, in a nearby hospital. To situate us and begin the narrative, she describes these events to illustrate how “Life changes fast. / Life changes in an instant” (3). And, despite tremendous grief and bewilderment, after a year of reflection, she comes to a conclusion that to survive “you ha[ve] to feel the swell change. You ha[ve] to go with the change” (227).

While I am not writing about grief, which was Didion’s catalyst, I am writing about change and the ability to think “magically” to deal with stressful, difficult, and unexpected issues. As I look back on my ten years at Virginia Tech as a program builder/administrator, I am convinced that such an ability is necessary for almost all program builders in our field. In 1998, I arrived at Virginia Tech, a newly “minted” PhD, who faced a difficult task on top of the standard “research/publish, teach, and serve”: I was asked to build a professional writing program in a traditional department of English; revise two service courses in business and technical writing, one of which was under tremendous pressure due to some unusual (erratic) teaching; and lay the foundation for future graduate study. Much like me, most recent PhD graduates who take administrative positions in our field come from programs that understand and value technical and professional writing. And many, if not most, get hired by English departments that may not value and probably do not understand it. They, like Didion and me, discover that life changes fast, and responding and adapting to that change requires something akin to “magical thinking.”

I wish I could promise that what follows is the formula for such magic. However, I doubt it is. Rather, it is a story about my first year and the five that followed as I attempted to adapt to these changes. And it is a story about what Paul Woodruff, in his fascinating study of the virtue of reverence, calls “the paradox of respect” (197). Woodruff explains that reverence is “the capacity for certain feelings where they are due” and one of those is respect. However, knowing when they are due is not so easy because “respect comes in three degrees of thickness: too thick, too thin, and just right.” The respect that has the degree of thickness that is “just right” is the type that “flows from reverence”; it involves “a felt recognition of a connection growing out of common practices” (198). Woodruff’s work is relevant on several levels. First, if hired by a traditional department of English, more than likely you will experience such a paradox. Your new colleagues, because they hired you from among many candidates, will respect your credentials and potential. However, they will also not know enough about your work to make a strong connection to you intellectually or even perhaps emotionally. In addition, there will be, at least among some of your colleagues, a certain amount of trepidation and worry and perhaps lack of respect. Will your work “fit in”? Will you add to or take away from their department’s reputation for scholarship? Will the applied focus you offer dilute their focus? Thus, one of your tasks, implicitly or explicitly, is to create or at least encourage a “felt recognition” based on “common practices.” Those practices will encompass not only your dedication to your epistemological position but also, and perhaps more importantly, your dedication both to the art or *techné* of teaching and to the *techné* of citizenship, both within the department and in the larger cultures—of the university and beyond.

My hope is that this “story” of our program at Virginia Tech will provide insight and some answers for those engaged in programmatic work. I see it as part of a move in our field to treat curriculum as conversation, an important shift toward ways of knowing that are more explicit, that work to articulate what Polanyi and others call “knowledge-in-action” or “tacit knowledge” (Applebee 11). Such a focus creates a domain where engagement with new texts and issues can lead to discovery and transformation. One such issue is a question that is embedded in the debate between art and science framed by C. P. Snow and manifested in many PTW programs as a fundamental tension between developing “insight or technique, liberal or vocational education, good citizens or good workers” as discussed in the preface to this volume. Rather than resolve this dilemma, my goal has been use this tension productively. As a program designer and leader my critical question, a mission statement of sorts, is simply this: how can I shape a PTW program that will graduate informed, critical citizens who can use their technical expertise for public service?

As I tell this story and address this curricular question, I hope that our curriculum at Virginia Tech will become a text for conversation that has relevance to our field. Our program's emphasis on rhetoric and experiential learning and our focus on principles of reflective practice such as "open mindedness" and "responsibility" (Dewey 177) have enabled us to create a curriculum that is both epistemic and instrumental, one that balances theory and practice, *phronesis* and *praxis*. This emphasis on key principles has helped us overcome some of the problems discussed in this volume, such as the issues of naming and other issues such as the politics of identity caused by the tension between liberal and practical arts.

The professional writing curriculum at Virginia Tech is part of a larger English curriculum that gives students more control and experience with technology, as well as opportunities to apply their knowledge and expertise for the benefit of others. The curriculum, as a whole, seeks to define "common practices" emerging from these principles of reflective practice, such as a belief in reflection and assessment, which are both essential components of effective teaching and learning. Currently this belief informs the department's recent adoption of ePortfolios as a strategy to improve teaching and learning. In addition, many faculty in composition studies, creative writing, and in our program use service-learning or client projects. All of us believe in teaching students the value of self-reflection, critical reading and analysis, and a multicultural context, three of six essential learning objectives our faculty have agreed are essential for all English majors. Despite occasional difficulties, this agreement on common practices has led to a form of reverence and respect among the faculty that "does not stop at boundaries" and "overlooks differences of culture" (Woodruff 84). The result, we believe, is a "*techné* for citizens" (de Romilly 30) in which students gain qualities Cicero believed were essential to making human social life possible: practical experience, expert knowledge, and a sense of responsibility for private and public life (6).

### **PROFESSIONAL WRITING: THEN (1998) AND NOW**

To understand how our program and department have come to operate with what I believe is a form of reverence, I begin with some contextual/historical information. I am in my tenth year of service to the English Department at Virginia Tech, and during this entire time I have been responsible for the professional writing program, even before a program existed. In 1998, the year I was hired, Virginia Tech, a Carnegie-rated research level I university with a traditional department of English, had no program in technical or profes-

sional writing, unlike many of its peers (e.g., Purdue or North Carolina State). Our department had 101 personnel, but only one with a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition or Professional Communication. The department's emphasis was literature, although there were a number of prominent creative writers on the faculty as well. English majors could add a Professional Writing Cluster, but this "cluster" was hollow, consisting of the two service courses (English 3774—Business Writing and English 3764—Technical Writing) and a course in Advanced Composition, which had no defined, consistent content. Equally important to note is a fact that I learned during my interview process that the reputation of these service courses in other colleges, particularly in the College of Business, had been diminishing.<sup>1</sup> There were no graduate courses in professional or technical writing and only one in composition—the required course in pedagogy for the graduate assistants, taught by Dr. Paul Heilker, who then directed the program in Composition.

Despite what I've just outlined, my position was highly vulnerable. During my interview with the dean, I learned that I was "an experiment"—the department's first tenure-track faculty with an advanced degree in Rhetoric and Professional Communication. For the first three years, the dean's office would pay sixty percent of my salary, and the dean told me quite directly that my contract renewal would depend on my success in reviving the credibility of the two "service" courses (Business and Technical Writing), expanding our emphasis in outreach, integrating technology into the curricula more effectively, and creating a program in Professional Writing, one that could be extended into a graduate program.<sup>2</sup> Despite the administrative duties involved, I would teach a full load and would be expected to conduct and publish research. The challenge, needless to say, was daunting.

Ten years later our department has ninety personnel—fewer overall, but a higher percentage of permanent faculty and virtually no adjunct or temporary faculty. More to the point, now eleven of the ninety (or twelve percent of total and over twenty-five percent of tenure track) have PhDs in Rhetoric, Composition, and/or Professional Communication. Several of these eleven are senior hires who have significant administrative roles in and out of the department (e.g., Carolyn Rude is our department chair; Diana George directs our Composition program and Writing Center; Kelly Belanger directs our Center for the Study of Rhetoric in Society; and Shelli Fowler directs a major university initiative for graduate education). Our Professional Writing Program not only exists, but it is one of the three options for English majors. We counted, as of last spring (2008), just over two hundred majors and minors, and our curriculum consists of nine courses at the undergraduate (3000-4000) level in addition to the two, previously mentioned, service courses. Equally significant is the fact

that enrollment in those two service courses has more than doubled (eleven sections of English 3774 and twenty-seven of English 3764), and we've quadrupled the number of online sections. We regularly offer graduate courses at the MA level, and we now have a PhD in Rhetoric and Writing.

## STARTING FROM SCRATCH

As is evident with the brief overview, much has changed in the years since I arrived. But, like a relative always told me when I faced a very large project: one eats an elephant one bite at a time. So to help understand what has happened, it helps to understand my approach, which was to treat this task like a qualitative research project. In essence, I began with a *needs assessment*.

Before I could consider making any changes, I had to understand what was present. I needed first-hand knowledge of our current service courses and their impact on our majors and on the university at large, because so many departments required their students to take them. To address that lack of knowledge, I began by teaching both courses. In addition, I surveyed the faculty who were and had been teaching them and examined their syllabi. Finally, to understand why people, particularly those in other departments, were dissatisfied with these courses, I visited our "client" departments and colleges, talking with their curriculum committees and surveying their faculty.

What I learned, particularly from the School of Business faculty, who six years before had "delisted" English 3774 as a required course, was useful. I learned that many departments would prefer that their students take a course dedicated to writing taught by qualified faculty, but they had been unsatisfied with the instruction previously. Our department's credibility was damaged, and my interviews with current English faculty confirmed that they were aware of the problem.

Most important, I gathered perceptions that other departments had of our department's writing programs, to include first-year composition, on whose curriculum committee I sat. I learned, in detail, what other departments hoped we would teach their students. I learned where our writing courses fit into their curricula. I also learned a lot about the ways in which faculty across the university saw writing in general, whether or not they felt competent to integrate it into their own curricula, and why they believed students needed to learn to communicate. I learned, in effect, what they envisioned or knew about writing and writing instruction. Bringing this information back to the department proved helpful in many ways, not the least of which was community building, which was perhaps the first step toward "common practices."

During conversations with the directors of our Center for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, the Office of Educational Technologies, and several associate provosts, I learned about the directions the university was moving as it revised its strategic plan and about several major curricular initiatives concerning undergraduate education. I learned, for instance, that the university intended to focus more intently on enhancing its status as a research institution while reviving its land-grant mission and outreach/engagement. One of the foci to achieving both goals would be to use technology to increase access and build bridges to communities. The Center for Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) was already involved in a number of such projects with local schools, and I became an affiliated faculty member.

### **BUILDING BRIDGES & FINDING COMMON GROUND: LONG-TERM STRATEGIES**

My data gathering and subsequent reflection led to my taking some immediate steps, with an eye toward developing long-term goals. My immediate steps focused on my own pedagogy to see if I might develop a model for others to follow. To that end, I enlisted the assistance of the Service-Learning Center to introduce me to nonprofit agencies and to help me learn more about our community's needs. I believed that service-learning pedagogy was a route to create engaged citizens, a topic I subsequently wrote about ("Service-learning"). This strategy fit in well with the university's long-term goal of revitalizing its land-grant and outreach missions. And it enabled me to give students hands-on, experiential learning opportunities, ones that, if successful, would also build both their resumes and excitement, which I hoped would help to enhance our department's credibility.

Longer term strategies were equally, if not more important. I was in a department that was both welcoming and a bit wary of my presence. Historically a literature department, the faculty recognized that the number of majors had dropped considerably (about three hundred when I arrived). Still, there were strong opinions about service, service courses, and being considered a service department that I had to overcome. As I've written about elsewhere, my strategy was to build bridges and demonstrate that, while professional and technical writing were applied disciplines, they were not vocational ("Status of Service"). In addition, our discipline produced knowledge and often relied on some of the same research methods used by those in literature. One of my essential tactics in that strategy involved a capstone course, rooted in rhetorical analysis, that would help students recognize the impact that texts have on pub-

lic policy. Thus, at the end of their program, after working on project-based, experiential learning courses, professional writing students would step back and analyze the impact that the kinds of texts they had been creating could have in a variety of contexts. Rhetoric and its historical connection to teaching and to the roots of all literature departments became my bridge (Thelin, Beale, Rudolph, Murphy).

The capstone course, ultimately entitled *Issues in Professional and Public Discourse*, became the senior seminar for professional writing students. To have this course qualify for the seminar status, which did not occur for several years,<sup>3</sup> I had to demonstrate to my colleagues on the undergraduate curriculum committee how it met the pre-defined criteria for senior seminars designed for literature majors. These criteria centered around two key issues: research and analysis of central texts. In such a capstone course, students would have to develop “the ability to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the discursive, social, historical, biographical, or cultural contexts out of which or against which literature is written” (Rubric). The challenge was to create an argument that substituted nonfiction policy texts for literature. Doing so did not prove to be nearly as difficult as one might expect with the more recent interests of some faculty in popular culture, in historiography, and in social theory.

While I was gathering data, teaching, and rethinking the service courses, I was also meeting and becoming familiar with the strong core of faculty who were dedicated to teaching writing – both composition and technical writing. I recruited a few interested instructors, two with PhDs, to be on what started out as a brownbag discussion group on professional writing (PW). This group met once every three weeks. I also received an outreach grant from our college, which enabled me to hold a one-day colloquy (*Bringing Business to Business Writing*) and put together an initial website that we used as a basis for our current program home. At the colloquy, I met some people who were then working in industry as tech writers, and encouraged them to come back to teach, outlining the potential of the new program. One, Marie Paretti, did, and, with her exceptional background, was hired. Thus at the end of year one, a core group of faculty were gathered, and the roots were growing.

## **YEAR 2: WRITING PROPOSALS AND FUNDING CHANGE**

In the fall of my second year, the department appointed me head of a PW Task Force and for the next two years, our core group of faculty studied key programs and curricula across the country, and I networked with other program developers, using CPTSC and ATTW as forums. With some curricular data

to use for support, we then asked for money to find out whether or not the university truly was behind this “experiment.” We submitted grant proposals for course development, using most of the money to buy down instructor loads (from 4/4 to 3/3), which would give them time to assist me with course development (to include creating materials for an online course).<sup>4</sup>

In those proposals, our arguments, at first, were quite pragmatic. We began by examining the university’s own documents, such as the College of Arts and Sciences’ Annual Report. In that document, we discovered that the college asked the departments to meet Objective 5.2, which had as a goal “to assure ourselves and our publics that we prepare students appropriately to become professionals” (1). We argued that the ad hoc group become more substantive and embedded in the fabric of the department and college. Doing so would give us credibility and visibility.

We also looked at institutional research, where a wealth of survey data resides. By examining alumni surveys, we learned that fifty-eight percent of recent graduates indicated that writing is of “great” or “critical” importance, and eighty-three percent indicated that writing is of at least “some” importance in nearly every profession surveyed. In these surveys, graduates also focused on the need to develop problem-solving and oral communication skills.

We then connected the dots, making linkages between these skills and the university’s increasing emphasis on information technology, which was so evident in all of its recent communications, particularly its two magazines focusing on research and alumni relations. Using data such as job lists in *Money* magazine in which technical writing was listed as one of the ten hottest professions,<sup>5</sup> we explained that technical/professional writers work in fields as diverse as computer software documentation, engineering, science, and medicine. They also work as WWW designers, information and media specialists for multimedia companies, and in business corporations.

We argued that courses in the proposed professional writing track would address several of the university’s strategic concerns. The skill sets that students would develop and the practical experience they would obtain would help them better achieve their career goals and prepare them to be life-long learners. Equally, if not more important, we argued that these same skill sets, when applied using service-learning or client project pedagogy would help them mature into professional citizens of the world. They would become, in Cicero’s terms, ideal orators.

As I said, our initial focus was on pragmatic concerns: teaching students to write clear, coherent prose; adapting their skills to meet the demands of changing technologies; gathering and interpreting data; and planning and managing projects. We wanted to assist them to develop transferable skills by providing



hands-on opportunities with many of the leading software packages (word processing, spreadsheet, graphic arts, WWW design, telecommunication, etc.).

We also drew from the alumni surveys to argue that a program in professional writing was long overdue. Several alumni had commented that a “concentration or degree [in professional writing] would be a good addition,” and a recent outside evaluator, surprised at our current configuration, had said that “Virginia Tech would seem to be an ideal place for . . . valuable training in technical matters and clear prose.” We buttressed this claim with an argument from example, explaining that many of our peer institutions (e.g., Purdue) had recognized the need for such programs long ago and had thriving programs that were continuing to grow.

Finally, we tackled one of the most difficult arguments—that of professional and technical writing being seen as too applied or worse, too vocational. We reasoned that if the goals were to insure that students have the skills necessary for success and to prepare students to be competitive for the jobs described above, the university needed to support courses that develop professional competencies. Recognizing that for many years, such courses have met with resistance,<sup>6</sup> we argued that our potential program provided an opportunity to reverse that trend.

But pragmatism and logic only go so far. We also wanted to appeal to the hearts of many of the university leaders, who were starting to resurrect key initiatives tied to Virginia Tech’s historic, land-grant mission. Because I had already experienced success with the service-learning projects I’d tried (“Service-Learning”), we chose to highlight the opportunities to work with clients in the nonprofit sector as part of a coordinated service-learning strand that we intended to thread through the program. I began using this pedagogical strategy in the service courses (Business and Technical Writing), then I integrated it into every pilot course I taught, as did my colleagues. I began to work closely with the Service-Learning Center, and I was fortunate to win two university awards, which elevated the work’s value in the eyes of my colleagues and led to further pedagogical discussions, both formal and informal. Several new hires, such as my current assistant director who is also a director of a non-profit organization, applied because of the emphasis on service-learning that we had. Students were receiving additional internship and co-op opportunities, and we received positive affirmation from the college. The service-learning component provided students with valuable experience as they applied concepts learned in academic contexts to real-world need. More to the point of program building, it offered needed credibility and visibility. As a result, our appeals using student and community partner testimony were very effective. These appeals, I learned later, sealed the deal. And we were funded.

The funding enabled us to develop and pilot several courses such as the Rhetoric of Disaster and Discovery (a predecessor of the current capstone course mentioned earlier). We also created an outline for a curriculum (see Figure 1), which led to five course proposals being submitted for approval at the university level in the spring of 2000.

### **YEAR 3: CREDIBILITY AND FACULTY HIRES**

In the third year, given we had a curriculum designed and approved and had already submitted six courses to the university, my department chair appointed me director of a “program.” However, we still had a long road ahead, as only I could teach the 4000-level courses, and the entire undergraduate curriculum was being revised to adjust to/accommodate this shift of resources toward writing. With my colleagues, we:

- Continued developing & piloting courses
- Submitted course proposals for university approval
- Changed the department’s governance and administrative structure to create a Professional Writing Committee
- Requested that one of the instructors with a PhD be appointed assistant director with a one-course relief (down to 4/3)
- Requested English 3764 (Technical Writing) be designated as a Writing Intensive course
- Developed our program website
- Argued for the hire of another assistant professor

All these goals were achieved, and the dean, who had been skeptical three years prior, approved two hires: Eva Brumberger and Jim Collier. What made this decision so important, in terms of the longer-term strategy, was that I was not the one to actually ask for two hires; a senior literature faculty member with an endowed chair did the asking. As a key faculty member on the personnel committee and an active participant in curricular issues, Dr. Ernie Sullivan made the case for these hires after I had presented a status report along with the proposed curriculum to the dean. Having the support of the literature faculty, who had lost a number of positions recently due to retirement, had a powerful impact on the dean. It spoke to culture change in the department and a growing sense that Professional Writing might actually be a valuable addition.

We chose Eva and Jim on the basis of their fields of expertise (Eva’s background in rhetoric, technical communication, and composition; and Jim’s

PhD in Science and Technology studies). Part of our vision included creating a team who could talk with and serve the various departments/colleges and meet their and their students' needs (looking to attract a variety of students to the minor and hoping to work with the Institutes/Centers springing up across campus in Biotechnology & Leadership for instance): I would handle business /

### Courses in the Professional Writing Option

*Courses listed with asterisks are required*

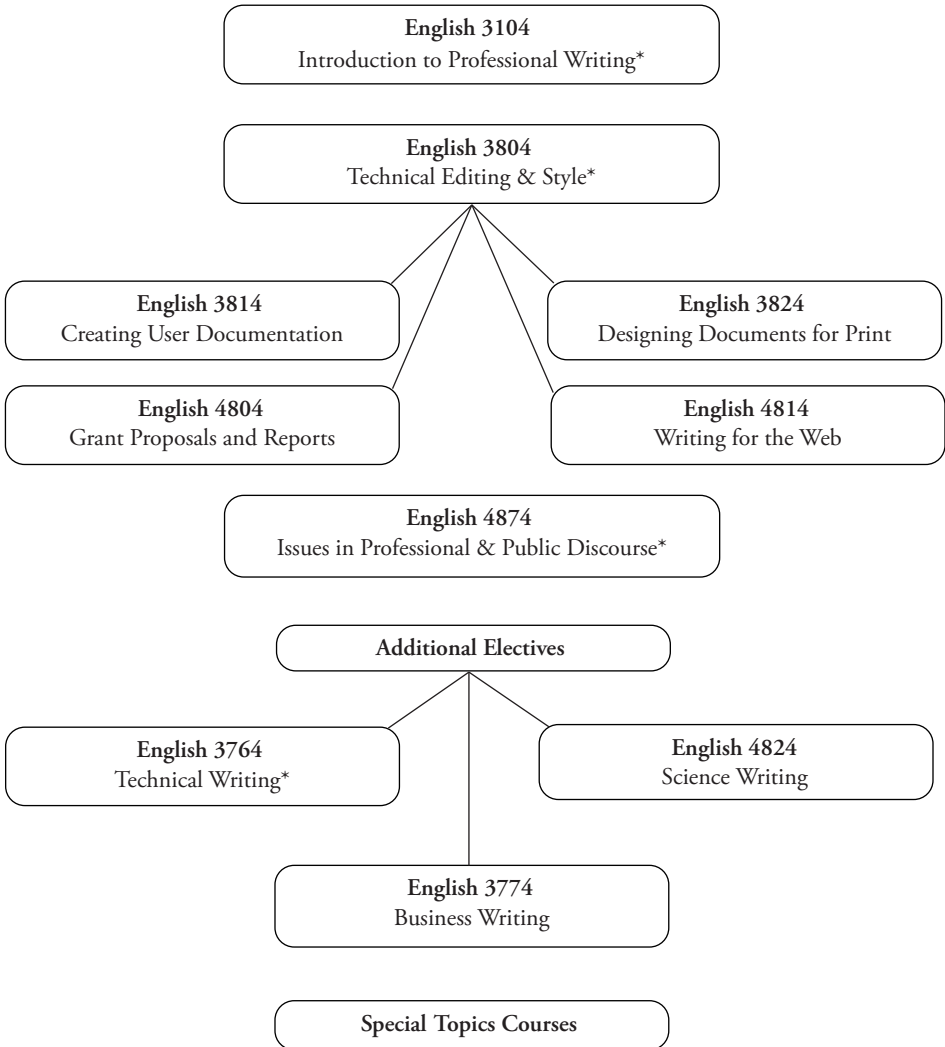


FIGURE 1: DRAFT OF CURRICULUM CA. 2000

educational leadership / outreach; Marie would be excellent for engineering; Jim would handle the natural sciences and philosophy; and Eva would focus on graphic arts and computer science and be a general support for all.

## **YEARS 4-6: ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY**

As year four began, with Jim and Eva arriving, we had a foundation and enough of a core group of faculty to start thinking ahead further (the success convinced the chair to give me a one-course release—the department recognized that my administrative duties had been heavy and consuming, and I needed to spend more time on research—it was clear that the admin load wasn't lessening). During this year (2001-02), with Jim and Eva's assistance, we:

- Submitted the final three course proposals for university approval
- Began preliminary work on a potential thread in International/Intercultural communication (we just had a new course in Intercultural Issues in Professional Writing approved)
- Argued for and were able to hire instructors with backgrounds in technical/professional writing.

In 2002, with the core of the program in place, Jim and Eva taking root and starting to establish their reputations—at VT and nationally, and students coming (forty-three English majors interested in the PW option and over forty minors), the department and new dean listened favorably to our argument about further growth—this time in the graduate realm (e.g., a PhD program since it would help the university achieve its strategic goals). Hiring Carolyn Rude (Texas Tech—past president of ATTW) was the result, with our argument being that we could never even hope for a PhD program unless we had a senior scholar / administrator to help guide us, as well as to attract students and other faculty.

Sustainability requires what Carolyn has called a “critical mass” of faculty. While we had hired successfully, maintaining a program means having the junior faculty achieve institutional acceptance, through the tenure and promotion process. Because Paul had been tenured in Composition, we had some hope that the university would value those of us with backgrounds in Rhetoric and accept the kinds of work we did. And, in that critical sixth year, I was fortunate enough to be tenured. Since then, Jim and Eva have been as well, and we've hired additional faculty, enough to grow the program and sustain it.

## SERVICE-LEARNING AND THE SCHOLARSHIP OF ENGAGEMENT

I am a firm believer in the work of Ernest Boyer and his argument that there are different kinds of scholarship worth considering. My argument for tenure was predicated, in part, on Boyer's work, and, as such, was not much different than the arguments we had made years before for grant money. I argued, using my dissertation as a starting place, that research, teaching, service, and administrative work are all of a piece, a kind of möbius strip of theory and practice. I focused on reinvigorating the rhetorical concept of *techné* in the field of professional communication, a concept that includes both *art* and *craft* and represents a practical wisdom directed toward some end, a field in which one of the central issues is the study of language use in the public forum in order to prepare students to succeed in that forum as practitioners and citizens. In particular, my emphasis was on *techné's* social, ethical, and rational richness, and its importance to the teaching of writing at the undergraduate and graduate levels due to its connection to civic engagement. Along with my interests in critical thinking and collaborative learning, this focus on *techné* was significant in my scholarly work and my efforts to build a professional writing program at Virginia Tech.

My goal was to place professional communication within the discipline of English Studies, by focusing on its humanistic elements, while distinguishing it from other fields in the discipline—such as literature—by raising up its connection to service and the practical applications involved that often require research in workplace settings. I argued for process, for a broad understanding not only of writing, but also of the contexts of writing and its impact on people, explaining that much of the research is conducted either in the classroom (the site of learning) or in the workplace (the site of practice). Thus, my argument was that our field requires an interdisciplinary perspective; we work to understand issues of problem solving and critical thinking, usability, document design, cognition, as well as standard issues of grammar and style. We have to be conversant with the latest developments in technology because we teach students to use a variety of media through which meaning is made. And our research methods range from historical and rhetorical to quantitative and qualitative. Like many of our literary colleagues, we study texts, but we also study the use and production of those texts; thus, we are often ethnographers. Finally, because the work is focused on process and because one of the sites of research is also the classroom, we are reflective practitioners who understand the art or *techné* of teaching.

I advocated a user-centered, reflective stance (“Reflective Practitioners”), linking classical rhetorical theory to teacher preparation and the concept of ex-

periential learning. I argued for the importance of both a particular stance—that of a reflective practitioner—and a method of teacher preparation at the graduate level. My emphasis on the concept of civic engagement emerged from a combination of my historical research into the Aristotelian notion of *technê* and the emphasis the field places on practical wisdom. My argument about *technê* came, in part, from making a case for service-learning as a pedagogical strategy that helps students become more reflective, enables them to make both practical and ethical judgments while acting for the public good, and gives them opportunities to apply the key concepts, strategies, and skills they learn (“Service-learning”). Service-learning and client projects served to bridge the gap between practical courses in the curriculum, which are linked to a market-economy, and the ideal of public service, an ideal central to Virginia Tech’s culture.

In our program, we have striven to remediate the negative connotation of what “service” can be. As we see it, the two service courses and the minor we offer serve the needs of our department and the many departments who understand the practical value of communicating effectively. These courses also serve our university by furthering the primary mission described within my university’s motto of “*Ut Prosim*” or “That I May Serve.” Finally, we serve our department by demonstrating that the production of knowledge is not separate from the rhetorical acts involved in such production. Thus, even though we serve, the service we do can be and is often seen as essential, which is in opposition to those who argue that service is menial.

By embracing service as a pedagogical goal, by focusing on the scholarship of engagement, by linking theory and practice to teach students and achieve a key strategic goal of the university, we built our status and achieved recognition. Students learned to solve problems and think critically, which are not narrow, utilitarian goals; they began to realize that what they were learning had vocational, academic, and moral/social components (Boyte). One student in one of my grant writing classes said:

English 4804 was more than just a class; it was an experience. It was more than academic; it was humanistic. This course taught me much more than how to effectively complete all the steps in the grant writing process. Each class, I learned something more about “taking life personally, letting the lives that touch [mine] touch [me]” (Remen). This course also forced me to do a little self-assessing, to look at myself and ask “how good a person am I” (Mills).

While working with my service-learning partner, Craig County Public Schools (CCPS), I developed a relationship with Mr. Stephen Janoschka, the

agricultural education teacher in the high school, and Mr. Jimmy Henderson, the agricultural education teacher in the middle school. This partnership really was a “relationship between equals” (Remen).

Another said,

If there’s anything I learned the most about, it is about service and giving back to the community. I have never really volunteered much in the past, nor have I involved myself in any community before; however, when I heard those speakers and how they devote their lives to serve others within the community, I began to wonder “why?” I never really had a good answer in my head until just now. In Rachel Remen’s essay (2002), she describes how lonely people begin to feel as they become older and how this quest for independence has left many unable to ask for assistance; asking for help is a sign of weakness. But she says something that I never considered: “A helping relationship may incur a sense of debt, but service, like healing, is mutual.” Humans are social beings; they need each other. When you do something for someone else, you’re helping yourself as well as the community. When you sacrifice, you are actually getting more back than you are giving.

Service-learning has been one very effective way our program puts its “money where its mouth is” by providing a pragmatic, rhetorical, and humanistic education. In our courses we begin with the concrete skill of editing, and the more abstract skill of recognizing that what matters about forms and genres is not “substance or the form of discourse but . . . the action it is used to accomplish” (Miller 151). Following the two required courses, we offer client or service-learning projects in nearly every elective. By doing so, students develop skills and insights by focusing on complex problems that often have social and/or cultural elements.

We believe that all students need to become familiar with technologies associated with information design to authentically contribute to the community. To this end, we design assignments with pragmatic and social goals (e.g., writing grants or designing promotional materials), and we help students develop their skills as professional writers while cultivating a sense of civic idealism. Service-learning projects enable students to join with others and put their knowledge to work in the communities in which they live. Through technologically mediated writing, students gain opportunities to move back and forth between the campus and the community. Rather than making their “clients” more abstract, students are more deeply connected to them when they are able to fulfill their needs by making documents have strong visual appeal and public

currency. Service-learning projects enhance students' curiosity about the people they meet and the problems they encounter.

In another sense, our current capstone course in the Professional Writing Option—Issues in Professional and Public Discourse—is also a service-learning course. It enables students to apply the analytic skills they learned while studying literature to documents in the public forum (e.g., *Presidential Report on the Space Shuttle Challenger* and *A Silent Spring*). This course gives students the opportunity to see workplace applications of their critical thinking skills and give them insight into the functions that documents (and thus writers) play in the shaping of policy.

Our curriculum is where our theories are enacted. By offering a range of courses and concluding with one that has, as its core, the goal of teaching analysis, we were able to bridge a gap between literature and professional writing; by focusing on the genre of nonfiction and its characteristics, we bridged a gap between creative and professional writing. We help English majors, our students, see the breadth of the discipline while applying what they know and learning to see from different perspectives.

As I have stated elsewhere (“Status”), our program takes a tacit tradition linked to the pejorative term of “service” and brings it into the open for examination and discussion. We teach problem-solving through service-learning, client projects, and rhetorical analysis of social and public policy. We offer a rhetorical education that has larger purposes, demonstrating that the production of knowledge is not separate from the rhetorical acts involved in that production. We value service and demonstrate its value to the university. We do not hide our relationship with service nor do we deny the value of teaching students to become reflective practitioners not only by understanding how to do essential tasks associated with writing/designing but also by understanding how the work they do and the situations contributing to that work contribute to the effectiveness of the organizations they're part of and the larger social system (28-29).

## CONCLUSION

I began this essay by referring to two very different concepts: “magical thinking” and “reverence.” In reality, “magical thinking” was closer to a rhetorical process involving imagination, collaboration, and deliberation. The work that emerged from that process led to a form of reverence among the many pedagogical and theoretical positions represented in our department insofar as very different positions about what English Studies is were bridged



by finding common ground about “common practices.” We built our program the old-fashioned way: we made arguments, relying on logic by extracting data from the university’s own documents, on ethos by forging links with other departments, and on pathos by developing an inclusive philosophy and curriculum that integrated the technical and humanistic. An essential component to this work and its success was the notion that professional writing has, as all humanistic disciplines do, a larger purpose that focuses on power, people, and values or what others frame as “political, economic, and ideological tensions” (Longo 8). We discovered service-learning was a rhetorical strategy for gaining the university’s heart, which became central to our understanding of the structure for our program. It provided a means of building relationships through teaching and learning, which inculcated respect. As Woodruff says, “to understand respect in a given culture, you need to look closely at how groups work together” (200). Through service-learning, teachers and students and their partners recognize that “they belong together in a common effort—to understand something that is important to understand” (202), and this “something,” like Frost’s “something that doesn’t love a wall,” has everything to do with community, with bridging the gap between theory and practice.

For our students, the theoretical becomes practical because it is related to living and working. But implementing this pedagogy isn’t easy; finding the balance between service and learning is as difficult as finding the balance between theory and practice or workplace and academe. Our hope, at least my hope, is that this story will provide a text for teachers in our field, who will, after reading it, contribute to the conversation about the roles we have to teach with both pragmatic and social outcomes in mind. Service will, as I’ve said elsewhere (“Status”), become a concept that we can talk about, define, develop, and defend to argue effectively for our place in the academy. Such a discussion may help us see teaching as a *technê*, as a kind of activity in the Aristotelian sense, which has an outcome and an end or purpose (*telos*). With this conversation, we may more clearly have a conception not only of how to teach but also of why. Knowing why and helping our students understand that rationale “turns out to be a form of influence; it lies not so much in one’s own operation as in the cooperation of others” (Dunne 359). A powerful result of this conversation, while perhaps not magical and surely not concluded in a year’s time, will be that prospective teachers will see that reflexivity is not individual, but collaborative and that what may occur in one course, while not necessarily reproducible, will potentially lead to ideas/changes in pedagogy in other courses and in curricula as a whole. Knowing this and being able to discuss it may lead to “open-mindedness,” as well as an appreciation of and reverence for what we and our colleagues do.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In 1998, the department offered, on average, only two sections of English 3774 per semester and fourteen of English 3764. Nearly all of these sections (over eighty-five percent) were taught by instructors, most with MA degrees in literature.

<sup>2</sup> The actual tasks, as outlined in a Request for Targeted Allocation submitted by the English department, were to

- develop and offer graduate courses in Professional and Technical Writing and Communication and in the pedagogy of these areas
- develop the writing and communication abilities of Virginia Tech undergraduates by developing and offering undergraduate courses in Professional and Technical Writing and Communication
- develop the faculty capability to offer significant Outreach activities and services in Professional and Technical Writing and Communication (1997).

<sup>3</sup> In year two, I proposed a special topics course (entitled The Rhetoric and Disaster and Discovery), which I taught in year three. In years four and five, we negotiated the revised and expanded English curriculum at the undergraduate curriculum committee then the department level. In year five the department approved the revised curriculum, and in year six, it was officially part of the university catalog.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://wiz.cath.vt.edu/tw/>

<sup>5</sup> The *Atlanta Constitution* recently ran an article listing Technical Communication in the top five fields.

<sup>6</sup> “the university has been slow to recognize the legitimacy of courses that emphasize the professional preparation of students” (Myra Gordon 7).

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