A Field-Wide Examination of Assignments in the Service Course in Technical and Professional Communication

Katherine Mavridou-Hernandez
University of South Florida

Jessica Griffith
Jacksonville State University

Tanya Zarlengo
University of South Florida

Lisa Melonçon
Clemson University

Abstract Our goal is that field-wide insights can assist TPC program administrators (PAs) and faculty in considering the kinds of assignments that should be included in their own service courses. We asked the question: If we gathered information on assignments students are asked to complete from a diverse range of institutions across the US, would a set of common field-wide assignments emerge? And if so, do the common genres align with what TPC knows about the genres most frequently written in the workplace? Data gathered from syllabi (n=90) revealed the most common assignments across the service course in the US are reports, proposals, job materials, instructions, presentations, and business correspondence. Findings suggest faculty should consider the number of assignments, improve terminology used in syllabi and assignments, and improve assignment design.

Keywords Assignments, curriculum, service course, technical and professional communication, field-wide

Programmatic Perspectives 17.1, Spring 2026: 129-169
Contact Author: kat.mavridou.hernandez@gmail.com

The technical and professional communication (TPC) service course is an "introductory course…for nonmajors" and is typically instituted "as a service to other departments and programs on campus" (Melonçon & England, 2011, p. 398). The course focuses on "problem solving, and learning to communicate information that has real cultural, legal, and ethical obligations" (Melonçon, 2018, p. 208) and also how to "adap[t] emergent knowledge to specific workplace or community-based contexts" (Scott, 2008, p. 382).

We are not alone in centering the service course as a place for research. Some focus on the courses' sustainability (Carnegie, 2018; Schreiber et. al, 2018b; St.Amant, 2018). Other scholars have examined a wide variety of topics, such as teacher feedback in the service course (Sara Doan, 2019); grading contracts (Litterio, 2018); teaching genres (Boettger, 2014); course design for specialized audiences (Arduser, 2018); and outcome use (Newmark & Bartolotta, 2021). However, our goal is to add to this existing work and to address the call to "critically reflect on service courses" as a "place to build programmatic research," (Schreiber et al., 2018a) while also taking up the scholarly concern that this course has not been studied over diverse institutional contexts (Read & Michaud, 2018). We wanted to study the service course while also addressing TPC's need to "understand what we are teaching," and we seek to "share that knowledge broadly with others in the field" (Rose & Turner, 2025, p. 3). Our aim was to uncover *what* assignments are being used within service courses across a variety of institutions and *share* those findings with the field.

We decided that an applied practical study would be most beneficial to gain a deeper understanding of what is being taught in the service course over varied institutional contexts. In similar ways to work on student learning outcomes (Griffith et al., 2024), we intend to offer a field-wide snapshot of assignments in the service course from a diverse range of institutions. This type of programmatic work aims to uncover *in situ* practices from across institutions within the field, rather than a deep analysis of local practices. Programmatic work of this kind is crucial because "the implications of any findings … serves as program development … [and] makes a faculty reflective by giving them something on which to reflect" (Hesse, 2012, p. 153). Programmatic research also provides valuable insights for the field of TPC, and "embodies our ethical obligation to audit and analyze what we know and practice in the name of writing and teaching" (Hesse, 2012, p. 153). TPC does not have a baseline across the field that showcases what is currently being assigned in the service course. A baseline is important for continuous improvement because it encourages programs to "systematically reflect on their own

programs and as importantly reflect with other peer programs" (Schreiber & Melonçon, 2019, p. 260).

We approached this research with a general inquiry: If we gathered information on the assignments students are asked to complete from a diverse range of institutions across the US, would a set of common field-wide assignments emerge? And if so, do the common genres align with what TPC knows about the genres most frequently written in the workplace? We begin by reviewing the existing literature, which guides our understanding of assignments within TPC. Then, we explain our methodology and the methods used to analyze data about assignments. Lastly, we offer the results, discussion, and implications for TPC. We conclude with calls for future research.

We hope these field-wide insights can assist TPC program administrators (PAs) and faculty in considering the kinds of assignments that should be included in their service courses based on evidence from practice rather than relying on assumptions or lore. Critical and continual reflection on assignments taught in TPC programs helps establish a connection between the work students are asked to do in the classroom and the work they will be called to do after graduation.

Literature Review

We chose to focus on assignments because it is "through engagement with assignments, [that] students acquire the skills and knowledge" needed for their professional lives (Zarlengo, 2019, p. 25). Further, previous scholarship on the service course has called for future research to look at assignments across the field (Melonçon, 2018). In our review of scholarship specific to TPC and the service course, we could find no studies that brought together field-wide data about assignments in practice. Thus, we pick up the call to look at assignments in the service course across the field.

At the time of this writing, the only insights into service course assignments from a field-wide perspective may be found in textbooks. While textbooks offer instructors a starting point to inform the creation of a course, the decisions instructors make as they populate the course with tasks reflect their pedagogical values, and it is our goal in studying assignments to gain some insight into these values. Of note is the fact that 93% of the institutions in our sample included a textbook in their syllabi, yet no two syllabi were identical. A textbook offers a single instantiation of an approach to teaching the TPC service course. However, Read and Michaud (2018) observe, "Although some instructors may follow the outline of a textbook to the letter, others might dip into a book now and again to touch on certain topics or use the book behind the scenes as a resource for

planning lessons" (p. 234). We agree that it is difficult to make inferences about textbook use and pedagogy, simply from the fact that textbooks have been selected (Read and Michaud, 2018). And, as G. Edzordzi Agbozo, Isidore K. Dorpenyo, & Godwin Y. Agboka (2024) additionally remind us, textbooks often present students with a monolithic view that creates a false sense of reality for students about what TPC looks like in the varied workplaces. Combined with the fact that changes to a text take an incredibly long time, TPC needs to take care in using textbooks as a standard. Rather they should be seen as one piece of a larger puzzle in understanding teaching and learning. The data from the syllabi that we present below offers deeper insights into approaches to facilitating student learning beyond the content of a text. Thus, we acknowledge the role of textbooks as part of the necessary scholarly conversation around assignments, but we also want to highlight other ways of knowing about assignments that may be more reflective of actual practice.

We limited our examination of the literature to scholarship that discussed assignments in the TPC service course. Assignments in other courses within TPC degree programs have different goals and objectives. To get a better sense of how our data might fit into the TPC service course landscape, we felt this limitation would help us narrow down scholarship to those with comparative examples.

TPC has examined specific approaches to assignments that work to connect theory to practice through assignments that employ client-based projects (Balzotti & Rawlins, 2016; Burnett et al., 2022; Robles & Baker, 2019) or service-learning projects (Kramer-Simpson et al., 2015; Nielsen, 2016; Matheson & Petersen, 2020; Baniya et al., 2022; Campbell, et al., 2024). This focus on service learning and client-based projects gives insight into what the field values. However, many service course programs do not have the resources or instructional capacity to include these types of projects. There is value in these types of assignments, but, in large part, the specialized nature of these approaches are not easily scalable in locations with large service course programs, nor are they sustainable for a service course labor pool that is primarily contingent (Melonçon, 2017; Melonçon et al., 2020; Rieger et al., 2023). Therefore, we look at all types of assignments found in a broad range of service courses.

We found two studies that examine the relationship between assignments in an engineering service course and what practicing engineers write, which intersects with the second part of our research question. Don Cunningham and Jill Stewart (2011) explored what types of documents architects and professionals spend their time writing and concluded that participants spent the most time writing correspondence and technical reports. Similarly to this study, Ann Marie Francis (2018) found that practicing engineers

spend their time reading and writing business correspondence and argues for faculty to "consider the types of writing engineers are required to do in their daily jobs" (p. 69). Both studies provide important information about writing in the workplace, but neither places this information in relation to teaching and learning in the service course writ large. In the interest of foregrounding teaching and learning, we wanted to cast a wider net to uncover the types of assignments that were being used within the TPC service course.

Even though the TPC service course serves thousands of students a year, the field has few insights into assignments and their efficacy for achieving the overall learning goals of the service course. Recent work examines the impact of different assignments on student learning. Using a continuous improvement model, Michelle Sonnenberg and others (2024) analyzed an information design assignment across a service course program and came to understand specific ways the assignment could be improved to enhance student learning. A key finding pointed to the insight that the existing assignment asked students to do too much, which meant they did not achieve the main goal of the assignment. In another example, Lisa Melonçon and others (2024) explore how well students achieved a rhetoric student learning outcome. This finding supports the goal of strengthening the pedagogical approach to teaching rhetoric and the student uptake of that learning objective. One of the results was improving assignment clarity. Furthermore, Justiss Wilder Burry and others (2024) wanted to understand how well students performed when they selected an assignment with an equity and inclusion issue embedded in it. What they found was that more students self-selected into the other assignment choices, but the ones who chose to do the inclusivity-focused assignment demonstrated an awareness of empathy and appropriate language use, as well as "starting to negotiate issues of relative power dynamics and POV when positioned as a company employee in a realistic workplace setting" (Burry et al., 2024, p. 135). These three studies provided important insights into how students interact with and respond to certain assignments. However, while these studies go beyond a single classroom to examine courses across a program, they are limited to a single institution.

Studies on student learning and student reactions to assignments made us question the process by which instructors or TPCPAs make decisions about what assignments to include in their courses. In other words, what assignments are instructors across diverse institutions having their students complete in practice? We set out to gather data, the first of its kind in the field, to offer a baseline of practice.

Research Methodology

Our methodological approach to the research study design is based in part on the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL): "Scholars of teaching and learning are prepared to mess with the world even more boldly than their colleagues who are satisfied to teach well and leave it at that…they examine the quality of those practices and ask how they could have been even more effective" (Shulman, 2002, p. viii). Therefore, engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning sits at "the edge of most disciplines, calling on but also going beyond the normal knowledge practices of most fields" (Huber, 2006, p.72). Building from SoTL scholarship, scholars in TPC created a taxonomy of research questions to help guide programmatic research initiatives, and they categorized four kinds of questions: description, practice, impact, and inquiry (Schreiber & Melonçon, 2026). Description research questions are meant to "gai[n]…baseline knowledge of programmatic features and practices at the course, program, and/or field level" and gather "information on current practices" (Schreiber & Melonçon, 2026, n.p.). Our descriptive research questions were:

- If we gathered information on assignments students are asked to complete from a diverse range of institutions across the US, would a set of common field-wide assignments emerge?
- Do the common genres align with what TPC knows about the genres most commonly written in the workplace?

With our research questions in hand, our next step involved determining what data we might gather that could help answer these two questions. We decided to use course syllabi and the descriptions of assignments included in the syllabi as our main artifact for analysis because of the history of their use in TPC pedagogical research (Chong, 2016; Melonçon & Schreiber, 2018; Melonçon, 2019; Faris & Wilson, 2022; Tham, 2022; Rose & Turner, 2025) and because they provide insights into the everyday practice of teaching.

Process for Gathering Data

TPC does not currently have complete data on the number of institutions where the service course is offered. Thus, we were unable to create a quantitative sampling plan with a high confidence interval and instead opted to use a purposive sample, which is a sample that is "used in qualitative (QUAL) studies and may be defined as selecting units (e.g., individuals, groups of individuals, institutions) based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study's questions" (Teddlie & Yu, 2007, p. 77). In purposive sampling, "particular

settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 1997, p. 235). Purposive sampling allowed us to use our professional networks and contact TPC PAs and faculty who were teaching the service course or directing a service course program. To gather our materials, we emailed faculty directly with a request for their syllabi. The institutional review boards (IRBs) from the University of South Florida reviewed this project (PRO#00033052). Based on the terms of those IRBs, information is shared in aggregate, and institutions are only identified by their Carnegie Classification® (2021).

Institutional Representation

Our final data set consisted of 90 syllabi, and Table 1 outlines the types of institutions included in this data set.

Table 1. Type of institution by Carnegie Classification and number of syllabi in the data set. (N = 90)

Type of institution	Classification definition	Syllabi
R1	Doctoral Universities—Very High Research Activity	28% (n = 26)
R2	Doctoral Universities—High Research Activity	14% (n = 13)
R3	Doctoral/ Professional Universities	10% (n = 9)
M1	Master's Colleges and Universities—Larger programs	24% (n = 22)
M2	Master's Colleges and Universities—Medium programs	5% (n = 5)
MS	Master's Colleges and Universities—Small programs	1% (n = 1)
BAC	Mixed Baccalaureate/Associate's Colleges	3% (n = 3)
Associates (A)	Associate's Dominant	12% (n = 11)

The majority of syllabi, 65%, came from a technical writing or communication course, while 10% are from a technical and professional writing course. Professional writing courses comprise 7% of the sample, and the remaining 20% is a wide array of courses with names such as Professional Writing Skills, Technical Report Writing, Technical Writing and Document Design, and Business and Professional Writing. The majority of courses, 60%, are offered at the junior or senior level.

Process of Data Analysis Through Collaborative Coding

We use *code* to mean "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative…attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" and this coding process is iterative (Saldaña, 2009). We supplement this understanding of Saldaña's approach with an attention to being systematic (Geisler & Swarts, 2019). The systematic and iterative nature of coding is illustrated through the process of creating and revising our coding scheme as we worked, which we discuss in the next three sections.

Assignments Included

One researcher, who was the one with the most time in the field, created the initial code list based on a preliminary review of the syllabi and working knowledge of assignment genres. This list contained 22 codes. In a trial run to see if the initial codes would work in practice, we made some immediate changes. We recognized that we wanted to focus on major assignments where the students were asked to produce a substantial product. Thus, we did not include homework, quizzes, other participation components (such as discussion board posts or reading responses), or other tangential grading mechanisms that were not written work.

We did keep exams (midterm and/or final) as assignments. The frequency of both midterm and final exams suggests that instructors viewed them as formative to their course to evaluate comprehension or knowledge of key concepts. Thus, we agreed to code *exam* into our dataset.

We also decided to add the code of *reflection* for assignments that asked students to self-reflect on their learning. While many assignments included the word reflection in their title, we only coded assignments as reflection if the assignment description indicated that the student would be asked to engage in self-reflection of learning. This same approach is applied to all assignments. Even if an assignment was given the title of *memo*, we used the assignment description to determine if it fit the definition listed in our shared table of codes.

We also talked through the initial codes to decide how to capture projects that had multiple components. We determined that we would code the individual generic parts of the projects. For example, a collaborative recommendation report that may take up to 4–6 weeks of the term may include a proposal, a final report, and a presentation. This project would then have three codes attached to the three assigned parts of the larger project. This decision complements the strategy of using genres as coding categories and works toward the larger goal of finding out what types of assignments are being included in the service course.

At this stage, we also created secondary codes. We included seven secondary codes to provide additional information for analysis (e.g., a primary code of report and a secondary code of recommendation). We initially had *collaboration* as a primary code but recognized it needed to be a secondary code. For example, if an instruction assignment was collaborative, we coded it first as *instruction* (the genre of writing) and then as *collaborative* (the method of working with other students). After the review and initial discussion, the original coding list went from 22 codes to 16, and we then included seven secondary codes. Refer to Appendix A for the complete code list.

Collaborative Consensus Coding

Our research team of four included two early career scholars. These two completed the initial coding, which means that two researchers split the assignments and coded their halves. Then, the whole research team discussed these codes. Unlike Peter Smagorinsky (2008) who advocated for code agreement to be reached through discussion, we found that because our team was made up of researchers at varying levels of their careers, the collaborative discussion was more productive *after* individual attempts. This was because we view collaborative research as a learning process, and allowing early career researchers to make the first attempt before coming together to discuss their own interpretations is an effective approach for both the research project and for gaining experience as a researcher. Thus, this process allowed space for our differing expertise and knowledge, and it also allowed for discussions of differences until we arrived at a consensus, which ensured that all our expertise was recognized and integrated.

After coding all assignments, we had 57 assignments that needed to be discussed for consensus. Some assignments were collapsed into others due to similar goals or assignment weights. For example, if an institution had multiple instances of an assignment, we read the description to see if they were similar. If so, we counted it once, thereby collapsing two codes into one. We did this through a contextual reading of the assignment descriptions versus the course as a whole. We also considered what the

assignments seemed to be doing in regard to the outcomes. For example, one institution (R3) attached a presentation to two assignments (a proposal and a report). Because the presentation was linked to a larger assignment, we only included one instance of the presentation since this assignment was not introducing presentation skills a second time but instead trying to enhance that original learning outcome.

Lastly, we also collapsed assignments that focused on job materials because, similar to the above example, they were working towards one singular outcome or goal. For example, one school (R3) listed multiple assignments as part of the course: Application (Cover) Letter, Resume, and/or CV. Because these assignments were working towards having students understand the goal of job materials, we collapsed this into the *job* code. We did this for all institutions that listed multiple steps to assignments related to job materials (i.e., cover letters, resumes, CVs, statements of purpose, or job applications).

Consistency Coding

Consistency coding is "the internal process of ensuring that we applied the same code for like items" (Clegg et al., 2021, p. 22). As one of the final parts of the coding process, consistency coding was done by one researcher who did not do the initial coding of the assignments. In this step, only six assignments were noted for consistency issues. Following the same process of collaborative, consensus coding described above, the authors discussed the six assignments and updated them based on those discussions.

Outside of these six assignments, consistency coding did uncover an inconsistent application of what assignments were to be included. There were 32 assignments that were tagged, and after discussion, all 32 were deleted. These tagged and then deleted assignments were a combination of different parts of the "job search" assignment and activities that were part of in-class exercises or homework that we had agreed not to include. This step offers an important final check to ensure the quality and validity of the coding process, and it emphasizes the importance of the iterative and systematic nature of coding (Saldaña, 2019; Geisler & Swarts, 2019).

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is the sampling plan. Because this study is based on convenience and purposive sampling, the data can only be generalized to the specific population it is drawn from, rather than the entire population. While the findings are representative of a particular sub-population, they can be useful in establishing a baseline

on which to build for future research. This baseline can also be used by TPC PAs, who want to continue to develop their programmatic work.

An additional limitation is the data gathered. For example, using syllabi comes with the understanding that the document itself is limited in what it entails. Also, with the increasing use of learning management systems (LMS), information that would be traditionally housed in syllabi (i.e., fuller assignment descriptions) is distributed in other locations. With only the syllabi, we were limited to the most basic type of information about assignments.

Results and Discussion

In this section, we return to our first research question: If we gathered information on assignments students are asked to complete from a diverse range of institutions across the US, would a set of common field-wide assignments emerge? We address this question by reporting the findings from the field-wide analysis of 519 assignments at 90 institutions. We begin by discussing the most common assignments and examining the way assignments are scaffolded in a syllabus. We then offer an explanation of what those assignments are and then relate them to the existing literature in TPC. Lastly, we discuss the incorporation of collaboration as a feature of assignments.

Types of Most Common and Unique Assignments

The data are broken down in two ways:

- Total assignment
- Unique assignment

The total assignment column represents each assignment counted in the data set (N = 519), while the unique assignment column removes any duplicate assignments at the same school (n = 462). This distinction aligns with work on learning outcomes (Griffith et al., 2024) that made this distinction to separate the total number of assignments collected and the assignments that overlap within each school. We present the summary of the coded assignments in Table 2.

Table 2. Summarizing the coding of total number of assignments (N = 519) and unique assignments (n = 462).

Code (n = 17)	% Total	% Unique
reports	17% (n = 89)	13% (n = 63)
proposals	11% (n = 60)	12% (n = 59)
job materials	10% (n = 56)	11% (n = 55)
business communication	10% (n = 56)	10% (n = 47)
presentations	10% (n = 54)	9% (n = 45)
instructions	10% (n = 52)	10% (n = 50)
miscellaneous	4% (n = 23)	4% (n = 20)
visual	4% (n = 22)	4% (n = 20)
exam	4% (n = 22)	4% (n = 22)
definition and/or description	4% (n = 22)	4% (n = 20)
analysis	3% (n = 16)	3% (n = 14)
portfolio	3% (n = 14)	3% (n = 14)
research	2% (n = 12)	2% (n = 12)
style	1% (n = 7)	1% (n = 7)

The most common assignments were *report*, *proposal*, *job materials*, *business communication,* and *presentations*. The order of the top five assignments did shift slightly when comparing the total versus the unique assignments.

The unique category "eliminates any duplicate" assignment at the same school, which means that each assignment code was only counted once per school (Griffith et al., 2024).

For example, if an institution has five assignments for their course, but two of those assignments were reports, unique codes would then only count *report* once. The difference in total assignments (N = 519) versus unique (n = 462) was 57 assignments.

We specifically address our research question by examining the unique assignments that appeared the most in our dataset. Six assignments were found at half the institutions in our study. As noted in Table 2, there was a considerable gap between this set of six assignments and the remainder of the assignments; thus, the reason we bring them forward. Refer to Figure 1.

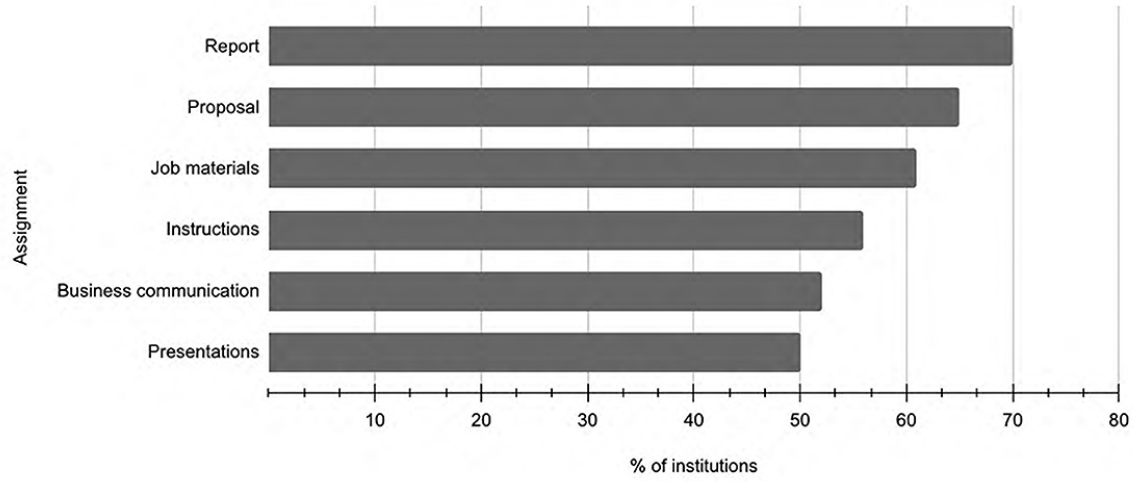

Figure 1. Most common assignments

It is important to note that although these assignments emerged as the most common, we are not advocating for the uptake of these assignments just because they appear frequently. Instead, we are placing the findings—what the data tells us—in relation to existing scholarship in the field.

Scaffolding of Assignments

The assignment data indicates that many assignments were constructed to assist students with gaining more proficiency and confidence with writing in a gradual and layered process. It seems that many instructors are scaffolding their assignments, building on previous work to deepen student understanding of certain course concepts. According to educational research, “scaffolding is construed as support given by a teacher to a student when performing a task that the student might otherwise not be able to accomplish” (van de Pol et al., 2010, p. 274). This is seen when instructors build a course with smaller assignments that build to a larger one. Additionally, each major assignment is

used as a stepping stone to larger ones later on in the semester. The goal behind scaffolding is for "learner[s] [to] internaliz[e] the support structure associated with the scaffolding and, in the end, teacher scaffolding is no longer needed as the learner can provide his or her own support" (van de Pol et al., 2010, p. 275).

In TPC, Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart Selber (2021) argued that assignments should "construc[t] pedagogical scaffolding to emphasize outcomes, interactions, relationships, and projects" (p. 154), so we examined the data to see any patterns and found that there were some connections between the way assignments were presented. For example, in our data collection, one school (R2) included five assignments (resume, report, PowerPoint, instructions, and a group proposal), and was coded as *scaffolding* to a proposal based on the organization within the syllabus that listed the proposal as the last assignment in the course. It should be noted that this data was based on where the assignment was located in a syllabus and how it was listed in relation to the other assignments. This does not account for schools that included common assignments early in the semester, such as a report or proposal, but ended the semester with a final presentation (this would be labeled as *presentation*).

Out of the 90 syllabi analyzed, the majority of them (40%) scaffolded the assignments to build to a final *report* project (see Figure 2).

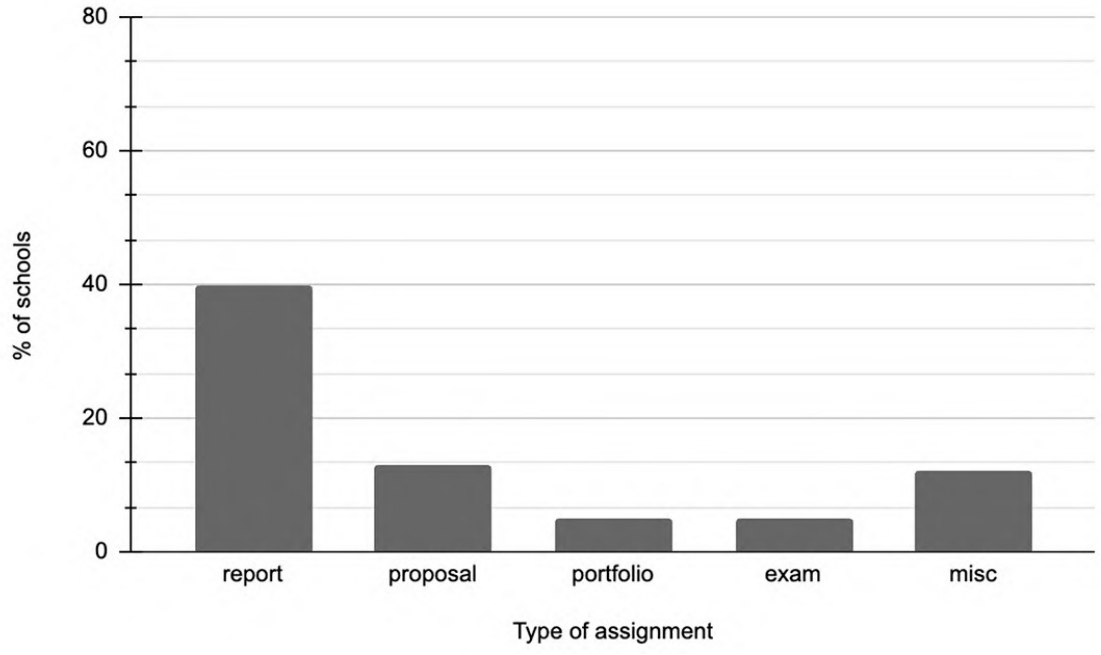

Figure 2. Scaffolded to assignment

These reports ranged from feasibility to recommendation to progress reports. The second largest category (13%) was the use of *proposals* as a final project, while the remaining categories, *portfolio* (5%) and *exam* (5%), were only seen in a small number of schools. The remaining schools scaffolded to assignments such as usability testing, website creation, creating instructions, or editing. Additionally, only 5% of schools included a reflective component, which was typically located at the end of the course.

Discussion of Common Assignments

In the sections below, we discuss the common assignments found within the TPC service course.

Reports

Reports were assigned at 70% of institutions in our sample (see Figure 1), which is the largest category of assignments. We also did secondary codes for *report* to capture the specific type of report that students were being asked to produce (if this information was clear in the syllabus or assignment description). The most common types of reports were *feasibility* and *progress*. Other types that we could code included *recommendation*, *technical*, *analysis*, and *information*.

As Figure 2 shows, the report was the most scaffolded within a course, meaning that 40% of schools had their course built to a report of some kind. Some institutions also included multiple instances of the report; for example, one school (M1) included a technical report, a progress report, and a feasibility report.

Reports have long been a staple of TPC pedagogy, with the first record we could find in 1951, when James W. Southern discussed the teaching practices of the report. Others have also discussed teaching the analytic report (Nelson-Burns, 2004); the lab report (Dave Kim & Wendy M. Olson, 2020); report writing in specific fields (Jones & Freeman, 2003); and decision criteria for a recommendation report (Baake, 2007). Further, Dorothy Winsor's (2003) classic study of the writing of engineers from academia to the workplace discussed report writing in both locales. The prevalence of the report assignment intersects with the field's ongoing scholarly attention to this genre.

Proposals

Proposals were assigned at 65% of institutions in our sample. The *proposal* code represents the genre of a proposal based on the title or assignment description, and we consider a proposal a type of document that puts forward a plan for solving a problem.

We also found that proposals were popular as a scaffolded assignment, with 13% of institutions building their course to end with a proposal. Some of these proposals assigned include *group proposals*, *business proposals*, and *final project proposals*. Each institution also only included one instance of a proposal assignment. The exception was a school (M1) which only assigned a *proposal report practice* and a *course proposal* and did not include any other assignments but the proposals.

TPC has examined the proposal as a key genre of the field, with some arguing that current practices continue to highlight the form of the proposal rather than its rhetorical context (Feng et al., 2023; Lawrence et al., 2019). In a study of the significant differences in the topoi of academic proposal writing versus nonprofit grant proposals, Emily Barrow DeJeu (2024) also concluded that there are specific rhetorical moves that should be made in a proposal, and those rhetorical functions should be included when teaching proposals.

Job Materials

This code focuses on documents related to a job search and appeared at 61% of the institutions. This assignment most often asked students to complete a resume and cover letter, with fewer assignment descriptions asking for a job ad to be analyzed as well.

Similarly to proposals, institutions only included one instance of job materials within each course. The exception was one school (R3), which had two job-related assignments, the resume and cover letter. This does not mean that other schools did not include a variation of this assignment, but that this was the only school to separate and list them as individual projects.

TPC scholars have looked at the resume assignment because of its prevalence in coursework (Berdanier et al., 2021; Fillenwarth et al., 2018). Notably, Chalice Randazzo (2016) suggested that the job materials assignment be taught as a research project "which empowers students and legitimizes educators' expertise" (p. 278). As we discuss below in the *considering assignments* section, the emergence of this assignment as common suggests a problematic theme of focusing on a genre used to get a job, rather than the writing done within a job.

Instructions

The *instruct* code represents the genre of instructions, based on the title or assignment description, and this assignment appeared at 55% of institutions. We define instructions as a document that prompts the user to act. Many of these assignments focus on the steps or the how-to of a task, and may also be called documentation, process, or procedural. In

the data, instructions were seen as an early or midway assignment, they were never used to build to a larger project. Many of the instruction assignments were simply labeled as "instructions," however, some institutions used titles such as "instructions with graphics" or "group video instructions."

This genre has long been a staple of TPC research (Hovde, 2022). Pedagogically, the field has several studies that focus on the use of free report manuals in the form of iFixit projects (Carnegie, 2018; Eggleston & Rabb, 2019; Getto et al., 2014). The assignment data further underscores this genre's importance in the field.

Business Communication

The code *biz comm* is a shortened version of business communication. *Biz comm* was included as an assignment at 52% of institutions and refers to letters, memos, and emails. Many of the assignments required students to write a form of business correspondence in response to the instructor or as a response to a prompt. For example, one school (M1) had the following instructions: "You will write and revise a memorandum announcing a new 'E-mail Etiquette' policy at your workplace." Similar to the above section on instructions, business communication assignments were used primarily as an early or midterm assignment, and not as an assignment that needed to be scaffolded to at the end of the course. Many of the institutions included one to two instances of a biz comm assignment, with some examples being labeled as "correspondence, business letter, memorandum," or "interview memo."

TPC scholars have also studied letters (Popham, 2008); emails (Blackburne & Nardone, 2018); and memos (Amare & Brammer, 2005), while business communication scholars have also noted the prevalence and importance of these genres in curricula (Moshiri & Cardon, 2020).

Presentations

This code identified the requirement of an oral presentation, based on the title or assignment description, and appeared at 50% of institutions. The range of assignments included in this code includes oral presentations as summaries of other genres, such as reports; presentations to focus on creating visual aids such as PowerPoint; or speeches. All of these align with common practices outside of higher education and emphasize the need for oral communication skills and knowledge. TPC scholars have also examined the efficacy and effectiveness of teaching presentations (Craig et al., 2008).

In addition to the data in Figure 2, many schools included a *presentation* component (20%) with their final project. The type of presentation ranged from individual presentations to group presentations. The presentation was also typically assigned alongside a report or proposal.

Collaboration

Rebecca E. Burnett and others (2013) defined collaboration as "intentional, sustained interaction toward a common goal" among people who "have shared goals and exchange information and knowledge" (p. 454). Because collaboration is a valuable skill for students to learn, we chose to include this as a secondary code. For example, an assignment could be coded as a *report* or *proposal* and then also have a secondary code of collaboration (*collab*).

Out of 519 assignments collected, 9% (n = 50) had a secondary code as collaborative, and the most common types of assignments that were collaborative included: *presentations* (n=11), *proposals* (n=11), *reports* (n=10), and *instructions* (n=10).

When analyzing the *collab* code, the assignments were usually seen as a larger project in which students would be asked to work as a group or team. For instance, one school (R1) had four assignments that included a collaborative aspect: two presentations, a report, and a proposal. Another way collaboration was seen was through a collaboration statement on the syllabus that often emphasized how collaboration should work. For example, one ML institution wrote that as a required component of the course, students were "responsible for updating one another and me [the instructor] about assignment development and progress. In addition, you also are responsible for negotiating together all aspects of your work, including planning, drafting, revising, file managing, and scheduling of assignments" (ML).

Additionally, some assignments used the collaborative statement to explicitly discuss why collaboration is such an important skill to learn, and indicate a general approach to assessment:

> In the "Real World" technical writing and communication is a collaborative effort. Sometimes that collabora-tion is easy, with team members participating equally, sometimes not. But regardless of the situation, everyone shares in the risks and the rewards of a team project. It is very important that you develop the skills to work collaboratively with your coworkers, that you learn to listen and incorporate the research and knowledge that each team member brings to the table, and that you

> learn how to build consensus. Therefore, the final two projects will be a group group projects [sic].
>
> However, having said that, I will take into account individual effort within work groups. Expect to evaluate your own and your team members' performance on group assignments. (ML)

This emphasis on collaboration extends beyond the assignment data. In the field of TPC, collaboration goes beyond classroom practices and has been a focus of research by Edward C. Brewer and Terence L. Holmes (2016) as well as a consistent theme in existing literature (Burnett et al., 2022; England & Brewer, 2018). Looking at the types of assignments that include a collaborative aspect is useful because it not only allows us to get a sense of how collaboration is valued as a skill, but it also shows us the types of assignments that other institutions are using to teach this skill.

Use of Common Assignments

Similar to Figure 1, which focused on the percentage of institutions that included each type of assignment, Figure 3 highlights how many of those same schools included multiple instances of the common assignments.

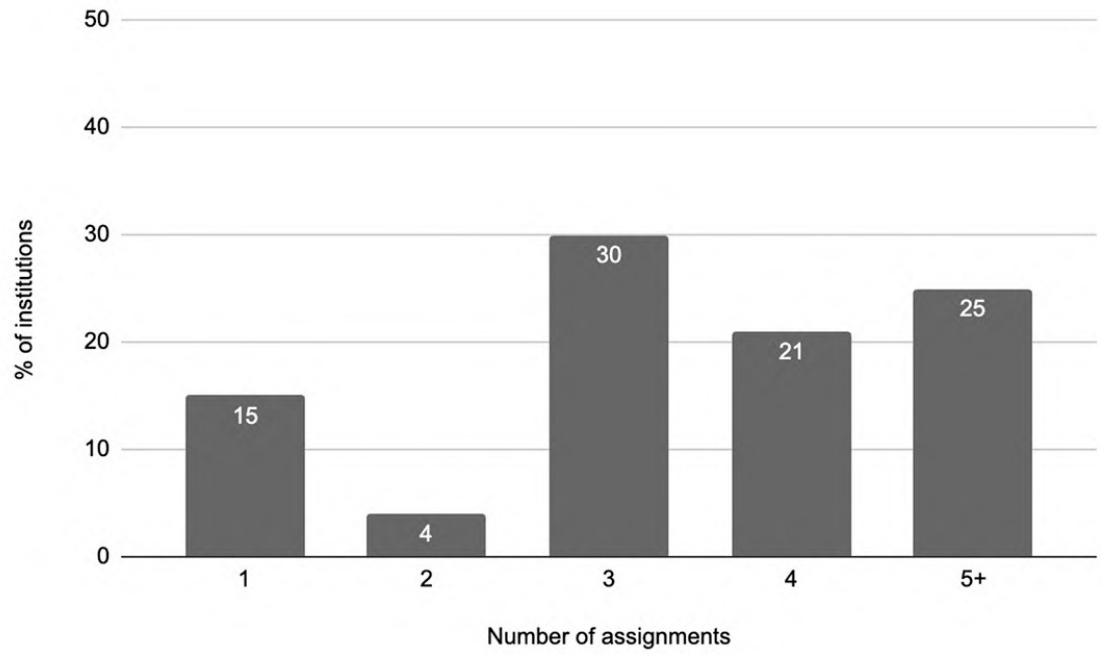

Figure 3. Number of schools that include a common assignment

For example, while there was a range in how many of the common assignments (reports, proposals, job materials, instructions, business communication, and presentations) were used, each institution included at least one of the common assignments. While the majority of schools included between three (30%) and four (21%) of the assignments, there were some that included five or more (25%).

What TPC Faculty Can Do with this Data Right Now

In this discussion section, we draw on the assignment data to offer ways in which TPC PAs and faculty can immediately consider and/or implement changes in the service course at their institution.

Consider Assignments and their Application to the Workplace

We focused on the top six assignments because of their prevalence across the service course and the fact that these genres have been discussed in the TPC literature through time. Since one of the goals of the service course is to prepare students for the writing they will do in the world of work, we wondered, do the common genres align with what TPC knows about the genres most commonly written in the workplace? The answer to our second research question is mostly yes.

Around 10 years ago, Stuart Blythe and others (2014) reported on key genres written in the workplace, and this has since been updated by a "communication in the workplace report" (Pigg et al., 2022). The findings of Pigg et al. are important because their results not only align with the top five genres mentioned in our study but also with other assignments shown in our data, such as visuals, descriptions, and instructions. Additionally, the data from our study also aligns with research on workplace writing, such as Tina Coffelt and others' (2022) research on business communication that asked employers what professional communication skills were needed. Lastly, the emphasis on collaboration in writing and communication is also consistent with a key skill needed in the workplace. When paired with current scholarship, this research offers an important data point to have alongside other data when making decisions about service course curricula and preparing students to write outside of higher education.

While the top five genres from our study align with current workplace practices, there was one assignment that did not coincide with the type of writing engineers do in the workplace (Cunningham & Stewart, 2011; Francis, 2018): the job material assignment. Rather, this assignment is a pre-professional genre used to get a job. The job materials assignment

raises interesting questions for the field to grapple with for course and assignment design. Here is a comment from one R1 institution:

> There is a common misconception that [course title redacted] is a course in which students work on their resumes. In fact, it is not a major assignment in the [redacted] curriculum because it comes under the heading of pre-professional writing (rather than professional writing), and many of your home colleges already provide instruction in resume writing appropriate for your field. I encourage you to make use of the University's resume resources available at [redacted].

As noted above, Randazzo (2016) has made clear that if this assignment is in a TPC course, it has to be taught in rhetorically sophisticated ways. Without a doubt, an argument can be made that the job materials assignment can teach important rhetorical concepts, but the majority of job materials assignments were focused on simply writing a resume rather than thinking through how to align the resume with a specific purpose and audience.

Consider the Number of Assignments

As noted above, we only coded assignments that had points (or weights) associated to them in the syllabus, and as we worked through the data, we became interested in the number of assignments students were asked to do. Refer to Figure 4.

Figure 4 illustrates the number of assignments in a service course as it relates to the percentage of institutions. The largest percentage of institutions, 20% (N=18), are assigning five major assignments in a term. But what we found most interesting was that a little more than half of the institutions in the data set, 52%, assigned six or more assignments in a term. If a traditional semester is 14–16 weeks, we began to wonder how students can complete these assignments and understand the skills they are building. The literature from educational research and composition studies all point to the need for ample time to practice as a key factor in students improving their writing (Hattie & Timperley, 2016; Kellogg & Whiteford, 2009; Anderson et al., 2015). Moreover, if TPC is invested in revision as a key component of learning how to write, time would need to be allotted to teach the revision process.

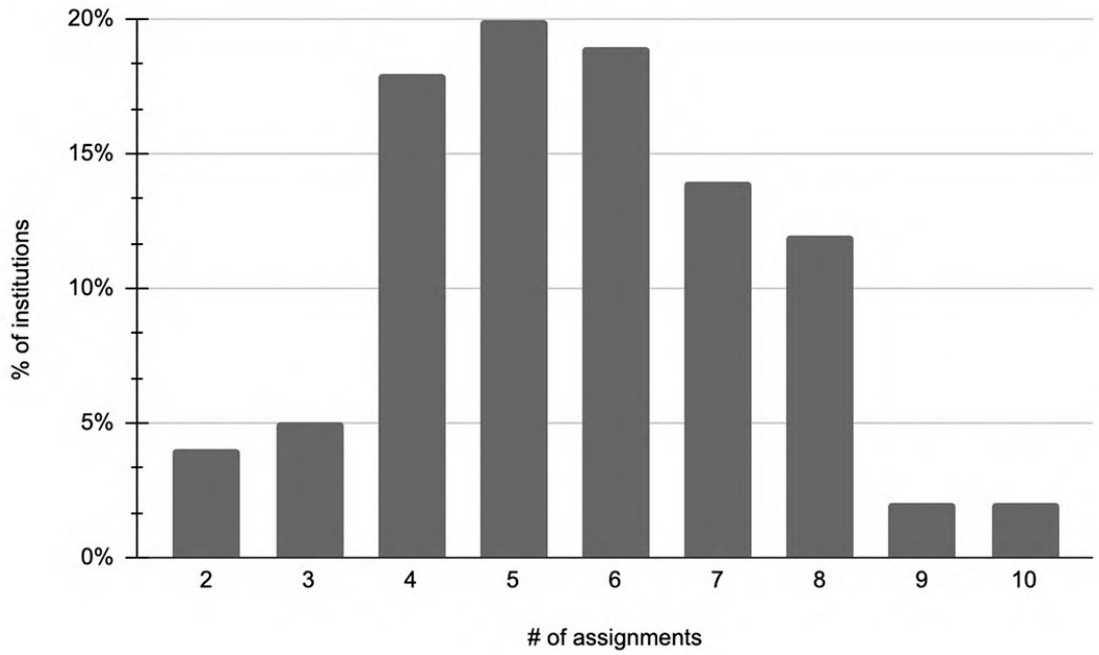

Figure 4. Percentage of institutions with number of assignments per course

A question arises here: Are faculty assigning too many things? Generally, the syllabi were so filled with assignments and sub-parts of assignments that we could imagine little time left to revise and incorporate meaningful feedback. Even the most common number of assignments, 5, raises questions about how to give students sufficient time for revision in a standard semester. The schedules often had students drafting something new without the full benefit of revising the previous assignment. Thus, using the field-wide data as a guide, we would encourage TPC PAs and faculty to seriously consider reducing the number of assignments in the service course.

Write Student-Focused Expectations Using Transparent Terminology

In this section, we want to highlight the lack of transparent terminology and language that was student-focused. Our research team is intergenerational, with one member of the team being a graduate student with a strong interest in TPC pedagogy. They consistently voiced their frustration during the coding process as they were unable to decipher the terms of art included in the syllabi. Being unfamiliar with discipline-specific terms can cause confusion and a lack of engagement. This is most noticeable in the terminology used in course descriptions as well as assignment names and descriptions. Without clear

language and clearly defined expectations, students experience a great deal of unnecessary stress and may fail to make connections between concepts and practice.

In some cases, the course description appears to be written to a specific audience that is clearly not the student. One school (A) uses the course description as a place to talk about how the outcomes of this course have been established by faculty, admin, and a board of trustees, and how this course guarantees that students achieve necessary goals, without ever actually giving the student an understanding of tangible goals. This description tells us nothing about the course, other than the fact that they (those in charge) are proud of it. Another school (R1) seems focused on sharing the word count and length of assignments, as well as information on what credit students can receive for certain courses. Different schools outline different goals for the service course, with some schools using the course description as a checklist of assignments and grade distributions, and others pointing toward how this course will translate into the work students do after graduation. In these types of descriptions, no connection is made between what the student will get out of the course and how they will achieve those goals in the course.

As noted previously, many institutions require a collaborative assignment. Instructors often used vague descriptions of collaboration. For example, an instructor at an M1 described the group project by noting that students "will work individually and in teams," without any further description. This makes it hard for students to understand what work will be done individually and what work should be done in teams. Another M1 simply stated that the collaboration assignment is a university requirement. Failing to explain the value of collaboration or the ways collaboration will be practiced in the course can potentially discourage the student from developing a deliberative approach to collaborative work as a skill they can use in other contexts and present the assignment as another item to fulfill on a checklist.

Another example of clarity in language is the oft-seen phrase, "This assignment is pretty straightforward." The assumption that the assignment is already clear or simple minimizes the work students do as they learn and limits individual students' learning processes. It also discourages students from asking for more clarification or explanation from the instructor. Writing an assignment description that clearly outlines goals and the steps to achieve those goals will empower students to engage with the learning process rather than assuming students will understand the assignment from the title and a one-sentence description.

Additionally, there was a pattern of broad statements. For example, one school (M2) explains that the course talks about rhetorical theory needed for effective documents in

professional contexts, without any further detail. Statements made by others (R3) point out that technical writing happens in an organizational context but then state that the goal of smaller tasks is to teach students how to produce one larger project. From a student perspective, the connections between the daily assignments and the broader concepts of the field are missing.

There are many examples of terminology used without a definition or explanation of that terminology. For example, the phrase "hands-on" was widely used without explaining what that actually meant. We can see where "hands-on" is used as an identifier to mean *not a lecture course*, but it's also a term that many students may not understand in the context of a writing course. Closely related are terms that are used to describe the type of writing done in the service course: transactional, instrumental, applied, and real. As faculty, we understand why and how these terms may appear in a syllabus, but we agree that terms need to be defined. We cannot assume students know what certain terms mean in relation to writing. In particular, the use of "real" can be problematic because it assumes other types of writing that students have done (or will do) are less "real" or important than what the service course will be doing. The term implies that the world they currently write in is *not* real. There is an overwhelming trend to talk about these courses as though they are the first instance of "real" writing for students, but there is no definition of what is real or how the material or assignments relate back to the "real" world.

In addition to terminology, language that discusses concrete tasks is especially important. As the data suggests, many syllabi include language that does not explicitly give an indication of what the students are going to do or how they will reach a larger end goal. For example, one school (A) explains that the class will "teac[h] you to write in ways that will get you a job, good grades on four-year college papers, admission to an important program, approval of a project you conceived, or other real-world rewards." This school also warns students that they may be "overworked, frustrated, and possibly angry because it will turn [their] long-held beliefs about writing upside down." This kind of statement asks students to make a huge, ostensibly uncomfortable jump between the general overview of the course, and what they might be required to do. There is a significant end-result promise, without looking at how each task gets us to that goal beyond stating that the tasks will be difficult or frustrating.

We offer these examples to illustrate that additional care and attention need to be paid to the language used in the syllabus and assignment descriptions. Many students read these materials and yearn for more clarity about what the course entails and why the material matters to their educational goals. Using clear and transparent language that is meaningful

to students is definitely something that is within the power of each instructor teaching the service course.

Focus on Assignment Descriptions

Writing assignment descriptions that focus on building skills allows students to understand why they are doing those assignments and helps faculty to create a logical progression within the course. Assignment descriptions manifest a throughline that transparently communicates the goals of an assignment, its relationship to other assignments, and the goals of the course. Research from the field of education has shown that clear assignments that are connected to learning goals help enhance the success of all students, but especially the success of first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented college students at statistically significant levels (with a medium-to-large sized magnitude of effect for underserved students) (Winkelmes et al., 2016). The syllabus introduces the student to the course as a whole. Thus, the syllabus represents an opportunity to show students not only what they will learn, but how they will learn it. Assignment descriptions should encourage students to engage with the material and explicitly communicate how their work will apply what they are learning. The assignment descriptions from this study suggest that TPC is not fully leveraging the opportunity afforded in the syllabus to make the important connection between outcomes and assignments. The following examples illustrate trends in the assignment descriptions we found in the syllabi.

> You will be responsible for an individual project and the written components of it (a proposal; a progress report; a data report; a recommendation; and a PowerPoint presentation). It's important that you find a topic you find relevant and interesting. The topic may relate directly or indirectly to your current job or future career or education plans. The topic must be approved by me. This type of project is called: A Comparative Feasibility Research Study. (M1)

Despite a discussion of the importance of topic selection, this description does not connect genre-based deliverables to a rhetorical context or exigence. Further, by stating that the topic must be approved by the instructor in order for the student to proceed, the instructor situates the work within the classroom, which both limits its meaning to the student and its relevance to a broader context.

> Email Etiquette Memorandum

> You will write and revise a memorandum announcing a new "E-mail Etiquette" policy at your workplace. This assignment is worth 10% of your grade; in addition to earning points for writing the 250-500 word memorandum, you will also earn points for participating in a group workshop. More specific guidelines will be posted in the assignments section of this course. (M1)

This description provides details about assessment, but little information on how this assignment achieves the goals of the course or helps students learn. While the description states that more information will be given, it is important to consider that the syllabus represents an opportunity to situate the major assignments within the broader context of the course as a whole. Making connections between assignments and between assignments and outcomes allows students to see how their work facilitates learning.

> Progress Report
>
> As a team, you will write a progress report regarding the recommendation assignment. The progress report will be in the form of an internal memorandum addressed to the course instructor. The progress report must include an introduction that clearly identifies the project scope and summarizes accomplishments and problems, if any. The report must also accurately and concisely indicate work completed, work remaining, as well as both estimated time and actual time spent in clearly identified and separate sections. Finally, the conclusion will report progress as positively as possible without minimizing problems encountered. The final version should be accompanied by a completed progress report planning guide. (M1)

This highly prescriptive approach to genre removes context and rhetorical exigence from the assignment. In so doing, the act of creating this type of report becomes an exercise in following rules, rather than a discovery of the type of information that might be necessary in a progress report and how to structure the information so it is useful to readers. As such, it is unclear to students why they should do this work or what they are getting out of it beyond a grade. When confronting the progress report in the workplace, students' knowledge of the genre is one of format. An assignment description in the syllabus does its best work by showing students the connection between what they are doing and why it matters.

The double-bind of the service course is the aim of providing insights into workplace communication genres and activities while still being constrained by the learning

environment. The service course classroom cannot and should not model a workplace. As Melonçon (2018) notes, teaching genres must not overshadow the context and exigencies that produce these genres:

> Pedagogically the field has to turn its attention back to teaching rhetorical practices and exigencies—on the actions that produce things, not the resulting objects they produce. We need to teach proposing, not proposals; instructing, not instructions; reporting, not reports. Teaching de-contextualized forms is not helpful in preparing students for future careers that will use and incorporate generic forms in a multitude of ways. (p. 212)

The groundwork for this endeavor is laid in the syllabus. It is in this document that the student is introduced to what they will learn and how that learning will happen. To best serve students, assignment descriptions should explain clearly and transparently how the work the students will do connects to what they will learn and how the assignments facilitate that learning over the course of a term. To do this, assignment descriptions should communicate to the student that the conventions of a genre are informed by rhetorical elements such as purpose, audience, and organizational culture. Further, the assignment should make transparent the connection between what they will learn and how they will learn it. And finally, instructors should leverage the opportunity they have in the syllabus to show the students the course holistically, making connections between the major assignments in the course as they build toward the achievement of course goals.

Where does TPC go from here with Assignments?

Our research is not meant to be a prescriptive approach to what instructors should assign in the service course. Rather, we strive to "lead to continuous reflection and improvement in how we teach and how we administer programs" (Melonçon, Rosselot-Merritt, & St.Amant, 2020 p. 93) and to ensure that it "remains relevant and responsive to changes in the 21st-century academy and economy" (Read & Michaud, 2018, p. 230). With this iterative and reflective approach, this study provides TPC PAs and faculty with a field-wide snapshot of service course assignments being assigned in practice. We looked at syllabi to gain insight into which assignments instructors prioritized and how instructors put assignments together as they created a course designed to achieve course goals.

In examining assignment descriptions from 90 institutions, we coded 519 assignments. We were able to answer our research questions, as a group of assignments did emerge as the most common across the service course in the US. Those assignments were reports, proposals, job materials, instructions, presentations, and business correspondence. We

were also able to confirm that collaboration was highly prevalent as a component of assignments. The assignment data offers insights into what faculty feel are the goals of the service course, as well as goals for potential areas for improvement in teaching and learning, such as considering the number of assignments and improving terminology used in syllabi and assignment descriptions.

We encourage TPC PAs and faculty to consider their local contexts when using this data as part of their deliberations for updating the service course. Kate Navickas (2022) argues that there is a "pedagogical imperative to be more conscious of how the values we are committed to are signaled in assignment texts" (p. 40). Part of this pedagogical imperative related to assignments and their relationship to the service course is the pressing need for more empirical research.

Future research should consider gaining insights into how faculty approach assignment design and the values that underscore service course development. These conceptual ideas intersect with Griffith et al. (2024) when they ask important questions: "What is the purpose of the service course?" and "What can TPC PAs and faculty reasonably expect the course to do for students?" (p. 61). We have these same questions in light of the assignment data. In addition, using quasi-experimental design, TPC researchers could work to understand approaches to assignment terminology and descriptions that work best for students. Research could also work to examine how both students and instructors understand genre and delve into current pedagogical approaches for teaching genre.

No field-wide discussion of the service course can be completed without some mention of labor. We recognize that the vast majority of service courses are taught by contingent faculty, which means that the issue of time and labor takes on new meaning (Melonçon & England, 2011). In fact, the task of creating assignments is often not open to contingent faculty since many do not have the opportunity or the deep disciplinary knowledge to contribute to the creation of course content. As noted by Melonçon et al. (2020), acknowledging the complexity of contingency requires considering labor limitations as well as institutional limitations and support.

Studying assignments affords a meaningful examination of the intersection between practically "what we do" and "what it means." Getting students where we want them to be at the end of the course relies in large part on creating meaningful assignments that align with the goals of the course. Negotiating the practical need for skills-based learning and the conceptual ability to navigate an evolving workplace is fundamental to the work of assignment design within the service course. But an intensified attention to the assignment—what we are asking students to do—is central to what we are asking them to

learn. If TPC PAs and faculty hope that students will transfer skills and knowledge gained from an assignment in a future workplace or civic context, then we owe it to the students to pay more attention to the assignment.

References

Amare, Nicole, & Brammer, Charlotte. (2005). Perceptions of memo quality: A case study of engineering practitioners, professors, and students. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, *35*(2), 179–190. https://doi.org/10.2190/ML5N-EYG1-T3F7-RER6

Anderson, Paul; Anson, Chris M., Gonyea, Robert M.; & Paine, Charles. (2015). The contributions of writing to learning and development: Results from a large-scale multi-institutional study. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *50*(2), 199–235. https://doi.org/10.58680/rte201527602

Arduser, Lora. (2018). Specialized technical writing service courses as a program sustainability tool?. *Programmatic Perspectives 10*(1). 12–43.

Agbozo, G. Edzordzi; Dorpenyo, Isidore. K.; & Agboka, Godwin Y. (2024). A black fetus? Examining social justice in medical illustrations in technical and professional communication (TPC) pedagogical materials. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *34*(1), 67–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2024.2352113

Baake, Ken. (2007). Decision-making in a quasi-rational world: teaching technical, narratological, and rhetorical discourse in report writing tutorial. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *50*(2), 163–171. https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2007.897619

Balzotti, Jonathan, & Rawlins, Jacob D. (2016). Client-based pedagogy meets workplace simulation: Developing social processes in the Arisoph case study. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *59*(2), 140–152. https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2016.2561082

Baniya, Sweta; Edwards, Jessica; Sano-Franchini, Jennifer; & Walwema, Josephine. (2022). Revisiting SL in TPC through social justice and intercultural frameworks: Findings from survey research. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *65*(3), 353–369. https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2022.3177083

Berdanier, Catherine G.P.; McCall, Mary; & Fillenwarth, Gracemarie Mike. (2021). Characterizing disciplinarity and conventions in engineering resume profiles. *IEEE*

Transactions on Professional Communication, *64*(4), 390–406. https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2021.3110397

Blackburne, Brian D., & Nardone, Carroll Ferguson. (2018). Beyond grammar: Tracking perceptions of quality in student e-mail. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, *48*(4), 412–440. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047281617730532

Blythe, Stuart; Lauer, Claire; & Curran, Paul G. (2014). Professional and technical Communication in a Web 2.0 world. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *23*(4), 265–287. https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2014.941766

Boettger, Ryan K. (2014). Explicitly teaching five technical genres to English first-language adults in a multi-major technical writing course. *Journal of Writing Research*, *6*(1), 29–59.

Brewer, Edward C., & Holmes, Terence L. (2016). Better communication = better teams: A communication exercise to improve team performance. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *59*(3), 288–298. https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2016.2590018

Burnett, Rebecca E.; Cooper, L. Andrew; & Welhausen, Candace A. (2013). What do technical communicators need to know about collaboration? In Johnson-Eilola, Johndan, & Selber, Stuart A. (Eds). *Solving problems in technical communication*. (454-478). The University of Chicago Press.

Burnett, Rebecca E.; Frazee, Andy; Girard, Amanda K.; Hutter, Liz; Lawrence, Halcyon; & Menagarishvili, Olga. (2022). Sustainable collaboration: A co-taught, client-based course sequence integrating computer science and technical Communication. *Programmatic Perspectives. 13*(2). 11–51.

Burry, Justiss Wilder; Gubala, Carolyn; Griffith, Jessica; Zarlengo, Tanya; & Melonçon, Lisa. (2024). Creating assignments that put programmatic inclusion and diversity work into practice. In Falconer, Heather M. & McClary, LaKeisha. (Eds). *Inclusive STEM: Transforming disciplinary writing instruction for a socially just future*, (123–145). The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado.

Campbell, Kim Sydow; Boettger, Ryan K.; & Swisher, Val. (2024). Challenges in developing technical communication leaders in client-based, content strategy projects: A teaching case. *Technical Communication, 71*(3), https://doi.org/10.55177/tc832113

Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. (2021). 2021 Basic Classification. Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education®. https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/carnegie-classification/classification-methodology/2021-basic-classification/

Carnegie, Teena A.M. (2018). Sustaining service learning in the service course. *Programmatic Perspectives, 10*(1), 110–141.

Chong, Felicia. (2016). The pedagogy of usability: An analysis of technical communication textbooks, anthologies, and course syllabi and descriptions. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *25*(1), 12–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2016.1113073

Clegg, Geoffrey; Lauer, Jessica; Phelps, Johanna; & Melonçon, Lisa. (2021). Programmatic outcomes in undergraduate technical and professional communication programs. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *30*(1), 19–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2020.1774662

Coffelt, Tina; Cosgrove, Samantha; & Vance, Bremen. (2022). Measuring business and professional communication skills. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, *85*(2), 169-191. https://doi.org/10.1177/23294906221082235

Craig, Jennifer L.; Lerner, Neal; & Poe, Mya. (2008). Innovation across the curriculum: Three case studies in teaching science and engineering communication. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *51*(3), 280–301. https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2008.2001253

Cunningham, Don; & Stewart, Jill. (2011). Perceptions and practices: A survey of professional engineers and architects. *2011 IEEE International Professional Communication Conference*, Cincinnati, OH, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1109/IPCC.2011.6087194

DeJeu, Emily Barrow. (2024). Topoi of nonprofit proposal writing. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, *87*(1), 122–151. https://doi.org/10.1177/23294906231182616

Doan, Sara. (2019). Contradictory comments: Feedback in professional communication service courses. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *62*(2), 115–129. https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2019.2900899

Eggleston, Alyson Grace, & Rabb, Robert. J. (2019). Returning to an industry-informed technical writing and communication course design. *2019 ASEE Annual Conference & Exposition*. Tampa, Florida. 10.18260/1-2--33246

England, Peter S., & Brewer, Pam Estes. (2018). What do instructors need to know about teaching collaboration? In Bridgeford, Tracy. (Ed). *Teaching professional and technical communication: A practicum in a book*. (159-175). Utah State University Press.

Feng, Haiying; Song, Chengfang & Li, Lin. (2023). Moves and images: A multimodal genre analysis of web-based crowdfunding proposals. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *37*(4), 311–346. https://doi.org/10.1177/10506519231179959

Fillenwarth, Gracemarie Mike; McCall, Mary, & Berdanier, Catherine. (2018). Quantification of engineering disciplinary discourse in résumés: A novel genre analysis with teaching implications. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *61*(1), 48–64. https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2017.2747338

Faris, Michael J., & Wilson, Greg. (2022). Making technical communication as a field: A co-citation network analysis of graduate-level syllabi. In Schreiber, Joanna, & Lisa Melonçon (Eds.) *Assembling critical components: A framework for sustaining technical and professional communication*. The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado. https://doi.org/10.37514/TPC-B.2022.1381

Francis, Ann Marie. (2018). A survey of assignment requirements in service technical and professional communication classes. *Programmatic Perspectives*. *10*(1). 44-76.

Geisler, Cheryl, & Swarts, Jason. (2019). *Coding streams of language*. The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado.

Getto, Guiseppe; Franklin, Nathan; & Ruszkiewicz, Sheryl. (2014). Networked rhetoric: iFixit and the social impact of knowledge work. *Technical Communication, 61*(3), 185–201.

Griffith, Jessica; Zarlengo, Tanya, & Melonçon, Lisa. (2024). A field wide snapshot of student learning outcomes in the technical and professional communication service course. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, *54*(1), 46–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/00472816221134535

Hattie, John, & Timperley, Helen. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, *77*(1), 81–112. https://doi.org/10.3102/003465430298487

Hesse, Douglas. (2012). Writing program research: Three analytic axes. In Lee Nickoson & Mary P. Sheridan (Eds.), *Writing studies research in practice: Methods and methodologies* (pp. 140-157). Southern Illinois University Press.

Hovde, Marjorie Rush. (2022). Procedural knowledge and discourse in technical communication: Easy as 1, 2, 3? In Schreiber, Joanna & Melonçon, Lisa (Eds). *Assembling critical components: A framework for sustaining technical and professional communication*.

Huber, Mary Taylor. (2006). Disciplines, pedagogy, and inquiry-based learning about teaching. *New Directions for Teaching & Learning*, *107*, 63-72. https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.246

Johnson-Eilola, Johndan, & Selber, Stuart A. (2020). Strange days: Creating flexible pedagogies for technical communication. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 35*(1), 154–159. https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651920959189

Jones, A. A., & Freeman, T. E. (2003). Imitation, copying, and the use of models: report writing in an introductory physics course. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *46*(3), 168–184. https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2003.816790

Kellogg, Ronald T., & Whiteford, Alison P. (2009). Training advanced writing skills: The case for deliberate practice. *Educational Psychologist*, *44*(4), 250–266. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520903213600

Kim, Dave, & Olson, Wendy M. (2020). Using a transfer-focused writing pedagogy to improve undergraduates' lab report writing in gateway engineering laboratory courses. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *63*(1), 64–84. https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2019.2961009

Kramer-Simpson, Elisabeth; Newmark, Julianne; & Ford, Julie, Dyke. (2015). Learning beyond the classroom and textbook: Client projects' role in helping students transition from school to work," in *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, 58*(1), 106–122. doi: 10.1109/TPC.2015.2423352.

Lawrence, Heidi Y.; Lussos, Rachael G.; & Clark, Jessica. A. (2019). Rhetorics of proposal writing: Lessons for pedagogy in research and real-world practice. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, *49*(1), 33–50. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047281617743016

Litterio, Lisa M. (2018). Contract grading in the technical writing classroom: Blending community-based assessment and self-assessment. *Assessing Writing, 38,* 1–9. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2018.06.002

Matheson, Breeanne, & Petersen, Emily January. (2020). Engaging US students in culturally aware content creation and interactive technology design through service learning. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, 63*(2), 188–200. doi: 10.1109/TPC.2020.2982253.

Maxwell, Joseph. (1997). Designing a Qualitative Study. In Bickman, Leonard & Rog, Debra J. (Ed). *The SAGE handbook of applied social research methods*. (214–253).

Melonçon, Lisa. (2017). Contingent faculty, online writing Instruction, and professional development in technical and professional communication. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *26*(3), 256–272. https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2017.1339489

Melonçon, Lisa. (2018). Critical postscript: On the future of the service course in technical and professional communication. *Programmatic Perspectives, 10*(1), 202-230. https://tek-ritr.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/08-Meloncon-Postscript-PP-10-Spring-2018-final.pdf

Melonçon, Lisa. (2019). A field-wide view of undergraduate and graduate editing courses in technical and professional communication programs. In Flanagan, Suzan & Albers, Michael. (Eds.) *Editing in the modern classroom*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351132756

Melonçon, Lisa; Griffith, Jessica, Gubala, Carolyn; & Zarlengo, Tanya. (2024). Back to the basics: Uncovering the rhetoric student learning outcome. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, *87*(1), 152–176. https://doi.org/10.1177/23294906231213631

Melonçon, Lisa; Mechenbier, Mahli Xuan; & Wilson, Laura. (2020). Introduction to 'A national snapshot of the material working conditions of contingent faculty in composition and technical and professional communication.' *Academic Labor: Research and Artistry*. *4*(1). 6–26.

Melonçon, Lisa, Rosselot-Merritt, Jeremy, & St.Amant, Kirk. (2020). A field-wide metasynthesis of pedagogical research in technical and professional communication. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, *50*(1), 91–118. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047281619853258

Melonçon, Lisa, & England, Peter. (2011). The current status of contingent faculty in technical and professional communication. *College English*, *73*(4), 396–408. https://doi.org/10.58680/ce201113516

Melonçon, Lisa, & Schreiber, Joanna. (2018). Advocating for sustainability: A report on and critique of the undergraduate capstone course. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *27*(4), 322–335. https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2018.1515407

Moshiri, Farrokh, & Cardon, Peter W. (2020). An updated and expanded nationwide study of business communication courses. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, *83*(4), 469–488. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329490620934043

Navickas, Kate. (2022). Feminist writing assignments: Enacting pedagogy through classroom genres. In Neaderhiser, S. E. (Ed). *Writing the classroom: Pedagogical documents as rhetorical genres.* (39–59). Utah State University Press.

Nelson-Burns, C. (2004). The Davis-Besse Nuclear Power Plant eroded reactor head: a case study. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *47*(4), 268–280. https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2004.837982

Newmark, Julianne, & Bartolotta, Joseph. (2021). Creating the 'through line' by engaging in industry certification standards in SLO redesign for a core curriculum technical writing course. In M.J. Klein (Ed.) *Effective teaching of technical communication: Theory, practice, and application* (147–165).

Nielsen, Danielle. (2016). Facilitating service learning in the online technical communication classroom. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication, 46*(2), 236–256. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047281616633600

Pigg, Stacey; De Haas, Rebecca; King, Ashley; Larsen, Jamie; Phelps, Christin; & Wagner, Elizabeth. (2022). Communication in the workplace: What can NC State students expect? D. o. E. Professional Writing Program, NC State University.

Popham, Susan L. (2008). As if good writing mattered: A rhetoric of pragmatism in health care business lettters. In Heifferson, Barbara & Brown, Stuart C. (Eds). *Rhetoric of healthcare: Essays toward a new disciplinary inquiry.* Hampton Press.

Randazzo, Chalice. (2016). Where do they go? Students' sources of résumé advice, and implications for critically reimagining the résumé assignment. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *25*(4), 278–297. https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2016.1221142

Read, Sarah, & Michaud, Michael. (2018). Hidden in plain sight: findings from a survey on the multi-major professional writing course. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *27*(3), 227–248. https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2018.1479590

Rieger, Katie; Lane, Christina; Lonelodge, Sarah; & Welker, Lydia. (2023). Contingent voices: An overview of a field-wide study and suggestions for support on three levels. *Programmatic Perspectives, 14*(1). 72–130.

Robles, Vincent D., & Baker, Matthew J. (2019). Using case-method pedagogy to facilitate audience awareness. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *62*(2), 192–207. https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2019.2893464

Rose, Emma J., & Turner, Heather N. (2025). Trust the process: A scalable model for UX pedagogy. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication, 55*(1), 3–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/00472816231210234

Saldaña, Johnny. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.

Schreiber, Joanna, & Melonçon, Lisa. (2019). Creating a continuous improvement model for sustaining programs in technical and professional communication. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, *49*(3), 252–278. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047281618759916

Schreiber, Joanna, & Melonçon, Lisa. (2026 [forthcoming]). A taxonomy of programmatic evaluation and research questions to guide TPC program administrators. In Williams, S. & Ilyasova, A. (Ed). *Where We Start: A Practical Guide to Technical Communication Program Administration*. Utah State University Press.

Schreiber, Joanna; Carrion, Melissa; & Lauer, Jessica. (2018a). Guest editors' introduction: Revisiting the service course to map out the future of the field. *Programmatic Perspectives, 10*(1), 1–11.

Schreiber, Joanna; Carrion, Melissa; & Lauer, Jessica. (2018b). Afterword: Service courses as an extension of technical and professional communication disciplinary identity. *Programmatic Perspectives, 10*(1), 231–242.

Scott, J. Blake. (2008). The practice of usability: Teaching user engagement through service-learning. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *17*(4), 381–412. https://doi.org/10.1080/10572250802324929

Shulman, Lee S. (2002). Forward. In Hutchings, Pat. (Ed). *Ethics of inquiry: Issues in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. (v-viii). The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Menlo Park, CA.

Smagorinsky, Peter. (2008). The method section as conceptual epicenter in constructing social science research reports. *Written Communication*, *25*(3), 389–411. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088308317815

Sonnenberg, Michelle; Gubala, Carolyn; Burry, Justiss; Griffith, Jessica; Zarlengo, Tanya; & Melonçon, Lisa. (2024). Implementing a continuous improvement model for assignment evaluation at the technical and professional communication program level. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, *54*(1), 24–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/00472816221124605

Southern, James W. (1951). Design that report!. *Journal of Chemical Education*, *28*(10), 519 https://doi.org/10.1021/ed028p519

St.Amant, Kirk. (2018). Contextualizing the technical communication service course: A research approach to reviewing, re-thinking, and revising the service course. *Programmatic Perspectives, 10*(1). 141–171.

Teddlie, Charles, & Yu, Fen. (2007). WITHDRAWN—Mixed methods sampling a typology with examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *1*(1), 77–100. https://doi.org/10.1177/2345678906292430

Tham, Jason. (2022). Instructional design pedagogy in technical and professional communication. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *32*(4), 327–346. https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2022.2130991

Winsor, Dorothy. (2003). *Writing power: Communication in an engineering center*. State University of New York Press.

Winkelmes, Mary-Ann; Bernacki, Matthew; Butler, Jeffrey; Zochowski, Michelle; Golanics, Jennifer; & Weavil, Kathryn Harriss. (2016). A teaching intervention that increases underserved college students' success. *Peer Review : Emerging Trends and Key Debates in Undergraduate Education*, *18*(1–2), 31–36.

van de Pol, Janneke; Volman, Monique; & Beishuizen, Jos. (2010). Scaffolding in teacher–student interaction: A decade of research. *Educational Psychology Review 22*, 271–296. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-010-9127-6

Zarlengo, Tanya. (2019). *No one wants to read what you write: A contextualized analysis of service course assignments*. [Doctoral Dissertation, University of South Florida].

Appendix A

Primary code	Description	Secondary codes
job	Combined for all documents related to a job search.	Type of document
instruct	Genre of instructions (based on the title or short description); may also be called documentation, process, or procedural. A document that prompts the user to act.	
report	Genre of report (based on the title or short description). Documents that use research to disseminate information or to solve a problem.	Type of report
proposal	Genre of proposal (based on the title or short description). Type of document that puts forward a plan for solving a problem.	
present	Genre of *oral* presentation (based on the title or short description).	
ethic	Any type of assignment where the assignment's goal is focused on the topic of ethics.	
visual	Any type of assignment where the assignment's goal is focused on visuals or design (e.g., any visual genre such as just graphics or a brochure and other assignments like our info design assignment would be coded with this code).	
DoD	A genre of technical definition and/or description. Use this code for either or both. Add secondary.	Definition, description or both

style	Any assignment (or cumulative series over a course of a term) focused on writing style such as grammar, re-writing sentences, active/passive verbs, etc.	
research	a stand alone assessed assignment that is clearly research; could include bibliographies or documents that summarize research (note: this is not used for translation assignments where students may be asked to re-write an academic article for a specific audience).	
analysis	More of an academic assignment that is analyzing rather than producing.	
biz_comm	Genres of business correspondence (based on the title or short description).	Memo, email, letter
exam	any type of exam	Mid, final, mid/final
port	any indication that a portfolio is a key part of the course	
misc	Miscellaneous assignment that fit no other category; use sparingly	Be specific with type assignment.
reflection	Anything where students are asked to reflect on learning or the things they've done	
	When the assignment noted it was done in collaboration	collab

Author Information

Kat Mavridou-Hernandez is a PhD student studying Rhetoric and Composition at the University of South Florida. Her research interests include digital rhetoric, the rhetoric of health and medicine, and technical and professional communication.

Jess Griffith is an Assistant Professor of English (Professional Writing) at Jacksonville State University. Her teaching and research focus on field-wide research related to curriculum and program evaluation within technical and professional communication.

Tanya Zarlengo is an Associate Professor of Instruction at the University of South Florida. Her research interests in the service course seek to uncover answers and gain insights that improve teaching and learning and offer strategies for administration of large programs.

Lisa Melonçon is a Professor in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Clemson University. Lisa has long term interest in programs in TPC both degree programs and the service course. She is widely published on programmatic and pedagogical issues in the field. You can learn more about Lisa at http://tek-ritr.com.