The Writing, Editing, and Publishing Major Concentration at the University of Northern Colorado

Jordan Smith

University of Northern Colorado

Marc C. Santos

University of Northern Colorado

Kevin Bomely

University of Northern Colorado

Abstract In this article, we describe the writing, editing, and publishing (WEP) major concentration in the Department of English at the University of Northern Colorado. The concentration was developed in 2021 in an effort to build a program that prioritizes vocational training for students while still maintaining a deep commitment to the humanities. Students in the program complete required coursework, which includes a three-course sequence of editing-related classes: ENG 216: *Grammar and Style*, which provides information on foundational language-level concepts editors need; ENG 327: *Copyediting*, which teaches students principles of language-level editing; and ENG 427: *Substantive Editing*, where students practice discourse-level editing through industry-related projects. We describe these courses in further detail, after which, Kevin (one of the authors of this paper) shares a narrative account of teaching the ENG 327 course. We then discuss how we manage artificial intelligence tools in the WEP major. The article concludes with a discussion of our commitment to inclusion, diversity, and community engagement.

Keywords course sequence, editing, program history, publishing, vocational preparation

Programmatic Perspectives, Fall 2025, 266-291, Contact Author: jordan.smith@unco.edu

This article details the writing, editing, and publishing (WEP) major[1] at the University of Northern Colorado (UNCO), an R2 university with just over 10,000 students. In its current iteration, the major features a strong curriculum in the writing and editing components. The focus of this article concerns the editing sequence at the heart of the major. As we continue to iterate, we aim to further develop the publishing component. In this article, we hope to help those developing a major in editing or, at the very least, a sequence of courses. We detail how Kevin and Jordan, two of the authors of this paper, have sequenced grammar, copyediting, and substantive editing across three courses. After this description of the three courses, Kevin shares a first-hand narrative of his experience teaching one of the editing courses.

We open with some institutional context and a brief narrative about the formation of the major and its learning objectives. We pay particular attention to the research that influenced the major's design: work from Eva Brumberger and Claire Lauer provided a scaffold for the interdisciplinary major we sought to build (Brumberger & Lauer, 2015; Lauer & Brumberger, 2019). Our major is an answer to the question: "How might we prepare students to be the multimodal, rhetorically savvy, responsive editors Brumberger and Lauer describe?" Carolyn Miller's (1979) framing of technical writing as a humanistic endeavor helped shape our theoretical commitment to inclusion, diversity, and community engagement. We were not simply aiming to produce workers but citizens with a deep commitment to social justice. Perhaps ironically, those values are more important than ever as we move into an uncertain future relationship with artificial intelligence (AI).

We close considering the place of AI and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in an editing major. While we each hold different opinions of AI, we recognize that vocational programs centered on writing or editing will have to provide students comprehensive instruction and experience with AI tools. Programs will need to embrace what Ethan Mollick (2024) termed the "human-computer interactive" (HCI) approach to AI proficiency. As to DEI, we believe it is essential to teach students the imaginative capacities necessary to productively encounter differences and work with other people. Such things make them not only better at crafting words, but also better at crafting a shared world.

Even with the spectre of AI, we believe our writing, editing, and publishing major provides students a strong career path. Job-market research has historically provided favorable

[1] Technically, our "major" is designated a concentration within the English major at our university for byzantine reasons. For the sake of convenience, we refer to this concentration as a "major" throughout this article.

predictions for writing-related jobs. At the time of this writing, the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook projects 4% growth for technical writers (*Technical Writers*, n.d.) and 5% growth for writers and authors (*Writers and Authors*, n.d.) between 2023 and 2033. The projected outlook for editors (defined as people who "plan, review, and revise content for publication") is projected to decline by 2% during the same time period (*Editors*, n.d.), though this prediction probably only reflects a decline in jobs solely or mostly focused on editing and not a decline in the amount of editing that people with all kinds of job titles will need to do. As we detail below, editing jobs in the 21st century are multifaceted and multimodal. We believe editing, as a proficiency, will be in high demand.

History of the Program

In this section, we present a brief history of the WEP major, including a discussion of institutional context under which the major was developed and the research that inspired its creation. We also share the courses included in the major and the learning outcomes for students.

Building a Major Around Jobs

Our WEP major was developed during austere times for our university; a budget crisis had led to a freeze on new programs. Planning for the major began late in the Spring 2020 semester; the major was submitted and approved late in the Spring 2021 semester. It was a busy year. We gained support for our major by tying it directly to an institutional emphasis on job preparation. Furthermore, as we share below, we explicitly tied the major's design to research on the job market, drawing particularly on Brumberger and Lauer (2015), Lauer and Brumberger (2019), and the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Outlook Handbooks for both writers and editors. Additionally, we conducted research on other professional writing majors in our region and demonstrated that none specialized in writing, editing, and publishing. Our administration was particularly impressed that our program would be the first of its kind in Colorado.

Institutional Context

In Spring 2018, our department hired six full-time instructors (on 3/4 teaching loads with research expectations) and one full-time lecturer to support the first-year writing (FYW) program. Several instructors brought additional expertise: Yavanna Brownlee in digital humanities and Indigenous rhetorics, Phillip Goodwin in public rhetorics, and Lauren Brentnell in community engagement and editing. Initially, they were limited to teaching

mostly FYW. In Fall 2020, Lauren Brentnell was promoted to a tenure-track assistant professor, expanding teaching options and prompting department chair Andreas Mueller to propose developing a major. Lauren's editing focus, combined with Marc's (one of the authors of this paper) strengths in multimodal technology and nonprofit writing, laid the groundwork for a new major supported by other faculty expertise.

At the time of development, our department had a healthy professional and creative writing minor. An anonymous poll of those students, conducted in the Fall of 2020, found that 82% of students surveyed indicated that they would have chosen our proposed WEP major over their current major were it available when they arrived at UNCO (54 minors surveyed, 33 respondents, 42% strongly agreed, 40% agreed). Sixty-six percent of those students were English liberal arts majors, but the other 33% of students came from a wide range of majors, including mathematics, studio art, theater, journalism, and economics. Our department was satisfied that we could develop this major and attract a diverse population of students and that we wouldn't be poaching students exclusively from our literature program.

However, we lacked the faculty required to sustain a 42-credit major. When an early version of the program with six new courses was presented to the dean, we were told quite directly to "be less ambitious." Our proposal would have to require "zero new resources." And so, we became interdisciplinary by necessity as much as by design, incorporating existing courses from Journalism and Media Studies (social media), Business (marketing), and the Arts (visual production). Thankfully, our research into the job market, detailed in the next section, emphasized the importance of such interdisciplinarity.

The program has persisted as it has undergone several personnel changes since it was developed. Lauren Brentnell departed UNCO in the Spring of 2023, right after we debuted the major. In their absence, Kevin, a lecturer in the department with limited editing experience, began the Professional Sequence in Editing program at UC Berkeley Extension. Four months later, Kevin revised and taught our 300-level editing course. He recounts this experience further below. In the 2023–2024 academic year, after another faculty departure, we secured a tenure-track line, and Jordan came aboard. He and Kevin began planning a multicourse editing sequence that includes a 200-level grammar course, a 300-level copyediting course, and a 400-level substantive editing course. We describe this three-course sequence in detail later in this article.

Research that Influenced the Formation of the WEP Major

When Marc was hired in the Fall of 2016, he was tasked with developing a series of professionalization courses. As he explored the complexity of today's job market for writers, he designed a course to help students navigate it: ENG 301: *Writing as a Job*. That course draws on Brumberger and Lauer (2015), who surveyed just under 1,000 different technical communication job advertisements to identify the essential professional, technical, social, and personal competencies and characteristics employers seek. They found that while genre knowledge remained essential, technical writers were increasingly called upon to create multimodal content and to have experience with marketing, branding, visual communication, and social media (pp. 235–237).

In *Writing as a Job*, students spend the first six weeks re-creating Brumberger and Lauer's (2015) research by collectively coding around 200 job ads to produce data for a professional report. Beyond teaching them how to do collaborative qualitative research, the project familiarizes them with the rhetorical nuances of job advertisements while also showing them a wide range of potential career paths. The report itself, written individually, targets multiple audiences: high school students, their parents, writing minors, and university administrators. Students are tasked with figuring out how our WEP major, and other university resources, can help them gain the skills that most frequently appear in those job advertisements, further familiarizing them with university resources and opportunities. Every semester, the class partners with a nonprofit organization for six weeks. Students break into teams and spend this time working on myriad organizational projects: grant research, editing, marketing and/or media kits, social media content planning and generation, web UX/UI testing, and/or graphic design. The final four weeks of the class are dedicated to producing résumés and cover letters that incorporate the knowledge and experience they gained through the job research and community engagement project.

Over the years, Marc has coded somewhere around 800 job ads with students and the findings of that work continue to support Brumberger and Lauer's (2015) conclusions: Writing and editing jobs increasingly require experience with multimodal technologies, social media, and marketing. These findings are reflected in our courses and learning objectives, as shown below.

Lauer and Brumberger (2019) also had a profound impact on the development of the major. After more than a hundred hours shadowing nine different writers and editors, Lauer and Brumberger conclude that:

> Advances in social media and other composing technologies and distribution channels have engendered a workplace in which writers are not tasked with "writing" as it is typically taught in the classroom—where students are asked to produce complete documents through a process that begins with invention and drafting and extends through revision and delivery. Rather, our study suggests that many writers actually act as multimodal editors—people who work with myriad modes of content—often encountered *in medias res* after the content has been originated by coworkers or consultants. Multimodal editors are responsible for modifying, adapting, designing, editing, selecting, and constructing content in ways that are dispersed, nonlinear, collaborative, and responsive. We refer to this as "multimodal editing," because it often involves shaping preexisting content that has been sourced from a variety of people and modes and distributed across a range of channels and uses. Multimodal editing requires rhetorical agility and adaptability. Based on our research, we argue that multimodal editing has, in many ways, become the writing of the responsive workplace. (p. 637)

When we were designing the major, we thought explicitly about the wide range of jobs the nine writers and editors shadowed by Lauer and Brumberger held. We thought about the wide range of jobs that students in ENG 301: *Writing as a Job* find in the job market research project. A program in writing and editing has to introduce students to social media strategy and content marketing as well as more traditional roles like technical editing and public communications for nonprofit organizations. Our major aims are to familiarize students with this range of jobs and to provide them with the option of specializing in one through interdisciplinary electives, course substitutions, extracurricular activities, and internships. Students are advised directly by major faculty at UNCO; faculty are able to personalize students' plans of study based on their creative interests and vocational objectives.

Major Requirements and Courses

Below is a quick sketch of the WEP major's sections and the courses we developed within them. Because our major is technically a concentration, we are required by the university to share four classes with our language, culture, and creativity major (itself an innovative reimagination of the traditional literature major that incorporates cultural studies and creative writing courses).

Required Courses (Students take all of these courses)

- ENG 195: *Introduction to the Discipline of English*

- ENG 220: *Writing, Transformation, and Change*
- ENG 301: *Writing as a Job*
- ENG 218: *Linguistics or* ENG 219: *Language and Society*

Editing and Publishing (Students select three courses)

- ENG 216: *Grammar and Style*
- ENG 327: *Copyediting*
- ENG 328: *Professional Writing and Document Design*
- ENG 427: *Substantive Editing*
- JMS 460: *Media Management*

Inclusivity, Diversity, and Community Engagement (Students select two courses)

- ENG 302: *Cultures, Community, and Civic Advocacy*
- ENG 319: *Rhetorical Theory*
- HUM 200: *Cultural Rhetorics*

Writing and Editing Electives (Students select three courses)

- JMS 215: *Social Media Storytelling*
- ENG 227: *Technical Writing*
- ART 237: *Introduction to Digital Media*
- ENG 229: *Digital Video Production*
- ENG 323: *Advanced Argument*
- HUM 320: *Digital Humanities*
- JMS 350: *News Editing*
- BAMK 360: *Marketing*

Capstone Experiences (Students select two courses)

- ENG 420: *Special Topics in Creative and Professional Writing Seminar*
- ENG 429: *Rhetoric and Technology*
- ENG 492: *Writing Internship*
- ENG 495: *Advanced Cultural Studies*
- BAMK 478: *Social Media Marketing*

Adopting Programmatic Learning Outcomes

The WEP major was built around six primary learning outcomes, listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Learning Outcomes for UNCO's WEP Major

Learning Outcome Topic	Learning Outcome Description
Communication	Research, compose, and revise communications in a variety of professional, public, and academic genres
Diversity	Think critically and engage questions about cultural, racial, economic, political, gender, and sexual differences, ethics, and intersections
Multimodality	Write and communicate through various modes, media, technologies, and platforms; comprehend and analyze texts in various modes and media
Research	Think critically while reading, analyzing, and conducting research in a variety of venues, including writing to identify needs and/or address problems with creative, evidence-based responses
Theory	Demonstrate understanding of rhetorical theory and core rhetorical concepts, drawing upon classical, postmodern, feminist, queer, and multicultural writers; analyze contemporary problems and contexts using these theories
Engagement	Experience working in publishing, non-profit, civic, and community organizational contexts; engagement work will address audience, rhetorical situational and cultural context, exigence, and/or ethical problem-solving

Our interest in multimodality can be tied to the research detailed in the previous section. Other outcomes, specifically our investments in diversity and theory come from our shared commitment to social justice. We believe Miller (1979) clearly articulates the profound humanistic value of a professional writing program:

> To write, to engage in any communication, is to participate in a community; to write well is to understand the conditions of one's own participation—the concepts, values, traditions and style which permit identification with that community and determine the success or failure of communication. Our teaching of writing should present mechanical rules and skills against a broader understanding of why and how to adjust or violate the rules, of the social implications of the roles a writer casts for himself or herself and for the reader, and of the ethical repercussions of one's words. (p. 617)

Amen. We believe the learning outcomes listed in Table 1 reflect Miller's (1979) foundational belief that a vocational writing major can have profound humanistic value if we build the kind of "communalist" writing courses for which she advocates: courses that approach writing and editing as "more than the inculcation of a set of skills" but rather as "enculturation" (p. 617). Below, we discuss further why we believe inclusion, diversity, and community engagement are requisite to developing the humanistic writers (and we add editors here as well) Miller describes. In short, editors require creative capacity and a commitment to others if they are to anticipate and address how a diverse set of audiences might respond to the same set of words. But before that discussion, we describe the scaffolded editing sequence we have built into our program, which we believe also helps students "understand the conditions of [their] own participation" (Miller, 1979, p. 617) in an editing community.

The Scaffolded Editing Sequence

As we have continued to refine the WEP program, we have done so with an eye toward building more editing curriculum for students. We do this (1) in response to findings like Shakked Noy and Whitney Zhang (2023), who found professional writers spend more time editing content when they write using AI tools, and (2) because students want more editing curriculum in the program. In a recent survey we conducted of WEP majors, nearly half of the students who provided substantive answers to our question about changes they would like to see implemented in the program mentioned that they would like to see more curriculum focused on editing. The following comment from a student is a clear example of one such request:

> I've found myself wanting more editing-focused courses in the program. The editing class that I have taken was more of a crash course in copyediting and felt a lot less like an introduction to print publication and what that might actually look like. I haven't had many chances to work on or learn about developmental editing in print publication, and I would like a course that focuses on that.

Only 0.048% of universities in English-speaking countries offer programs (including majors, minors, and certificates) in Editing and Publishing (Baker et al., 2024). It is therefore rare for students in English or professional communication programs to take more than a single editing course. Students in our WEP major are required to take a three-course sequence of editing-related courses. First, ENG 216: *Grammar and Style* introduces them to the fundamentals of grammar and style. This course is followed by two editing-intensive courses: one focused on copyediting and another focused on substantive

editing. Being able to offer two separate editing-intensive courses gives students the foundational knowledge they need to be effective editors. Initially, the department offered a course in editing for print publication and another course for digital editing. At the time, these courses served students well, but changing technologies and work environments have necessitated a change. In the Fall of 2024, Kevin and Jordan proposed a revision to the ENG 327: *Copyediting* and ENG 427: *Substantive Editing* courses. We reframed both courses so that instead of focusing on the medium of the products (print and digital texts), we focused on the type of editing students will be doing in each course (copyediting vs. substantive). We provide a brief description of all three courses in Table 2.

As described in Table 2, the three-course editing sequence prepares students for the kinds of multimodal and community-engaged work they will encounter in professional settings. Restructuring the two editing courses so that they focus on the different types of work editors do conforms with long-held descriptions of editing as a task composed of different stages. Joy Burrough-Boenisch (2013) notes that "editing is actually a continuum with no sharply delimited editing activities" (p. 144). In spite of this, several attempts have been made to operationalize editing into discrete activities. Many readers of this journal will be familiar with Robert Van Buren and Mary Fran Buehler's (1980) popular "levels of edit" concept. In this framework, the editing process is broken down into nine types of edit. In a later article, Mary Fran Buehler (1981) noted that these nine types of edit may be combined in various ways to facilitate the use of more standard terminology like "copy editing" (p. 14). Popular technical editing textbooks also commonly break the editing process into discrete steps.[2] Revising our course sequence according to the editing task brings our curriculum into alignment with established conceptions of editing and, we feel, will better help our students understand the many different ways that editing plays a role in writing, publishing, and content-creation workflows.

[2] For example, Carolyn D. Rude and Angela Eaton (2011) devote separate sections of their book to copyediting (section III) and comprehensive editing (section IV). The copyediting section includes chapters on editing for consistency, mechanics such as spelling and grammar, and proofreading. The comprehensive section includes chapters on style, organization, and visual design. Donald Cunningham, Edward Malone, and Joyce Rothschild's (2020) textbook uses a slightly different organizational structure. Chapters 4–11 focus on substantive concepts like editing for organization, navigation, and completeness, while Chapters 12–17 focus on copyediting concepts, primarily editing for grammar and punctuation. Kathryn Riley and others (2015) indicate a difference between the two types of editing more subtly: Chapters that focus on substantive editing begin with the word *revising* (e.g., "Revising for cohesion," "Revising for conciseness"). Chapters that focus on copyediting begin with the word *editing* (e.g., "Editing punctuation," "Editing modifiers").

Table 2: Three-Course Scaffolded Editing Sequence

Course	Description
ENG 216: *Grammar and Style*	Students are introduced to the basics of grammar and mechanics through a rhetorical lens. Using Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers's *A Writer's Reference* (10th ed.), the course has been broken into four units: parts of speech, punctuation, sentence structure, and style. At the time of writing, this course has not been taught as a part of the editing sequence; however, when it is launched, students will be encouraged to begin thinking of each "rule" taught in the class as a rhetorical choice—similar to how an editor will approach a manuscript. In other words, when does it make sense for a writer to break this rule? Throughout the course, students will begin to compile a grammar log of essential rules, tips, or references they encounter that they think will be beneficial to have on hand. The expectation is that this grammar log will expand and become a tool as students begin copyediting and beyond.
ENG 327: *Copyediting*	Students are introduced to copyediting through an academic and creative lens. Copyediting, in the way we approach it in this course, involves making language-level changes to a text so that it is consistent with the guidelines of a given style manual or style guide. We use the *Chicago Manual of Style* (18th ed.) as our primary style guide, and we use Amy Einsohn and Marilyn Schwartz's *The Copyeditor's Handbook* (4th ed.) as well. Students focus on copyediting while understanding editing as a job and best practices for on-screen editing, utilizing resources, and communicating with clients through two larger editing assignments—a chapter excerpt and a research proposal—and a series of editing exercises provided by Einsohn and Schwartz in *The Copyeditor's Workbook*. Kevin provides a more detailed description of this course in his narrative below.
ENG 427: *Substantive Editing*	Students will learn and practice editing at the substantive level. Substantive editing (sometimes called "developmental editing" or "comprehensive editing") focuses on discourse-level concerns, such a text's organization, usability, completeness, accuracy, and style. Jordan is currently developing the course, which will be offered for the first time in spring 2026. In the course, students will work in groups to edit an excerpt of a scholarly or popular edition, with specific projects changing from semester to semester. We have begun working with Jeri Kraver, emerita professor at UNCO and editor of *The CEA Critic*, to arrange for students to edit submissions for the journal. We also plan to build relationships with local nonprofits, businesses, and publishers to provide more opportunities for hands-on experience. Through this project-based course, students gain audience awareness, skills in editor–author relationships, and ties to a community that we hope will be beneficial to them after they graduate.

We aim to help students see that the editing process is multifaceted and not something that can be done in a single "pass." As Burrough-Boenisch (2013) wrote, an editor "should

not give an author the impression that copy-editing [sic] and substantive editing can be done simultaneously, because the two activities require a different approach and entail different sorts of concentration on the task" (p. 150). In addition, we aim to help students overcome what Buehler (1981) described as the misconception of "an editor as someone who spends the day bent quietly over a manuscript" (p. 12). Buehler's statement is now more than 40 years old, but we suspect the misconception remains. For students to be successful as editors today, they must learn that editing today is multimodal (refer to Brumberger & Lauer, 2015; Lauer & Brumberger, 2019; Lang & Palmer, 2017) and that editorial opportunities are available in places they might not think to look. To this end, one of the goals of our editing courses is to give students opportunities to hear from practicing professionals in the editing and publishing world. Though at the time of this writing (fall 2025), ENG 427: *Substantive Editing* has not yet been taught, Jordan is currently developing the course. As part of this preparation, he has met with a local publisher who is eager to provide a guest lecture for students to explain the publishing work she does. She has also offered to connect Jordan with the editor she works with on book projects. Helping students make connections with practicing professionals in the editing and publishing world—particularly with those in the Northern Colorado area, where most of our students are from—will, we hope, expand their sense of the kinds of opportunities available to students interested in editing.

In both courses, we adopt the "situational approach" to editing that Buehler (1980/2003) described in 1980 and that others have echoed since then (e.g., Connatser, 2004; Smith, 2023). This view aligns with Miller's (1979) call, mentioned above, for technical and professional communication to hold tight to its humanistic roots. In a situational approach to editing, editors acknowledge the flexibility they have to make decisions based on the rhetorical situation—the audience, exigencies, and constraints (Bitzer, 2010)—of the editing task, even if such decisions violate prescriptive rules of Standard English or guidelines in a style manual. Jordan Smith (2023) argues that adopting a rhetorical approach to editing can help editors promote equity and fairness (pp. 196–200), and Angela Eaton and others (2008) found that in some cases, authors prefer to work with editors who took a more flexible approach to their work (p. 126). Rather than teaching students to mechanically follow prescriptive usage rules or rigidly adhere to guidance in a style manual, we aim to help students understand these rules and guidelines in a way that allows them to think critically about when and when not to follow them.

Kevin's Experience: Learning About Editing

In this section, Kevin provides a first-person narrative describing his experience teaching ENG 327: *Copyediting* and the ways that he has structured his pedagogy to meet the humanistic and rhetorical aims outlined above. Because ENG 427: *Substantive Editing* has not yet been offered, we cannot provide a complementary narrative for it, but we are committed to teaching the course with the same foundational principles.

Spring 2023–Fall 2024: Preparing to Teach Copyediting

When Lauren announced their departure from UNCO at the end of Spring 2023, I was wrapping up my first year of teaching UNCO's first-year writing courses. Our department chair approached me and asked if I was interested in taking over Lauren's editing courses. I did not know much, if anything, about editing as a discipline or a career outside of basic grammar checks and revision processes that I both teach and employ. But I was eager to design and teach such a unique class—how many instructors receive that kind of opportunity their first year out of grad school? So, I readily agreed and began to prepare for my first class in spring 2024.

I spent the next year learning about copyediting and reflecting on how I could tie my concentrations and passions—first-year writing and creative writing—into such a technical field. I began taking courses to become a certified copyeditor with UC Berkeley Extension, and I spent time exploring our previous course sequence to get an understanding of how previous instructors approached this discipline. One key learning outcome the previous instructor focused on is "the relationships editors create with authors and the world" (Lauren Brentnell, 2023). This aligned not only with the university's commitment to diversity and inclusion but also with Brumberger and Lauer's (2015) assertion that editors in today's world will be expected to engage in many roles and modes. Similar to Miller's (1979) assertions about teaching ways to "adjust or violate" standard writing rules, I have always held firm in the belief that there is no right or wrong way to approach writing. However, I wasn't sure how well this belief would translate to a field that I, at the time, believed was about checking for grammar errors and correcting each one. It is possible that I held some of the misconceptions mentioned above.

Spring 2024: Copyediting, the First Run

During the first few weeks of spring 2024, I was facing a confidence crisis in my classroom. I found myself responding to questions with answers like, "Well it depends on the situation," while flipping furiously through *The Chicago Manual of Style* and *The*

Copyeditor's Handbook—my selected textbook for the course—and praying that the "right" answer was somewhere in there. Even though all of my course preparation and research had shown me that editing is about rhetorical decisions more so than "correctness," I felt like a poor teacher for not having firm answers for questions. A conversation with a good friend who works in educational editing helped ease my worries. "The answer almost always does depend on the situation," my friend assured me. "It's about thinking through each unique situation and knowing where to look for confirmation" (Morgan, personal communication). This realization struck home for me and assured me that my pedagogy and the department's focus on diverse voices belonged in my copyediting classroom.

Emboldened with this new idea, our class discussions came alive. I no longer saw student questions as unanswerable challenges. Instead, we discussed potential scenarios, and I would encourage students to think about other ways these situations could be approached. Because many of my students were not singularly focused on becoming editors, I would encourage them to think of scenarios in their own interests or disciplines and how this editing situation could apply there. For example, how might a writing center tutor find the balance between line editing for grammar and helping their peers see and understand the mistake they've made? How might a musician draw on the importance of editing for correlating parts when reviewing lyrics or sheet music? Like Marc's *Writing as a Job* class discussed above, I wanted to ensure that my class prepared students for not one job but many.

This method of open-ended discussion was most effectively displayed in our discussion of editing for problematic language. Unsure how students in today's political and social climates would respond to examples of intentionally controversial language, I began the lecture with a disclaimer in block letters: "This presentation includes sentences written as purposely biased by the professor or pulled from other sources written purposely biased as points of discussion and do not reflect the beliefs of the professor or authors." The examples were obvious mistakes, such as a news article about a female entrepreneur who is referred to as "the mayor's wife" (Hacker & Sommers, 2021) or brushing your teeth in a "zen-like state" (Einsohn & Schwartz, 2019). What followed, though, was a discussion of shared experiences and identities that my students have seen misrepresented in writing. Students with various backgrounds and racial identities were eager to share and hear from each other, and I even felt comfortable sharing some of my own experiences with problematic language.

As part of a major assignment for the course, I asked the students to submit up to ten pages of their own writing. The writing was then redistributed to be copyedited following a set of house requirements for the fictional company Bomely Editors, Inc. Our house style sheet had minimum requirements, such as the use of the Oxford comma and treatment of numbers, but otherwise, students were encouraged to edit as they saw fit. I quickly realized after the assignments were submitted that grading 25 different samples of writing—most of which I had never read before—on how well they were edited to conform to rules that may or may not apply to this writing would be next to impossible. So, I graded on completion but provided comments on the edits they made and how they approached them. The students enjoyed the assignment and were pleased with their grades, but as an instructor, I wanted more from this assignment. To me, equitable grading in editing is a blend of "rule adherence" and the student's unique approach to the document.

Spring 2025: A Fresh Approach

With one successful class under my belt, I began my spring 2025 *Copyediting* course with a clear vision on how we could improve the experience. Students were given weekly editing assignments that were graded on effort and completion, but I wanted to use these smaller assignments to expand our Socratic discussions about editorial decisions. I set aside four class periods in which we pulled up the answer keys provided by our textbook and discussed them as a class. Together, we would look up specific rules or concerns in *The Chicago Manual of Style* or discuss different ways that an error could be corrected. I wanted students to realize that editing was less about getting the "right" answer and more about rhetorically complex, contingent, and communal situations. This was often reflected in edits that involved changing a word or restructuring a small section. It was very rare that two edits came out exactly the same, and yet both were correct.

Having this sense for how students approached their weekly assignments shaped how I restructured my major assignments for the course as well. Instead of student samples that may or may not have the errors discussed in class, there were two different manuscripts to edit over the course: (1) an early draft of a chapter co-written by Jordan and (2) my thesis proposal from grad school. The book chapter was graded mostly on completion with small point deductions for any obvious errors that were missed and comments on how they approached their edits. From here, I was able to structure the second assignment, my proposal, more thoroughly. Some errors counted for one point, such as a missing explanation for an acronym or a missing bullet point in a sequence. If a student found that error, they received one point; if they missed it, they lost one point. Some issues were considered bonus points—students received a point if they found the error but did not lose

points if they did not. These included calling Victorian police officers "cops" or changing "E-mail" to "email" per the Merriam-Webster spelling. For the second assignment, students were also asked to create a style sheet and transmittal letter, which were graded in the same plus-or-minus point system. Formatting and correcting an em-dash, for example, was a lesson that we covered many times, (have you ever tried to show 20 people how to use four different interfaces of Microsoft Word?) so that was a consistent point deduction. This allowed me to maintain an equitable consistency in my grading, but it also left space for students to make their own editorial decisions for the majority of the document.

Using writing samples from Jordan and me also created a unique opportunity for the students to communicate with the authors for clarity. For example, one of my students approached me regarding Victorian titles and honorifics used in my proposal—a mystery set in Victorian London. The student was unfamiliar with historical titles such as "Honorable Lord" and was having difficulty approaching the capitalization. As an instructor, I was able to guide her through where to find the information in *The Chicago Manual of Style*. As an author, though, I was able to let my editor know that I would capitalize the title. Because the book chapter has been published, students were also able to look up the finished product and compare their decisions to the actual revisions, a benefit I had not even considered until my students eagerly asked me where they could find the publication.

Looking Ahead

Copyediting is not being taught in the upcoming 2025–2026 academic year. While I am going to miss some of the activities and discussions from this course, I am looking forward to the opportunity to expand the other sections of our editing sequence. Since Jordan joined our department in fall 2024, we have been working on organizing a three-course editing sequence: *Grammar and Style*, *Copyediting*, and *Substantive Editing*. In spring 2026, I will teach *Grammar and Style* for the first time, and Jordan will teach the first *Substantive Editing* course. We have been able to use the data and experiences from the *Copyediting* courses discussed above to determine key focuses and learning outcomes for the courses. For example, *Grammar and Style* will be taught with Miller's (1979) pedagogical theory of knowing when to bend and break the rules. This will hopefully prepare students for more confidence in their decisions in *Copyediting*, which will in turn prepare them for making larger, structural changes in *Substantive Editing*.

Now that all three courses are actively being workshopped, we can begin to think about the writing world's next great challenge: AI. Discussed in more detail below, our editing courses will seek to blend AI into the editing workflow while still maintaining a firm stance that a human editor is an invaluable tool in any writing situation.

Artificial Intelligence and Rhetorically Responsive Editing

Like many departments, we find ourselves racing to keep up with both the scholarship on artificial intelligence and the technology itself. As authors, the three of us hold differing attitudes towards artificial intelligence—ranging from strong resistance to daily use. However, we all agree that artificial intelligence is already having an impact on writing and editing jobs and that its use is highly unlikely to decline over the next decade. Last year, Marc's ENG 301: *Writing as a Job* class found references to artificial intelligence in 12% of the 150 job advertisements they surveyed. Interns reported back that they are advised to use artificial intelligence in all parts of the writing process. If we want our students to be competitive in an already difficult job market, then we will need to prepare them to productively use AI tools while we also expose them to the limitations and problems of AI. We briefly sketch out our initial attempts to balance a professional obligation to prepare our students for a technology-driven (obsessed?) job market (refer to, for instance, Salvo & Sherrill, 2025, pp. 34–35) against our significant concerns about AI's adverse cognitive, economic, environmental, social, and political impacts (Sano-Franchini et al., 2024).

Last spring, our department generated a heuristic for instructors to consider when thinking about AI's integration into their classes. We are sure many others are working on similar policies; we want to contribute to this discussion by sharing the heuristic we developed for faculty to consider when creating syllabi and assignments:

Can students use AI to:

- help understand readings?
- help develop potential research questions or ideas?
- identify research materials?
- outline their essays?
- draft their essays?
- organize/structure their essays?
- revise and copyedit their essays?

Obviously, we were asking our faculty to think about how AI might be used in all facets of the writing process. Such an approach was influenced by Mollick's (2024) concept of "co-intelligence," which proposes that AI can augment human capacity but not replace it. Mollick's model of productive AI use is built around four core principles:

- Always invite AI to the table
- Be the human in the loop
- Treat AI like a person (but tell it what kind of person it is)
- Assume this is the worst AI you will ever use (pp. 47–62)

All four of these principles have influenced how our department and major are thinking about AI. Programmatically, we are asking our faculty to think about *when* it is appropriate to bring AI to the table and acknowledging that "always" might not be the right answer (even if it is the mandate that interns encountered on site last year). We do not have clear answers to the questions above; however, they are helping us think carefully about learning outcomes and how artificial intelligence can help us focus on particular tasks. Pedagogically, we recognize that strong prompt engineering requires that we provide AI generators with deep contextual knowledge, such that it knows not only who it is, but who its audience is and more about its rhetorical situation (Ranade, Saravia & Johri, 2025).

It is Mollick's second principle, to "be the human in the loop," that most drives our programmatic approach to AI. As Mollick (2024) argued, AI systems require human judgement and expertise; humans offer "unique perspective, critical thinking skills, and ethical considerations" (pp. 53–54) of which machines are largely incapable. Mollick is not a rhetorical theorist, but we would suggest that the critical thinking and ethical considerations requisite for his human-computer interaction (HCI) model of AI use mirrors the audience awareness and cultural sensitivity that we have described as germane to rhetorical editing. Thus, we attempt to construct curricula that expose students to AI productivity *and* its limitations. For example, in Kevin's *Copyediting* class, students learn that AI can help with proofreading. However, they also learn that they should not be fully reliant on the machine. Sure, ChatGPT knows how to check commas against the traditional rules, but, as we all know, there are places where the traditional rules just do not work. AI and other digital editing tools such as spell check or Grammarly might be used as part of an initial file clean-up and for proofreading grammar errors, but editors should evaluate any proposed edits and make an informed case-by-case decision. Marc used AI to help edit the institutional context section of this article, asking it to reduce the section by 35%. Although he did go through the recommendation line-by-line and edited the output.

In the fall of 2024, Marc taught a capstone seminar, our ENG 429: *Rhetoric and Technology* class, dedicated to artificial intelligence, writing, and editing. The results of that class will be published in a forthcoming chapter; here we can briefly share one assignment as another example of how we ask our students to "be the human in the loop." The six-week project was based on Douglas Eyman's (2024) assignment that asked students to compare how three different large language model (LLM) tools summarized technical documents. In our class, students were asked to compare how three different LLMs suggested revisions on academic, professional, and creative writing. The results of those comparisons were rather trivial (they all performed about the same), and the quality of suggested revisions and edits was mediocre (and quite terrible for poetry in particular). However, in our post-project surveys, students found value in developing the prompt engineering documents we used, since they further developed their own metacognitive knowledge of the editing process. While Marc is troubled particularly by AI's cognitive and ecological impacts, he also recognizes that it is essential to familiarize students with the technology given its growing place in job advertisements. He advocates for developing editing projects that balance human cognition and technological capacity.

Jordan would argue that there might even be room for optimism: that as writers rely more on AI technologies to generate drafts, there will be an increased demand for editors with sophisticated understanding of audience, context, and language. In an experiment comparing professional writers who used ChatGPT with a control group who did not, Noy and Zhang (2023) found that the group who used ChatGPT in their writing workflow spent far less time (about half) composing when compared with the control group, but they spent almost double the amount of time editing compared with the control group. Smith (2024) argues that "as more and more AI tools are adopted into professional workflows, writers will likely continue to spend more time editing the output—both on a substantive and copy-edit level—so that it meets the needs of their audience" (p. 26). Alan Knowles (2024) offered a framework for thinking about the ways that humans and machines can collaboratively work together to author texts; similar to Mollick, he proposed a "machine-in-the-loop" model "in which the human collaborator retains majority of the rhetorical load, and thus, relegates GenAI tools in their workflow to roles more akin to assistants than a co-authors" (p. 8). If AI tools accelerate the generation of content, then humans will need extensive training in tailoring and improving that content. This brings us back to Lauer and Brumberger's (2019) notion of the multimodal, responsive, hybrid editor we discussed above (albeit in ways that make some of us uncomfortable).

Commitment to Inclusion, Diversity, and Community Engagement

This is a strange section to write—to justify why inclusion and diversity are central to our major. We developed this major before *DEI* became the "devil term" that it is today (Weaver, pp. 222–223).[3] Our approach to the writing process is grounded in empathy—the ability to try and imagine how words, things, histories might feel and mean from another person's perspective (see particularly Blankenship [2019].) People cannot write or edit without such decentering, without developing that creative and imaginative capacity. You probably cannot live a life in a world with other people without that capacity, too. As Walter Ong (1975) described it, as writers and editors, we have to creatively imagine all of the audiences who might read our words in an attempt to imagine their questions, see potential (mis)understandings, and assuage their skepticisms: audiences are works of fiction. We find it disturbing (to say the least) that some states are villainizing and outlawing fundamental skills that help us share the world with other people.

As for community engagement, that also shows up across a wide range of courses, projects, and departmental culture. We wanted our students to actively engage their local communities, to see how what they were learning in the classroom could be carried out into their worlds. Some of this work happens via class projects through community-engaged writing. We have already described how Marc's *Writing as a Job* class partners with local nonprofits (11 different organizations over the past seven years). Similarly, his graphic design class partners with the Go West Film Festival, an annual weeklong festival celebrating the American West, to design their festival's program. His ENG 229: *Digital Video Production* class has worked with UNCO's liberal arts council to develop faculty highlight videos and with the Go West Film Festival to record a series of promotional videos and highlight videos from their fall 2023 festival. As previously mentioned, Jordan's ENG 427: *Substantive Editing* class aims to partner with *The CEA Critic* in future semesters and will feature guest lectures from local publishing and editing professionals.

The department also looks to build community. All WEP majors are encouraged to participate with *The Crucible*, its longstanding student-produced literary magazine. During his last year with us, Phillip Goodwin partnered with Greeley's local LINC Library to create Zine Fest. Students in ENG 220: *Writing, Transformation, and Change* and ENG 328:

[3] We would also note that we have nothing against equity. We simply developed the major before the acronym *DEI* became commonplace.

Document Design continue to participate in the event (with some extra credit as encouragement). We have been fortunate to sustain this connection with Phillip Goodwin even after his departure.

Internships also form a core experience for our WEP majors. Marc has overseen 21 internships since the Fall of 2020. And, true to the research we presented above, these internships have come in a very wide range of positions including content writing, copywriting, social media management, grant writing, web UX/UI work, marketing, and archival work. We see internships as a capstone for community engagement—an experience in which our students' expertise with the written word, their multimodal capabilities, and their humanistic capacities come together.

Conclusion

We have presented in this article the current state of the writing, editing, and publishing major at UNCO in the hopes that others who are developing a similar major or sequence of courses will find value in what we have shared. We emphasize the phrase *current state* in the previous sentence. As stated earlier, we acknowledge that we still have work to do to further develop the publishing component of our major. In addition, given the rapidly changing ways that people write and edit, and with the shifting cultural views surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion, we recognize the instability that can result for programs like ours. As we observe these changes, we see both opportunities and challenges.

On the one hand, the increasing role that machines play in the writing and editing process—as resource tools, assistants, cowriters, and even in some cases executive decision-makers (McKee & Porter, 2022)—means that writing workflows will evolve and present new opportunities. While the final outcome of these changes is still yet to be seen, we readily anticipate the opportunity to help students grow and adapt to changing job-market needs.

On the other hand, we face challenges as long-held foundational principles of humanistic disciplines—principles such as diversity, equity, and inclusion—come under increasing attack. We remain committed to helping students understand and honor diversity and to use writing and editing as a way to build community with the people around them. Our courses in the WEP major are built on the idea that writing is indeed a humanistic endeavor (Miller, 1979) and that humans are at their best when they respect diversity, treat others equitably, and include people with different experiences and views in their lives.

In spite of the challenges we face, we eagerly seek opportunities to better prepare our students for fulfilling lives and careers, and we look forward to the future with optimism.

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Author Information

Jordan Smith is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the University of Northern Colorado where he works in the writing, editing, and publishing concentration. His research interests include editing and publishing, corpus linguistics, and technical and professional communication. His work has appeared in *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, and *Technical Communication*, among others.

Marc C. Santos is Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Northern Colorado. He is the former director of the writing, editing, and publishing concentration and currently serves as the Director of Graduate Studies. His research interests include postmodern and rhetorical theory, digital technologies, writing pedagogy and assessment, and ethics. His work has appeared in *Philosophy and Rhetoric, Kairos, Computers and Composition, Composition Forum, Enculturation,* and *The CEA Critic*.

Kevin Bomely is a contract renewable lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Northern Colorado where he works in the writing, editing, and publishing concentration. His research includes creative writing and core curriculum support in first year college composition. This is his first publication.