Moving Program Reviews into the Future: Strategically Positioning Technical and Professional Communication

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Abstract Since its inception, the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC) has emphasized both the development and quality of technical and professional communication (TPC) programs. This article traces the evolution of CPTSC's external program review process, from early definitions of program quality in the 1970s and 1980s through the late–20th-century rise of outcomes-based assessment, to contemporary efforts to align reviews with program sustainability. Program review is distinguished from program assessment, in that reviews encompass broader factors—faculty, governance, resources, recruitment, and strategic positioning—while integrating assessment data as one component. While assessment literature in the past two decades primarily focused on identifying and mapping learning outcomes within curricula, CPTSC's External Program Review Taskforce (ExPRT) establishes a comprehensive external review that evaluates programs beyond individual student performance.

The article details the updated review guidelines, reviewer recruitment processes, fee structures, and support materials. The new model emphasizes a consistent, replicable process including pre-review preparation, onsite evaluation, and post-review reporting, designed to help programs navigate budgetary pressures, increased accountability demands, and a competitive higher-education landscape. A case study from Arizona State University's Technical Writing and Communication program illustrates how aligning curriculum revision with external review requirements strengthens program coherence, scaffolding, and long-term viability.

Keywords Learning outcomes, program assessment, external program review, CPTSC, evaluation

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In its first ten years, the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC) saw rapid development of technical and professional communication (TPC) programs, so much so that members argued that CPTSC needed to not only focus on what went into a program (Pearsall, 1984) but also "the promotion of quality in our programs" (Kelley, 1984, p. xii). Fifty years later, CPTSC continues its efforts to support the development of quality programs through external program review. This article is intended to update CPTSC members on the new external review service created by the CPTSC External Program Review Taskforce (ExPRT). It outlines the history of CPTSC program reviews and the rise of TPC outcomes-based assessment, presents a brief case study describing the role of assessment in program review, and, finally, explains the current work of CPTSC to foster effective program review.

History of CPTSC Program Review

For CPTSC, program review has been an ongoing concern since the formation of the organization. At the inaugural meeting of what would later become CPTSC, Thomas Pearsall noted that TPC programs shared several problems and challenges. At the top of his list was the question: "What elements make up a successful TPC program?" (Pearsall, 1974, p. 6). As the number of established TPC programs increased, members argued that CPTSC needed to not only focus on what went into a program (Pearsall, 1984) but also, as previously stated, on the promotion of program quality (Kelley, 1984). In 1985, Patrick Kelley, then CPTSC president, noted that an evaluation in terms of quality of the programs listed in the third edition of Academic Programs in Technical Communication (a joint publication of CPTSC and the Society for Technical Communication) would be "a disheartening experience" (p. viii).

However, what constitutes quality and how it should be reflected in a program review would be an ongoing question. In 1986, the CPTSC conference examined this question. The discussions showed that CPTSC members viewed quality and program review comprehensively, based on results, curriculum, administration, teaching, and students. For example, Sherry Little (1986) argued that if programs supplied students "with knowledge that allowed them to achieve entry level positions" (p. 188), then the quality of the program could be determined by the number of job placements and the satisfaction of employers with the performance of the graduates. Regarding curriculum, presenters argued that a quality program needed both TPC courses and an even mix of courses from the humanities and the sciences (Corey & Gilbertson, 1986) or from literature and rhetoric (Jaffe, 1986). A balance between theory and practice with an emphasis on the practical at

the undergraduate level and theoretical at the graduate level was also a requirement (Corey & Gilbertson, 1986; Jaffe, 1986; Hayes, 1986).

Additionally, presenters argued that quality programs also needed flexible course content to enable innovative teaching and to facilitate industry contacts through faculty consulting, student internships, and advisory boards (Corey & Gilbertson, 1986; Jaffe, 1986). Administrators needed to be diplomats, translators, visionaries, and leaders of change in a dynamic field (Haselkorn, 1986; Samuels, 1986; Zimmerman, 1986). For teachers, quality was demonstrated in a knowledge of the discipline, an ability to do technical writing, skills at helping students develop their talents as technical writers, and a demonstrated respect for science and technology (Coney, 1986; Harris, 1986; Geonetta, 1986). In considering quality in terms of students, presenters focused on key skills and abilities that students would obtain as part of their education, including interpersonal skills; technical proficiency; effective, rhetorically-based communication skills; professionalism; ability to produce a range of successful products/documents; and critical, analytical thinking (Lay, 1986; Jones, 1986; Severson, 1986; Kaufman & Eldridge, 1986).

Following the conference, Patrick Kelley raised the question of how CPTSC would facilitate reviews, and thereby, enhance its ability to influence the quality of education in scientific and technical communication. He proposed the creation of a program advisory board made up of past presidents of the council, who would serve as consultants responsible for coordinating external reviews (Samuels, 1987; CPTSC, 1987). Instead, in 1989, the executive committee created a Program Review Board (PRB) planning committee that would be responsible for designing, promoting, and implementing the review procedures (CPTSC Executive Committee, 1989).

In the following year, discussions about program review continued at the CPTSC conference. In considering what a program review should assess, Carol Lipson (1990) argued that, in addition to curriculum and size of faculty, program review should include the availability of resources to support programs. While this would include equipment, travel, library holdings, staff, and other such resources, it would also include training, mentoring, supporting, and professionalizing teaching staff. Carole Yee (1990) reasoned that program review should also include a description of organizational culture and faculty performance. Jimmie Killingsworth (1990) added that the review should be formative (focusing on strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement) rather than summative (focusing on the success or failure of results) and involve systematic qualitative analysis of the complex interactions between course content, teachers, and

students. Overall, conference participants still viewed program review as a comprehensive evaluation, including all aspects of a program's context as well as its content.

In 1991, the PRB presented the first application and guidelines for program review to members for discussion. The application was extensive, requesting not only information identifying the institution and type of program but also information about course offerings, faculty, administration, and governance. The guidelines for self-study included the following sections: focus of the review (concerns and future plans); curriculum (courses and goals, syllabi, instructional methods and materials, testing, grading practices, and internships); program administration (institutional and program structure and administrator's job description); faculty development (current conditions and support for faculty development); support services (type and definition of service, personnel for support services, and administration); and finally, the appendix (statistical information, student evaluations, course descriptions, CVs, etc.) (PRD, 1991). The response from members was generally positive (Lay, 1991), with many recognizing that self-study needed to be an ongoing activity for every program (Lipson, 1991; Jaffe, 1991).

The first program review was piloted in 1995 with the program at Michigan Technological University (MTU), using the guidelines for self-study first published in 1991. Cynthia Selfe, the director of the MTU program at the time, made several recommendations for revising the guidelines. She also recommended that the service be advertised to other directors. The membership voted to approve the program review process (CPTSC, 1995) with an understanding that the self-study guidelines would be revised based on current and future program reviews.

In 1997, New Mexico Tech underwent the program review process. This review became the foundation for confirming the effectiveness of the program review guidelines. Recommendations for revision included developing guidelines for reviewers (support, honoraria, and purpose of report), but no further revisions were proposed for the self-study (CPTSC, 1997). With CPTSC advertising the program review through the conference program and its website, demand for program review remained constant, with one or two programs reviewed each year.

As more programs underwent the review process, the value of program review became more apparent. Bob Johnson observed that program reviews are especially beneficial in the planning stages and again about five years into a new program (CPTSC, 2002). Pam Ecker noted that while self-studies may be time-consuming to prepare, they are helpful politically because when a designated expert from out of town provides insights about the local program, their opinions are perceived as more credible than a review by internal

faculty (CPTSC, 2002). According to Lu Rehling, program review, with its external reviewer, functioned as a "valuable tool for improving our program, motivating faculty, and encouraging support for our program" (2003, p. 71). In her case, the review "taught the administration much: warding off challenges to our program integrity and how we deliver our curriculum, encouraging more responsible faculty staffing and support policies, and persuasively identifying guidelines for improvement and possible expansion" (p. 71). In essence, the external reviewer serves not only as an evaluator but also becomes an ambassador for the profession, articulating explanations and descriptions of what our field is to institutional administrators and other stakeholders (Herrington, 2003).

In 2004, CPTSC renewed its commitment to the program review process by reinstating the program review committee. While the committee sought to examine and update the self-study guidelines, it also set out to build a foundation of knowledge about program review, and, as a result, it proposed, edited, and published a special issue on program review and assessment in the journal *Technical Communication* (St.Amant & Nahrwold, 2007).

While CPTSC continued its work to establish and refine the program review process, the conversations about program assessment by its members were changing. At the 1999 conference, Linda Driskill and Margaret Hundleby argued that an emerging culture of assessment would require programs to pay closer attention to outcomes assessment (1999). At the 2000 conference, several presenters described the increasing focus on outcome assessment by accreditation agencies such as ABET and the increasing pressure from states seeking to link accreditation and funding to student performance (Munger, 2000). By 2006, discussions about program review focused primarily on linking program assessment with outcomes and core competencies, arguing that this new model would support CPTSC's approach to self-study. By 2008, outcomes and program assessment had become almost synonymous, leading some members of CPTSC to question the need to focus on program review in light of CPTSC efforts on program assessment (CPTSC, 2008). The program review committee was renamed the program review and assessment committee and, eventually, would just be known as the assessment committee. Much of the committee's work became focused on research related to identifying program outcomes and their role in assessment.

From Program Review to Program Assessment, and Back Again

As noted, while CPTSC established academic program review processes, scholarship on program assessment simultaneously proliferated, and sometimes distinctions between

program review and program assessment have blurred. Program reviews can occur on multiple levels; for example, Teena Carnegie (2007) explained that academic program assessment can (and does) occur on institutional, state, and federal levels. Program reviews can also occur as formal or informal processes (Sides, 2007). However, over the course of 2000– 2020, many programs in technical communication were being created, and much scholarship focused on the content, development, and assessment of technical communication academic programs. Fewer scholarship studies on program reviews occurred during this period, as assessment and learning outcomes became a primary focus.

Early discussions about TPC programs aimed to outline core principles and concepts. Scholarship addressed pedagogy as well as specific courses such as multi-section technical writing courses, usability courses, and introductory courses. For example, Kelli Cargile Cook (2001) described a layered literacy approach based on reviewing core programmatic curriculum that outlined six key literacies: basic, rhetorical, social, technological, ethical, and critical. This approach acknowledges the complexity and fluidity of TPC work and its potential to "layer" in various ways throughout the curriculum. Others described assessment in terms of specific courses, such as the introductory technical communication course (Cook, 2003) and usability courses (Breuch, Zachry & Spinuzzi, 2001).

Jo Allen (2004) noted the need to move beyond individual courses and toward programmatic assessment, which might examine programs from perspectives of satisfaction, engagement, or learning outcomes. Approaches connected to satisfaction might include surveys of students and faculty about perceptions of program aspects; approaches connected to participation might reflect levels of engagement with courses and/or co-curricular activities; approaches connected to outcomes might reflect the degree to which courses and assignments integrate and reinforce learning outcomes within a curriculum.

Discussions around assessment began to lean heavily toward learning outcomes, which spurred discussions around what, exactly, learning outcomes for technical communication programs ought to look like (Carter, Anson, & Miller, 2003). Discussions around program-level outcomes have often been informed by professional practice in the workplace and a desire to develop core concepts in technical communication programs that bridge academia and professional practice. Kenneth Rainey, Roy Turner, and David Dayton (2005) surveyed and interviewed practicing technical communicators and generated a list of core competencies that graduating students in technical

communication would need in the workplace. Several others have since discussed programmatic outcomes in connection with professional practice (Turner & Rainey, 2004; Williamson, 2010; Coppola, 2011; Coppola et al., 2016; Cosgrove, 2023) and in a special issue of *Technical Communication*, Nancy Coppola (2011) framed this discussion as "Zeitgeist" for the field and articulated core concepts for technical communication education, both academic and professional preparation, including certification.

It is important to note that as technical and professional communication programs have grown, program reviews have not been the focus of the field's collective scholarship. Rather, discussions around assessment and outcomes sought to secure core concepts of TPC programs, which were important to their growth and proliferation. Thomas Barker (2012) noted that early assessment discussions simply described programmatic areas, while later assessment discussions identified core program outcomes and mapped them within the curriculum. Barker described the shift toward learning outcomes as an analytical approach to program assessment or an approach concerned with the internal connections in a curriculum and what students take away from their experience. To further inquire about program-level outcomes, Barker surveyed TPC programs and learned that outcomes-based approaches were employed most frequently through portfolio assessment, key assignments, and capstone courses (p. 198). Many of these threads have continued to be discussed by scholars in technical communication, regarding identifying key areas of academic programs. As an example, Geoff Clegg and others (2020) reviewed curricular programs of multiple programs and, through a coding process, agreed on a set of primary outcomes that included rhetoric, writing, technology, and design, along with secondary outcomes including ethics, research, collaboration, and professionalization.

Discussions around program-level outcomes have often brought up the issue of professional certification or the creation of a credential to signify professional competence in technical communication (Barker, 2012). As Barker (2012) noted, these discussions increased when the Society for Technical Communication offered a certificate option, Certified Professional Technical Communicator (CPTC), which consisted of a curriculum and an exam to demonstrate professional work. Saul Carliner, Liz Pohland, and Steven Jong (2014) discussed the potential of certification for technical communication and the impact of certification options on academic programs with those programs including professional practice as part of their learning outcomes.

While many assessment discussions in TPC focused on either the creation or application of outcomes, outcomes are only part of the larger assessment picture (St.Amant & Nahrwold, 2007). Recent discussions around assessment point to larger issues around

program sustainability. Joanna Schreiber and Lisa Melonçon (2019) proposed a continuous improvement model to sustain TPC programs that takes into consideration all aspects of a program beyond curriculum, including recruitment, instructors, and program resources. The GRAM model (gather, read, analyze, make) proposed by Schreiber and Melonçon illustrates a comprehensive review process for TPC programs. Similarly, Scott Kowalewski and Bill Williamson (2023) advocated for a recursive, iterative assessment that responds to evolving curriculum and program design.

In summary, while organizations such as CPTSC established the need for program review, much work over the last two decades has focused on program assessment, including the identification of learning outcomes that outline core concepts of technical communication programs. Further, assessment discussions in TPC have evolved from individual course assessments to identifying program-level outcomes based on curriculum or professional practices. More recent discussions around program assessment have shifted toward holistic program assessment, which reviews more than just curriculum. The conclusion of these discussions is that to achieve greater sustainability, assessment needs to be continuous and iterative.

It is in this most recent context—considering program sustainability—that program reviews continue to be important and helpful. Assessment, as discussed over the past two decades, has identified and mapped learning outcomes within TPC curricula. This work provides an important foundation for program reviews; however, assessment needs to be approached differently in program reviews to ask the question of how program outcomes are applied and how they have succeeded overall. That is, external program reviews need to consider assessment that is not connected to individual student performance or the review of grades of students in particular courses. Rather, program review needs to examine the learning outcomes of a program, review samples of student work from key curricular courses, and develop rubrics or a set of criteria by which external reviewers can determine if programmatic outcomes are being met (refer to Boettger, 2014). In addition, program review involves external reviewers with a self-study that includes assessment as well as an address of other metrics such as recruitment, graduation rates, program resources, and instruction and training. That is, while important, program assessment and its focus on learning outcomes are just a subset of program reviews. External reviewers provide feedback to programs that can be used to support program strategic plans. Moreover, indeed, program review becomes more pertinent and helpful in times of budgetary crises. In this sense, the value of reviews is to help make arguments to support the overall sustainability of the program.

The following case study demonstrates how program review influences program assessment and how developing program assessment in terms of a program review can build more robust and sustainable programs.

Case Study: Revising Arizona State University's Technical Writing and Communication Undergraduate Degree

The Technical Writing and Communication (TWC) program at Arizona State University has a strong history, and as of 2023, the curriculum was about 10 years old. In the spring of 2024, the TWC faculty began a deep look at the program with the goal of reconfiguring the degree and its associated concentrations. Although not connected to the decision to revise the TWC program, the TWC degrees were also scheduled for an external program review in 2025–2026. The external program review is required every seven years by the Arizona Board of Regents, and the TWC faculty saw an opportunity to "double dip" by using the requirements of the external program review to focus on a curriculum revision.

Because the process followed by the TWC faculty to complete the program revision mirrored the requirements for preparing for the external program review, tracing the path followed by the faculty illuminates the differences (and necessary relationships) among program learning outcomes and program assessment, course learning outcomes and assessments, individual assignments and their grading rubrics. In what follows, we present a case study to demonstrate the relationships among the different assessment levels, all of which combine to form the most comprehensive type of assessment: the external program review.

Step 1: Articulate program learning outcomes

Program learning outcomes are why a program exists and achieving them should be the core purpose of instruction and manifested in multiple courses throughout the program. External reviewers require data on students' performance against program learning outcomes, so having well-written learning outcomes is the important first step. The curriculum revision process for TWC generated four core outcomes for the entire program, with each concentration carrying an additional one or two learning outcomes for a total of five or six for each concentration. The four core outcomes appear below (for the sake of brevity, the additional concentration outcomes are not included):

1. Design communication products in diverse media to communicate complex information clearly, ethically, and persuasively to diverse audiences
2. Apply technical communication research methods to assess user needs that improve the design and impact of technical content
3. Evaluate emerging technologies to determine appropriate methods for delivering content for different audiences and purposes
4. Compose clear, concise, and accurate written documents that achieve a stated purpose

Program learning outcomes form the basis of all assessment, from external review to program level to individual assignments, because, in theory, every assignment in the entire program should be able to logically trace a path back to one or more program learning outcomes.

Program learning outcomes are important to external program review, as holistic, longitudinal data on students' performance demonstrate how students have achieved program outcomes over the period under review, in this case, seven years.

Step 2: Write assessment plans and program assessment rubrics

Arizona State University's program assessment plans and associated rubrics are quite detailed and lengthy. The plan requires programs to:

1. Elaborate concepts that support the learning outcome (LO). Concepts are the things that students learn which demonstrate they are practicing the LO. Think of these as noun phrases.

2. Explain competencies for the LO. Competencies are the steps that students take to learn the LO. Think of these as verb phrases that follow Bloom's Taxonomy (or another one).

3. List at least two measures with an associated performance criterion. Measures are the deliverables housed in a "mastery" course where students should demonstrate their performance on the concept.

4. Explain the assessment process. The process details how the actual work will be completed and by whom.

5. Propose a plan for acting on data. The plan outlines the path for the future, detailing how faculty will utilize the generated data to enhance the program.

This stage is perhaps where most people become confused between programmatic assessment and course assessment. While a specific assignment from a specific course is the "measure" of the learning outcome, the evaluation of student work that occurs in the class is not a consideration. Grading is not assessment because grading measures a particular student's performance against a rubric or expectations for the course. In contrast, assessment measures an artifact against a separate, programmatic rubric to determine aggregated performance on the deliverable across a sample of students. Additionally, assessments are conducted by faculty who do not teach the course using a rubric from the program assessment plan, not from the course, because the purpose is to collect aggregated data on performance against a program outcome, not performance against a course outcome. So, a relationship exists between a course assignment and a program assessment that *uses* the course assignment as an artifact. In the course, the assignment is used to measure an individual student.

External program reviews rely on assessment of a sample of students' work against programmatic learning outcomes without regard to a specific student's performance. The performance reports aggregate data across many students on a single artifact, where that single artifact is meant to measure performance on a particular program learning outcome.

Step 3: Scaffold courses and course learning outcomes

One of the most important parts of creating a successful program is scaffolding courses so that a particular learning outcome is introduced, reinforced, and mastered across multiple courses. In the case of the first outcome above, for example, the concepts are introduced in TWC 201: *Writing for Digital Media*, reinforced in TWC 311: *Principles of Visual Communication*, and mastered in TWC 445: *Content Strategy*. The artifact assessed for learning outcome one above is found in TWC 445.

Individual courses in the sequence, however, contain learning outcomes that support the program learning outcome. For example, in the course sequence above that scaffolds program learning outcome one, TWC 201, the "introduction" course, has the course learning outcome, "Compose documents and create multiple drafts while adapting to specific audiences." Likewise, TWC 311, the "reinforcement" course, has an associated course learning outcome: "Demonstrate communication production skills for different audiences through the use of different visual media." Finally, TWC 445, the mastery course, has the course learning outcome, "Identify and define content types and audiences for each content type." Each course builds upon the previous one, and together

they lead to achieving the program's first learning outcome, which involves designing products in diverse media for specific audiences.

To use a somewhat clunky metaphor, individual courses and their learning outcomes are building blocks. On their own, each block is unimportant. However, when cemented together through scaffolding, the blocks make a wall, and the quality of the wall is what a program assessment measures. When combined, all the program's learning outcomes (each a wall of bricks from individual courses and specific assignments) form a house. External program review measures the quality of the entire house by individually digging into every wall and every internal system. The external review might uncover that one system or wall is poorly conceived and recommend revision, while complimenting the quality of another system. External program review decomposes the entire house, which means all the smaller parts must have individual integrity so that the entire house can stand.

The newly revised Technical Writing and Communication program at Arizona State University, which began in Fall of 2025 after a year of work, is a different house from what existed before. It maintains some similarities and integrates bricks from the prior house, but its floor plan is fundamentally different from the older program. Using the external program review as the catalyst to build a new house, the program faculty worked from the ground up to create blueprints—the program learning outcomes and a complete assessment plan. The faculty then set about building the house—revising courses and assignments and ensuring that the scaffolding supported students' success at achieving the learning outcome.

While this case shows the relationships of the curriculum pieces for an external program review, it does not consider many other things such as retention, graduation rates, alumni placement, institutional support, or disciplinary trends—all items that intersect with the program's curriculum and can tell us if a program's internal structure is successfully meeting the needs of the larger professional or disciplinary context. Both the internal and the external are necessary, and this case focuses only on the internal components. The complete external program review, with its 151 discrete elements, will be completed in 2026, and only then will we know if the new house—the revised program—will withstand the deep scrutiny of every tiny detail and its relationship to the world outside the walls of the university.

CPTSC Program Review Overview and System

As the prior brief case shows, the reciprocal relationship of outcome assessments and program review constitutes one aspect of a more comprehensive evaluation. As universities face increasing challenges (both economically and politically), examining programs based on a wide variety of factors, including not only student learning and outcomes but also faculty, governance, facilities, financial resources, etc., has become critical. Recognizing this evolution, the CPTSC President and Executive Committee created the External Program Review Task Force (ExPRT) to revise and reinstitute the external program review process. By revising and updating the guidelines and process (Carnegie et al., 2024), CPTSC seeks to provide its members with an important tool for not only improving programs but also enabling programs to better negotiate the challenges that they face in maintaining and retaining their programs.

Work completed

During the discovery phase of its work, the task force located all available CPTSC documents related to external review and examined program review procedures at various universities, at other professional organizations such as the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) and ABET, and regional accrediting organizations. In October 2023, the task force began the second phase of its work, which was to develop guidelines and materials needed for the external review and to present the new guidelines at the October CPTSC conference (2024) for review and feedback.

For this phase, the task force accomplished the following goals:

- Expanded and updated the process for the external review. The process was documented in a guide. The guide was completed before the 2024 conference, so the task force could receive feedback from the members before finalizing the guidelines. The final version of the guide is available on the CPTSC website (CPTSC.org>Resources>Program Review) (Carnegie et al., 2025).
- Investigated fee structures to propose a fee model for CPTSC.
- Designed a form for programs to request an external program review and a form for program experts to apply to serve as CPTSC external reviews. Both forms are available online (CPTSC.org>Resources>Program Review).
- Created a series of exercises to help develop program identity descriptions.
- Presented a draft of guidelines at the CPTSC 2024 conference and gathered feedback from members.

The taskforce agreed that the review process would be repeatable; include all phases: pre-review (application and self-study), the onsite review process, and post review (drafting of report, enabling feedback, and creating final report); and be scripted in a guide to enable reviewers to follow the process consistently and effectively (Carnegie et al., 2025). The review would look at that piece of the curriculum that is TPC (whether this is defined as a program, department, certificate, or component within a degree). However, it would include all TPC programs in a given department or academic unit if that unit contains multiple programs, including, for example, certificates, minors, majors, undergraduate, and graduate.

Implementing the ExPRT program review

In March of 2024, the CPTSC Executive Committee accepted the task force's recommendations and the ExPRT Review service. The Past President will be responsible for overseeing the program review, and this activity will be added to the duties of the Past President in the by-laws.

The Past President will send out a call for reviewers, review and approve applicants, collect CVs, and compile a list of CPTSC-sanctioned reviewers. Reviewers will be members of CPTSC. They have advanced in their academic career, with a minimum of 5 years of experience administering TPC programs. This experience involves reviewing programs and correlating them with the programs they will review, focusing on type, size, home department, and Carnegie classification.

The website will be updated to provide information about the process, including costs and an online form, so programs can easily request external program review services.

The fees for external review align with those of the WPA. Reviews will require an administrative fee to be paid directly to CPTSC. In addition, there will be an honorarium per reviewer. Costs for travel, lodging, and meals are required for each reviewer. These will be paid directly to the reviewer by the requesting institution.

Conclusion

As this article suggests, a concern with assessment and external program evaluation is not new. Indeed, assessment of all kinds has become a staple in higher education over the last twenty or so years. However, since skepticism about the value of higher education appears to be gaining momentum (in the United States, at least), our programs and universities will be held accountable by their stakeholders in new and demanding ways. Even though this cultural trend was not the exigence for the ExPRT project, our work holds value for

responding to concerns about what our programs— and universities more generally— contribute to society. We cannot avoid external evaluation because the funding for our programs will likely be increasingly tied to demonstrable outcomes valued by legislators, businesses, families, and students.

External program reviews will be critical for technical and professional communication programs to demonstrate their value. According to Lisa Melonçon (n.d.), more than 700 TPC programs exist in the United States which means that the competition is fierce for students in a comparatively small professional field that also, according to the most recent outlook by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2025), is only keeping pace with job growth in the US. Equally important, with the rise of sophisticated AI tools and subdisciplines such as UX gaining ground as their own professional domain, TPC programs must be strategic about crafting compelling arguments that demonstrate our unique contribution to society and the world of work. The ExPRT project, along with the guidance for creating effective external program reviews elaborated here, aims to empower programs to craft compelling arguments for securing, sustaining, and growing excellent technical and professional communication programs.

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