Undergraduate Writing Majors in the 21st Century: Seeking Disciplinary Identity in the Modern Economy

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Deborah Balzhiser and Susan H. McLeod's 2010 "The Undergraduate Writing Major: What Is It? What Should It Be?" lays the groundwork for a general outline of what a writing studies major should be. We, nine undergraduates, argue that seven years later, the writing studies major continues to expand without a concrete academic or professional identity, and many students graduate without a clear understanding of their place in the job market. Through review of the field's literature, national employment surveys, and analysis and synthesis of our own experiences, we conclude that adjustments must be made to current writing studies curricula. In an attempt to catalyze widespread institutional cohesion, we propose several elements that we argue are a foundation from which other students, faculty, and administrators in the discipline should work toward creating a unified undergraduate writing major that will better prepare its graduates to succeed in the 21st century workplace.

In their 2010 article "The Undergraduate Writing Major: What Is It? What Should It Be?" Deborah Balzhiser and Susan H. McLeod analyze data collected in 2004 by the Conference on College Composition and Communication's Committee on the Major in Rhetoric and Composition (CMRC). The committee was tasked with research and data collection that would return a list of existing majors in composition and detailed reporting on their inception and development. Balzhiser and McLeod note the growth of majors in the United States from 45 to 68 between 2005 and 2008. The most recent data we find lists the number of majors at 141 (CCCC 2015).

Balzhiser and McLeod paint a landscape of the major as a whole and document the number of writing studies programs in the U.S. Their data show significant and continuous development, as well as revisions of programs across the country. The article also lays groundwork for a general outline of what the writing studies major should be, in an effort to foster discussion on a clear identity for the major. Balzhiser and McLeod conclude by asking timely questions to move this discourse forward, such as: What purpose should the writing studies major serve? Can the major, as a unified entity, agree on a set of learning outcomes that will narrow the spectrum of this field of study and better prepare its graduates for the realities and demands of modern economies?

As nine students on or near the brink of entering the job market, we believe these questions remain unanswered, seven years after they were posed. We find ourselves concerned with the same issues that Balzhiser and McLeod address, but with a special urgency as we are transitioning into the job market. Eight of us (Avery, Elizabeth, Erik,

Gina, James, Miguel, Sarah, and Walker) are majoring in Professional Writing (PW), as it is called at our institution, and have gotten to this point in our college career without a clear understanding of "what's next?" Symone, our ninth author, is majoring in Communication Arts and Sciences (CAS) and minoring in PW. The PW majors' post-graduation uncertainties contrasted with Symone's clarity regarding her career path options with CAS.

As students majoring in a relatively new discipline growing simultaneously in popularity and ambiguity, we stand months away from the dawn of our professional lives, feeling certain about one thing only: the writing major, in a disciplinary sense, could have served us better. Overall, we feel uncertainty about writing studies programs in two primary ways: disciplinary identity (courses, course names, and course content) and synopsizing possible career paths. As the writing studies major continues to expand without a clear professional trajectory, more and more students like us graduate without a clear understanding of their place in the job market. Without knowledge of the modern economy and its sectors, graduates are not fully equipped to put their skills into practice or articulate academic learning outcomes to future employers.

Based on review of the field's literature, national employment surveys, and analysis and synthesis of our own experiences, we argue adjustments must be made to current writing studies curricula. To catalyze greater cohesion of the major across institutions, we propose several elements as a foundation from which students, faculty, and administrators in the discipline should work toward creating a unified undergraduate writing major that will better prepare its graduates to succeed in the 21st century workplace.

Our Experiences on the Brink

We, eight PW majors, many of us in our final months of college and some entering our last semester before graduation, began to feel anxiety in our capstone class about the transition from academia to the job market. Walker, who is seeking a job in technical writing after graduation, believes "there is a need for terminology to inform non-academically oriented employers about our skills." This brings to light an extremely relevant question: If we cannot see a clear correlation between our education and the jobs we are applying for, how can we market ourselves to attain a position? How do we convey the effectiveness or importance of our education to a particular job? Elizabeth pointed out that "up until this semester, I was completely unsure of what my future held in terms of a career." It is unnerving that a student could learn the most difficult material in a curriculum with no clear end in sight. For most, the question would be, What am I working towards?

Gina, a graduating PW student exploring a career in occupational therapy, said, "The PW program allows me to consider a variety of careers due to it being so broad, yet I'm still unsure about the kind of work I'd like to try." There is no question that courses like rhetorical studies and writing studies were vital to our development as writers, but as Sarah, who will pursue jobs in communication, said, "There was no way of knowing that such courses were so crucial to our overall development while scheduling classes or any time prior to the actual participation in that course." Similarly, other students felt that the lack of trajectory was a major issue, as they saw little or no connection between their academic writing and its workplace application. Avery, who is graduating this semester and

aspires to become a journalist, pointed out, "We're not even clear what the writing major is." We feel as though our futures are uncertain because we are prepared for an array of professional writing jobs, but without a clear-cut goal or pathway.

The second issue we confronted was a lack of knowledge on the central connection of writing to the modern economy. In our capstone course, we could speak one-on-one with professionals from a variety of workplace environments. Each professional had their own unique perspective, yet each discussed the importance of writing in all fields of work. One presenter, the co-founder of a Reading-area environmental engineering firm, explained that technical writers are vital not only in his specific field, but in many others as well, since all industries rely on writers to be effective communicators. Is that an appropriate outlet for a professional writer? Which part of our PW education led us toward this career path? Would technical writing be more practical than other genres we had been taught? Our overarching feeling of uncertainty can be summed up with one question that Gina posed: "Where do I begin?"

Miguel, who is generally ambivalent about his career aspirations, explained that when trying to take all that he has learned in the PW major and apply it to the professional world, "it is a constant search with no concrete answers." Adding to this view, James brought up that there are newly-emerging positions, such as social media management and digital content creation, which did not exist 10 to 15 years ago. He explained that skills that support these types of writing jobs should be included in the curriculum. James also noted that there are jobs that might not traditionally be associated with writing that we, as PW students, would excel at.

In contrast to the students in PW, Symone described a comprehensive knowledge of the array of careers open to a communication major. CAS is branded in a fascinating way that draws interest, defines identity, and engenders pathways to different careers. Symone experienced the excitement and benefits of the PW minor as an essential counterpart to a communication major. The level of ambiguity that negatively affected the PW students during our paths through undergraduate studies will certainly follow us when making the transition to the professional world. For the benefit of prospective writing studies students, we suggest that undergraduate writing studies programs should create identifiable curricula by way of name changes, gateway courses, and practical education.

The Elusive Disciplinary Identity

Much of our primary research for this article analyzed and synthesized material from Giberson et al.'s 2015 *Writing Majors: 18 Program Profiles*. Most of its contributors indicate that the field's broadening scope seems to further muddy professional paths for graduates, which compounds the exigency for a more definite identity of the major and the professional writer.

The ongoing struggle for the major lies in its efforts to stand alone as an independent academic field. Some colleges, such as Penn State Berks, created their writing studies curriculum from scratch without the direct influence of a competing English major (Weisser and Grobman 41). But for most of the programs profiled in Giberson et al., the task of creating a new major independent of other departments was often obstacle-laden with disciplinary competition over who "owned" writing and where the discipline

belonged in academia. This issue is magnified in Darsie Bowden's overview of DePaul University's PW major. Bowden discusses the challenge she and her Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse Department faced in the process of creating the writing studies major—specifically in naming the new field of study. Program administrators were at an impasse as writing is traditionally associated with English studies. English department representatives, mostly consisting of creative writers in poetry, creative nonfiction and fiction, protested the word "writing" as part of the new major's name (12). Bowden indicates that the pushback from the English department was rooted in defense of their status in the DePaul community as the writers on campus (12). The debate became a question of control over writing, in both a "disciplinary" and "symbolic" context: On one side stood the English faculty, who clung to their field's long history in literature and creative writing, and on the other stood a new field that focused on the study of composition and practices in discourse and rhetoric with its own extensive roots dating back to philosophers in ancient Greece (12).

Another reason the writing studies major grapples with separating itself from the English major derives from earlier school conceptions of writing. In high school, writing is often embedded in the English Language Arts curriculum, and typically relates more to literature and grammar, style, and punctuation rules than to theoretical and practical applications (Bowden 16). Consequently, incoming college students are conditioned to associate writing with "English." These misconceptions cause students (and professionals) to have inaccurate conceptions of what the writing studies curriculum offers and how it can benefit them post-graduation.

These misinterpretations cause many writing studies programs to compete with English and communications departments for money, space, and students. Such resources are limited even in the largest and most affluent institutions, and even more so at smaller schools. Claudia Brinson and Nancy Tuten's experience attempting to establish the Writing for Print and Digital Media program at Columbia College is a prime example. Their proposal to offer a course in narrative video was contested by the school's communication faculty, ostensibly because the school's size (900 students) did not justify adding another video course (221). Likely, the communication faculty believed a writing studies media course would lure students away from their own. The dynamic in such situations often ends up resembling an academic turf war.

The lack of consistent curricula and course naming across writing studies programs also demonstrates their relative academic adolescence. Among the 18 program profiles we analyzed, no consistent programmatic theme emerged. Writing studies programs choose foci from rhetoric to digital media and everywhere in between, meaning that one major's students rarely receive the same education as another's in the same field. Further, among the 18 programs we analyzed, most incorporate technical, major-specific terminology into the names and descriptions of their courses. Most new students are unfamiliar with writing studies jargon, so courses with names like "Rhetorical Traditions" and "Genre and Discourse," on their face, offer no indication of the skills and learning outcomes of the course or how it might fit into career paths (Bowden 16).

Understanding the Economic Landscape and Workplace for Writers

The landscape of professional writing is evolving to depend on knowledge and creative economies. New technologies, innovative ideas, and intellectual expansion generate revenue, and writing and communication are the heart of this economic revolution. Without adequately-prepared writers and communicators, businesses cannot survive. Whether in scientific or creative businesses, professional writers must adapt and assimilate to effectively communicate inside and outside a workplace. With new technology and content as premier products, innovation is constant and the only reliable factor is change. For writing studies graduates to succeed in this professional arena of ever-changing skillsets, students need skills that are as plastic as the demands of the 21st century—a need to which curricula must also adjust.

The Knowledge Economy

In "Writing for a Living: Literacy and the Knowledge Economy," Deborah Brandt analyzes the changing role of literacy in workplaces that value thought, innovation, and research. Modern organizations are more concerned with new findings and communication of ideas than ever before. Walter Powell and Kaisa Snellman define the knowledge economy as "production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technical and scientific advance, as well as rapid obsolescence. The key component of a knowledge economy is a greater reliance on intellectual capabilities than on physical inputs or natural resources" (199). Knowledge is of the utmost value, often the product of industry.

If knowledge is the lifeblood of this business model, then literacy is the beating heart that pumps it. Literacy puts knowledge to work by translating brainpower into useable text. Without literacy, knowledge would be bound to its place of origin. When the pressure to be accurate is high, skill in communication is imperative. Literacy connects the scientist developing a new drug and the accountant creating investment proposals. Writers are the "site" where information is transcribed into a communicable format (Brandt 177–78). The writer decodes, transcribes, and translates information from person to person, allowing for corporate cohesion. Successful translation across the company protects its and its writers' integrity (Brandt 180). Literacy is thus not just a basic skill but a production tool; it keeps the machine of industry running fluidly.

The knowledge economy's constant evolution of technology necessitates continual education and preparation of skilled workers. Its inevitable demand for change and innovation requires endless evolution of writing and learning as organizational information and roles evolve. Even employees who have held the same position for decades report that their job description has changed drastically since they started (Brandt 167). Brandt's study suggests that there is no single designated path for professional writers in contemporary workplaces. When knowledge is the product, literacy will continue to change as new ideas arise. The role of the professional writer will continue to be of utmost importance, but it will demand adaptation and innovation. As the knowledge economy evolves, so must the writers within it and those preparing to enter it.

In "The Third Way: PTW and the Liberal Arts in the New Knowledge Society," Anthony Di Renzo cites Richard Freeland's observation that universities have begun to

recognize the importance of combining the traditional components of liberal arts with professional praxis, including "internships and other kinds of off-campus experiences" (243). This "Third Way" is a new field of study that combines a liberal and professional education. Di Renzo works from the AAC&U report *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College*, which lists four economic and technical developments that factor into this academic revolution: democratization, globalization, competition, and most relevant, the rise of the knowledge economy. Curricula that were written when only the elite enrolled in college no longer serve contemporary economic needs; most liberal arts programs were aimed not at students who would graduate into a craft career, but at those who would become society's intellectuals, to whom practical and professional-driven studies were not relevant (Di Renzo 244). As more and more students enter college, those academic programs that predate the knowledge economy have fallen out of style and relevance (AAC&U). The AAC&U insists that students be taught to *apply* theoretical, rhetorical and ethical knowledge to concrete societal issues they learn firsthand through real-world experiences.

Di Renzo also references Peter Drucker's prediction in *Post-Capitalist Society* that as the knowledge society advances, knowledge will become more specialized and the educated person will be defined not as someone who *excels* in all the disciplines but who can "understand" various knowledges. In a world "defined and determined by the division of knowledge," the ability to mediate language in the field and the classroom is "crucial." Di Renzo extends Drucker's speculations, insisting that a professional and technical writing education is "crucial to the academy's identity and survival in the new Knowledge Society" (249) and that professional and technical writing programs are the vessels of the Third Way. They are the middle ground between academia and professions, adapting ethical, theoretical, and rhetorical traditions for the industrial advancements of today.

The Creative Economy

The creative economy is not a new concept. However, the term *creativity* is often misconstrued as involving artistic sensibility apart from everyday talents or skills. In this way, creativity is often bound to its context. By contrast, observers such as John Hartley draw attention to "the need to respond to the challenges posed in a world where creativity, innovation, and risk are general necessities for both economic and cultural enterprise" (1).

Hailey et al. examined 45 careers in technical communication for the impact of creativity and innovation on the creative economy. They found that the most secure jobs seemed to involve strategic problem-solving and decision-making skills that led to profitable innovations, but it is questionable whether or not these jobs can be strictly labeled as creative. The study instead associates them with "innovation" and calls educators and professionals to act in accordance with step-by-step instructions for innovation developed for professional and educational settings. Hailey et al. also found that "skills" and "knowledge" were self-explanatory, but "talents" and creativity" proved more difficult to nail down. Because creativity is subjective, it is difficult to assign it a rigid definition. The authors work with several definitions for talents "directed

toward creativity," ultimately defining talents as innate and habitual compulsions that serve our well-being (129). They are built-in behaviors that help us in some way and make us happy. The article uses a salesperson as a model to help separate *skills* and *knowledge* from *talents*. A good salesperson can study and train in the ins and outs of a company and sales techniques, but she is born with the love for person-to-person connections that makes her a better salesperson.

To build a definition of creativity, Hailey et al. comprised a list of four talents that define creative people: adaptivity, the ability to embrace big changes either in expectation or atmosphere; connectivity, the tendency to make connections between seemingly unlike objects or ideas; idea-orientedness, being drawn to explore new and unique ideas; and vision, the ability to conceptualize future needs and envision routes to that future. "Creative" jobs are defined as requiring one or more of those four creative talents. Hailey et al. use "creativity" not as itself a talent, but the synthesis of certain skills and talents that work together.

Further, the definition of creativity can differ from job to job. The authors show how a documentation specialist and a copywriter might share certain talents such as a love of learning and communication, but the copywriter may lack the focus and analysis skills necessary to documenting while the documenter's possible lack of skill for presenting new ideas would fail him as a copywriter. Hailey et al. note that while both positions offer creative opportunities, "neither require innovation in the economics and business context" (132). The authors then provide an example of a job that would employ innovation: a director of communications would innovate by strategically and routinely solving problems and making decisions while seeking ways of improving communication within the company that bring in more money (139).

To navigate the evolution that is the creative economy, Hailey et al. recommend that "technical communicators and their educators should understand 'innovation' in its formal context and be able to apply that knowledge in their workplaces and classrooms" (125). Creativity, in this sense, would be the ability to adapt and innovate ideas toward all types of audiences and find new ways to solve problems. The researchers demonstrate ways that innovation can be explicitly taught to students entering the creative economy, borrowing a process typically used in college curricula from business to engineering designed to equip students with guidelines for innovation. This process includes step-by-step instructions to move from a problem to a solution. After observing and questioning teachers in communication fields, the researchers argue that while students are often thrown into situations in which they must engage in problem-solving and decision-making, they are not actually *taught* the skills they are expected to adapt. The authors suggest liberal arts educators provide case-specific steps for students to follow, and detail a process that outlines formal, specific guidelines for writers to learn to innovate, grasp opportunities, identify problems, and brainstorm creative solutions.

The Curriculum Moving Forward

The knowledge and creative economies share a basic idea: to thrive, we must neither rely solely on traditional knowledge and intellect nor act on experimental practice without memory, but build on prior learning as tools and armor for the obstacles of

the future. Though current writing studies curricula provide many relevant components to such a modern education, unified, large scale revisions to the major are necessary. For two decades, faculty and program administrators debating the disciplinary identity of the undergraduate writing major have come down on the side of local needs, local contexts, local institutional values, local faculty interests and local economic factors. The time to change that has arrived. Based on Balzhiser and McLeod's findings, our analysis of the 18 program profiles, and our own experiences, we propose elements of an undergraduate writing major that provide an overarching outline, the bones or structural integrity, of any writing studies major. This central form will prepare students to branch into specific career paths. This core of elements includes consistent learning outcomes emphasizing rhetorical soft skills, argument, and persuasion, and incorporating digital media; gateway, internship, and capstone courses; and consistent course and program naming.

Consistent Learning Outcomes: Skills and Knowledge Required of Writers in the Workplace

Certain skillsets and learning outcomes are arguably crucial to a professional writer's toolbox. In this section, we synthesize three national studies to pinpoint common competencies of writing studies graduates that qualify them for a growing list of job titles. First, we derived a list of top attributes from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Job Outlook 2016 survey, the Hart Research Associates' surveys of employers for 2015, and a *LiveCareer*.com analysis of over two million LinkedIn profiles (Copeland). Then we turn to two recent substantive studies about technical and professional writing, Eva Brumberger and Claire Lauer's "The Evolution of Technical Communication: An Analysis of Industry Job Postings" and Blythe et al.'s "Professional and Technical Communication in a Web 2.0 World." Together, these texts emphasize the economic exigency for "soft skills" such as a rhetorical compass, innovation, and adaptability that can be molded to a breadth of genres and workplaces writing studies graduates now occupy. These studies help illustrate educators' struggle as they prepare students for an economy where static skillsets fall obsolete faster than ever before.

We first studied the top seven traits employers look for in college graduates. Appearing at least once among the three lists (NACE, Hart, Copeland) are the ability to work on a team, effective communication (written and oral), ethical judgement and decision-making, professionalism (acting responsibly and appropriately), honesty, integrity, and adaptability. The Copeland article notes how frequently these soft skills appear. While the NACE study reports that 59 percent of employers do look for "hard" technical skills on a candidate's resume, they are not the be-all-end-all. All these "soft" proficiencies can be understood as learning outcomes of rhetorical study, suggesting how plastic learning outcomes qualify TC students for such a range of fields.

These results align with Brumberger and Lauer's analysis of technical communication job postings, in which written communication and other soft skills are frequently sought. Brumberger and Lauer challenge the standard definition of technical communication as writing in the traditional, pragmatic nature such as static, print-based instructional documents and manuals (225). They

analyze 914 TC job postings from *Monster.com*, demonstrating that TC job demands are anything but static. The postings yielded 58 job titles, 25 percent of which did not even exist before the smartphone era began in 2007. This rapid expansion of creative and knowledge economies has amplified the scope of opportunities available to writers. Job titles were divided into five sectors: technical writer/editor, content developer/manager, social media writer, grant/proposal writer, and medical writer. Over half of the technical writer/editor job postings called for contract work (230), suggesting that writing studies graduates will likely have to adapt to multiple discourse communities in order to remain relevant and employed—and that the job description of the professional writer will be in constant flux.

Brumberger and Lauer studied four primary areas: information products (types of genres and content produced), workplace tools and technologies, professional competencies (learning outcomes of a TC education that are workplace-based but not tied to specific products), and personal characteristics. They found that information-products and personal-characteristics requests varied with job sector (typically one product/characteristic dominating per sector). The tools-and-technologies requests also varied by sector, with the exception of Microsoft Word, requested by at least 25 percent of postings (235). Over ten percent of postings except the social media writing sector sought fluency in Acrobat (235). Another popular tool, Photoshop, appeared in at least ten percent of postings in all sectors except medical writing (235).

These data show that technical writers are producing much more than instructions and print-based manuals. The results of the technology-tools and information-products categories show content driving newer TC jobs, requiring web and social media content, multimodal content, and promotional/brand marketing content. Yet Brumberger and Lauer note that most TC education programs don't offer courses in social media, and only 25 percent teach courses focused on tools (239). Advertising and marketing courses are also needed in writing majors.

The personal-characteristics category should not be overlooked. Unlike the other three categories, here requests remain mostly consistent across all sectors—a point that parallels the NACE, Hart, and Copeland studies in which "soft," adaptable competencies appeared at the top of each list of employable traits. For an economy for which it would be impossible to teach in school enough genre knowledge and technical skills to prepare students for ever-changing demands of the 21st century workplace, it seems advantageous to embed these more universal core competencies in the curriculum. Students can then be introduced to new products and tools through workplace-aimed assignments and genre research in their preferred sector. This approach would allow students to apply soft written communications skills in the context of actual work environments.

Doing so would address Brumberger and Lauer's findings on the increasing importance of familiarity with tools used by a company or specialized, industry-specific knowledge, which there is no way to provide students in school alone. Professional writers across all fields are expected to adapt to the needs of any particular assignment. These communicators thus regularly deal with multiple established genres as well as emerging ones. Blythe et al.'s study of genres utilized by

alumni in the workplace finds that email, documentation (instructions and manuals), and web sites are the genres both most valued and used most often in the workplace across all industries (273). All these data suggest ways the importance of writing studies, rhetorical studies, and contextual awareness remain constant, regardless of which genre a professional writer/communicator produces content for. These are the core skills that develop through textual analysis, discussion and debate, lecture, and writing practice in classrooms. But other crucial aspects of a student's knowledge base cannot be learned through the conventional classroom setting. Interpersonal communication, teamwork, and navigating workplace hierarchy, among other skills that can only be developed through experience, are all listed as extremely important by employers. It is important to work in a professional setting prior to one's transition from academia to the workplace. Internships and other practical education methods enable students to learn through such firsthand experience. We take up this problem later in our discussion.

Brumberger and Lauer are largely optimistic regarding the growing demand for writers in the workplace. Clearly, the field is broadening and job opportunities are expanding in several directions. As certain fields begin to require more of entry-level employees in terms of genre knowledge and technology and software fluency, it seems important that curricula be molded to more directly relate to the contemporary workplace and the modern economy, which continuously changes. Students need to see how certain skillsets help in particular fields. It would also be helpful for professors to relate course material to practical goals that serve contemporary economies, rather than aiming for checkpoints in academia. Courses should be directed toward praxis—the practical application of skills.

Most of the skills that writing studies programs teach their students can be categorized as either hard or soft. Hard or rigid skills like software fluency, proposal writing, or web-design are valued in the workplace, but as the three employer surveys reflect, static hard-skillsets appear to be less essential than more adaptable "soft" skills. Courses on specific genres of writing, such as business or technical, tend to teach hard skills. Soft skills, like rhetorical awareness, are plastic, adaptable across rhetorical situations in the workplace. Rhetoric and writing studies courses tend to focus more on teaching these soft skills; newer texts have begun to analyze soft or flexible skills and their growing value to a technical writing and communication education.

The common competencies of writing studies graduates are, therefore, a mix of hard and soft skills, though the amount of each varies between, and even within, institutions. Preparing for workplace demands requires that the learning outcomes of our major be on some level cohesive, through some standardization of material taught. A rhetorical education must be a core learning outcome of writing studies majors, so that students not only develop crucial skills and specialties that will serve their careers but are also equipped with the rhetorical, ethical, and theoretical compasses that are crucial to effective navigation and communication in the professional sphere. Students will have the classical liberal arts scholarship and the adaptable communication skills to bridge disciplinary and professional divides in the knowledge economy.

Emphasizing Argument and Persuasion

Rhetoric has been a crucial theory of communication, and more specifically persuasion, dating back to the Greek sophists, and it is critical to professional writers in the contemporary workplace. In "The Third Way," Di Renzo states (using Bacon as an example) that unlike in the past when thinking played a larger role in enterprise than writing, as knowledge has become literate, writers must be rhetors in the new economy, translating intellect into everyday language (249). Di Renzo asks, "Given this social reality [that writing is becoming as important as thinking], shouldn't the academy teach students to become effective and ethical rhetors in an emerging knowledge economy, particularly when globalization and technology have brought our planet to a historic turning point?" (250). We answer that affirmatively. Rhetorical studies are a necessary foundation in a writer's education regardless of eventual career path. The history of rhetoric and the Aristotelian appeals provide a theoretical lens for contextualizing situations, knowledge that can be applied multimodally, from speaking to coworkers and bosses, to presentations, to genres of workplace writing. Thorough knowledge of rhetoric is necessary given the need to adapt to frequent job changes in the knowledge and creative economies.

In the 18 program profiles we analyzed in Giberson et al.'s collection, many classes covered the overarching subject of persuasion or rhetoric. Nearly every program included a class on rhetoric, even if it was not named as such. (For the purpose of this study, we grouped classes containing the word "persuasion" in their titles with those that included rhetoric.) Some programs, like the one at Oakland University, focus specifically on rhetoric, saying both rhetoric and literacy are "academic disciplines that must be studied in the context of broader cultural and public interests" (Ostergaard et al. 75). We want to see this rhetorical emphasis across majors.

Incorporating Digital Media

With the ubiquity of digital media, written communication has become a commodity and an indispensable resource in the creative and knowledge economies. The digital shift necessitates combining traditional writing skills already present in the technical communication and PW curricula with new methods and practices and applying them to positions beyond simply "Professional Writer" or "Technical Communicator." As Alex Reid writes,

> In this situation, we cannot simply add new curriculum onto our existing professional writing curriculum. To do so would establish an expanding curriculum with escalating credit hours.... Rather than thinking of creative writing, technical writing, other genres, or general composition as discrete subjects (or even majors), we have found it necessary to conceive professional writing at the intersection of these and other writing traditions with emerging rhetorical concerns in design, information, and multimedia production. (254)

In other words, while we think of creative and technical writing as separate entities, the reality is that the skills needed to succeed in the knowledge and creative economy require technical communicators and professional writers to be trained in both.

The massive changes in digital media have also led to new kinds of jobs, especially

in social media. According to Brumberger and Lauer, a full one third of the jobs they analyzed were in categories for social media writers and other content developers, positions they describe as being in "technical communication" (238–39). Since most of these positions are Web-based, they require "capabilities with Web analytics, Web and social media content, multimodal/video content, and promotional/brand/marketing materials" (239).

Some curricula are shifting toward a more digital emphasis, the writing major at Metropolitan State University providing one excellent example. Its Professional Writing track offers four courses (three required) in digital design and writing for new media (McCartan and Sadler 104–5). Nearly every major showcased in Giberson et al. includes at least one class on new media and web writing. Faculty are beginning to update pedagogy to incorporate blogging, podcasts, and website design, and to show how traditional skills transfer to various forms of digital methods of communication (which will help students stay current after graduation).

Three Specialized Courses: Gateway, Internship, and Capstone

We also suggest implementing three required courses in all writing studies majors: a gateway, an internship, and a capstone. Formatted to fit individual programs, these courses are vital to preparing writing students for the job market. Each combines academic experience with real-world application.

A gateway is an introductory course to the major. In the Professional and Technical Writing major at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, students are required to take a gateway their first semester. It outlines all coursework offered and required in the major, and introduces students to the broad scope of possible career choices for a professional writer (L'Eplattenier and Jenson 24). It stresses the importance of building skills and learning software that will be crucial to thriving in the modern economy by inviting field professionals to speak to students about their own paths and the learning outcomes that benefited their own advancement. The gateway is also an introduction to crucial terminology and ideas in the writing studies major. It should use other ideas from Arkansas' course, such as inviting professionals to speak about the job market for writers. The modern landscape of professional writing is growing constantly, and without some insight into the climate, students feel directionless. This course introduces students to opportunities in the workforce so they can forge academic paths toward a focused career.

Multiple sources cite internships as one of the most vital elements of a praxis-oriented curriculum, allowing students to apply classroom lessons to a real-world setting. According to Brumberger and Lauer, internships help students "develop subject matter familiarity" and "enter a competitive workplace" (240). Such applied learning may also increase job prospects. The Hart study noted that nearly all employers surveyed said they were far more likely to hire a recent college graduate who completed an internship or apprenticeship than one who hadn't (7). Internship courses can be structured to allow faculty creativity and individuality while still maintaining coherence. While approached and executed in diverse ways, the objectives of internships should be the practical application of previously acquired academic skillsets in professional settings.

Internships also provide students with professional documents that can be used in a portfolio. Some programs choose to require only an internship itself from students, while others combine classroom learning and internship to create a hybrid experience. Weisser and Grobman describe the Penn State Berks Professional Writing internship course as a class that "combines regular class meetings, discussions, and reading assignments with internship fieldwork and contextualizes the internship through classroom discussion and rhetorical analysis" (44). The format encourages applied learning while also offering teachable moments and student discussion. Of the 18 writing studies programs in Giberson et al., 11 require an internship and two allow an internship through a capstone/senior seminar. With the importance employers place on internships, we believe all writing studies majors should require them.

We round out this triad of suggested required courses with a capstone, a necessary final rite of passage, so to speak, of writers' college experience, where they analyze abilities accumulated in an academic setting and apply them to the workplace. According to Robert Hauhart and Jon Grahe in their book *Designing and Teaching Undergraduate Capstone Courses*, the purpose of the capstone is to "integrate concepts across the learning experience" (46). In other words, it is in this course where students reflect on all their learning throughout their major. They also may apply those skills and theories to the job market; however, Hauhart and Grahe point out that few institutions use the capstone course in that way (35).

As students prepare for graduation, a capstone course can be a profound way to prepare the documents and hone the skills needed for the job market, as students may be guided in crafting resumes, cover letters, and online and print portfolios. Here, too, core competencies for making students flexible for 21st-century workplaces can be embedded and applied in various scenes. Students should be introduced to new products and tools through workplace-aimed assignments, and conduct genre research in their preferred industry or career, allowing them to apply soft skills to their growing knowledge of work environments. Capstone courses can also be sites for portfolio work. We believe a portfolio should be created and adapted all throughout a student's collegiate career—for example, a three-credit portfolio class could be taken as one credit for each of a student's first three years in college. The capstone course, though, would be the final cumulative effort for the portfolio. Focusing on the importance of the portfolio may also encourage students to get published while still in college.

Based on our own capstone, we suggest inviting professionals who write frequently, which shows alternate job opportunities that may not be considered typical "writing" occupations and offers more concrete possibilities in what can otherwise be an ambiguous major. As a liberal arts major in every essence of the term, a "professional writer" can enter a vast variety of different career paths, fields, and professions. The traditional academic assumption that fields in media, science, engineering, and finance are separated by hard lines rather than gradients, and require specialization in order to join, is not entirely the case. We found ourselves wishing we had learned about those opportunities before our last semesters in college. We suggest that the gateway and capstone courses could work together by

incorporating guest speakers from the field into the gateway curriculum as an introduction to the breadth of available career choices. Then, as students near the end of their undergraduate careers, they would be exposed to the field again in their capstone courses through guest presentations aimed more toward specific professional paths and entry-level positions. Seniors from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock agreed that if they knew about these alternate occupations, "they could then take the courses that would make them more marketable" (L'Eplattenier and Jensen 29).

Course Naming

Most programs profiled in Giberson et al. incorporate technical, industry-specific jargon into the names and descriptions of their courses. We propose a re-evaluation of course names and descriptions to eliminate or reduce terminology that deters prospective majors. Most incoming freshman are unfamiliar with writing studies jargon, and without a fundamental understanding of the field's terminology, courses names like "Rhetorical Traditions" and "Genre and Discourse" offer little indication of the skills studied or learning outcomes, or where they might fit into potential career paths (Bowden 16). In her analysis of DePaul University's Writing, Rhetoric and Discourse major, Bowden argues that academic jargon is a deterrent for prospective students and even faculty (16). Words like "rhetoric" and "discourse" may not only intimidate newcomers, but also provide no context for laypeople. The preconceived understanding of writing in the minds of recent high school graduates poses a challenge for writing studies departments to advertise the major to students who are unfamiliar with writing as an independent entity. It is valuable to consider how the curriculum and courses within can help to define the major, as well. If a student wishes to pursue a career in medicine, for example, they will likely plan to enroll in physiology, anatomy, chemistry, and other obviously relevant courses. Though the actual content of those courses will be foreign, the words "physiology" and "anatomy" are common enough to be meaningful even prior to study of them.

Even though professional writing students will branch out in wildly different career directions, writing studies courses which serve as tools for such paths should be clearly delineated with relevant names. Arkansas, for example, boasts a very successful employed alumni rate, and the major offers several advanced electives that are explicitly named to reflect the associated field. The authors zero in on editing courses like *Editing for Publication*, but they also mention others like *Advanced Persuasion* (L'Eplattenier and Jenson 25). This is interesting because the Editing for Publication course so clearly means to attract students interested in editing and publishing, and Advanced Persuasion mentions in the course description that it targets students interested in pre-law. Majors should consider using such naming more widely, removing jargon and gearing titles and descriptions toward either the intended learning outcomes of the course or the place of the course on a potential professional writing path.

Program Naming

Finally, we suggest the importance of a common name for the "writing" major. In the 18 programs profiled in Giberson et al., there

were eight different names, including "Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse," "Professional and Technical Writing," "Writing and Rhetoric," "Technical Communication," "Writing," "Professional Writing," "English," and "Professional Writing and Rhetoric." Such breadth may open a greater variety of fields to students, but this lack of consistency makes identifying majors to potential employers a challenge. Moreover, how others identify us reinforces the ambiguity the eight PW majors authoring this article feel. Weisser and Grobman note this as well, and we want to reemphasize it: "Internally, consistent naming may ultimately draw more students to a writing major and continue to validate its legitimacy in higher education…. Doing so may also contribute to a greater sense of legitimacy and identity among graduates, as well as more consistency and recognition of those programs in the eyes of employers and graduate programs" (56).

If persuasion, multimodality, and professional practice will be the touchstone of the major, then the name of the major could reflect the skills the curriculum teaches more specifically. Although we authors have not agreed amongst ourselves on such a comprehensive name, we have demonstrated the ways in which other curricular aspects (e.g. courses in digital writing, discussion with working professionals) can be unified, as they would give students, faculty, and employers a clearer understanding in their curricular and future professional path. As O'Neill et al. point out in *A Field of Dreams*, this is a major that has been hotly debated among faculty for many years and will continue to be so for many more (2). This is one more example of the need for constant self-critique and revision in order to serve students building their own path—and students' viewpoints should also be acknowledged in this discussion.

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