Collaboration Models for Programmatic Development: Stakeholder Engagement in Program Design, Growth, and Assessment

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As we note in the call for proposals for this special issue (Lancaster, 2022), in the last 13 years, every archived issue at the time of the CFP has included the word stakeholder—over 450 uses for the term, with 80% appearing in archived issues since 2015. Stakeholder engagement is more than a trend; it is a vital part of the practice of technical and professional communication (TPC), and thus of program development, as TPC instructors seek to teach their students to collaborate with stakeholders and model collaboration by *exemplum*. The nature of technical, scientific, and professional communicators is collaborative (Beck, 1993), and that nature is acknowledged throughout the literature. Research and theory has addressed collaboration with students in graduate and undergraduate programs (e.g., Balzhiser et al., 2015; McKee, 2016; Steiner, McCracken, & Moeller, 2020) and with professionals in various fields (e.g., Bosley, 1995; Hill & Griswold, 2013; Lofstrom, 2010). The field have also published literature that addresses stakeholder collaboration as it relates to assessment (Clegg et al., 2021; Kinash, McGillivray, & Crane, 2017; Say, 2015); industry advisory boards (Spartz & Watts, 2016); and curriculum development including client-based projects (Kramer-Simpson, Newmark, & Ford, 2015; Lancaster & Yeats, 2016), service-course curriculum (Ballard, 2018; Schreiber, Carrion, & Lauer, 2018), and course materials (Carnegie & Crane, 2019; Oswal & Meloncon, 2017). This list addresses only a small segment of the literature that TPC scholars have published.

Programmatic Perspectives, 13(2), Fall 2022: 2-10.
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Despite the innateness and the emphasis in scholarship for collaboration, our field's primary journals have not published a special issue focused on TPC, stakeholder engagement, and collaboration. Additionally, our field is sparse on highlighting formal collaboration models that TPC uses in stakeholder engagement. This is the motivation behind our special issue of *Programmatic Perspectives*.

Despite the collaborative thread that is woven through the essence of TPC, collaboration is not natural; it requires planning, strategizing, evaluating, communicating, and revising. In TPC, we must seek out others to collaborate in developing programs, courses, and projects. We must establish and maintain relationships, build connections and trust, and establish networks that benefit stakeholders in our program designs. Our stakeholders are innumerable:

- Industry contacts and advisory boards benefit in helping to ensure that our students graduate with skills that meet employers' needs; they also benefit from investing in their community, including institutions of higher education—with input, internships, and projects.
- Colleagues on campus benefit from collaborative relationships and from working with students, either in service learning or in diverse learning experiences, to help diversify student skills and also to gain student services in the learning process.
- Administrators and accreditation boards benefit from stakeholder input—for taking education beyond "the walls" of the classroom, preparing better educated graduates, building strong programs, and ensuring that curriculum is relevant and appropriate.
- Industry and government sponsors of research and program labs benefit by working with TPC practitioners and scholars for efficient and valuable investigation and development.
- Students benefit from experience with professionals and learning in more diverse environments.

These are only a few of the stakeholders with whom we engage as we build strong programs in TPC.

TPC practitioners and scholars collaborate across phone lines, internet, hallways, campuses, specializations, and even oceans. But engagement with stakeholders radically changed in 2020–2022 during the COVID-19 pandemic; employers and practitioners moved to remote work, students moved to hybrid and remote learning, and instructors scrambled to shift from in-person to synchronous (and sometimes asynchronous) instruction. The processes of learning and working were complicated in ways that we are still identifying, as we "socially distanced" or used technology in innovative ways to carry on

our work and study. COVID is still ever-present, but practice now depends more on the new norms we established for communication, collaboration, and engagement.

After experiencing almost 2 years of the pandemic, we conceived and proposed this special issue in response to changes we perceived at our universities in our stakeholder engagement practices, and a call went out. Though the special issue's focus is not entirely tied to pandemic responses, we see diversity, innovation, and creativity in stakeholder engagement across the US. We appreciated the chance to read about how administrators and instructors are shifting their collaborative practices, not only because of the pandemic but also because of preventative measures, technology familiarity, increased globalization, and new needs and norms that a worldwide virus created. From those proposals, we selected five manuscripts focused on new models for stakeholder engagement and collaboration.

Articles in this Issue

In "Empowering Stakeholders in a Cohort of Interdisciplinary Writing Minors: Flexibility, Agency, Reciprocity, and Accountability," Melissa Carrion and Ed Nagelhout showcase their program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where they recently established three new interdisciplinary minors: professional writing, science writing, and technical writing. In conceiving and developing these minors, Carrion and Nagelhout were inspired by TPC scholars to build four values (noted in their title) into the design of their program with the long-term goal of engaging stakeholders and building sustainable partnerships. Three minors were proposed to engage STEM majors, with administrative control in the provost's office and leadership rotating through the collaborating departments. Each minor requires 12 semester credit hours (SCHs) focused on writing and design (English Department) and 6 SCHs from other collaborating departments, focusing on writing-intensive courses in other departments to allow students to emphasize coursework in their discipline. Borrowing from stakeholder theory, Carrion and Nagelhout address a model that emphasizes knowing and creating value for stakeholders: "we felt compelled to account for the needs of *all* stakeholders, so that all are treated equally, given a voice, and provided a legitimate outlet for engaging." In their article, they share heuristics and program objectives so other TPC programs can consider this user-centered program model.

In "From Anecdote to Evidence: One Program's Efforts to Define STEM Collaborators' Perceptions of Successful Writing," Ian Weaver and Colleen Reilly showcase their program at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington, where they recently began a participatory assessment

of their science-writing program by reviewing course-specific and related documents and by hosting a focus group session with those who teach the Environmental Science (EVS) capstone course.. Noting that, for 12 years, their enrollment has included a large number of EVS students, and 7 years ago collaborating with the EVS program to prioritize EVS students in the course, Weaver and Reilly determined to learn if their course construct met their STEM colleagues' expectations and student needs. What they learned is that their program exceeds expectations, requiring an expansion of course student learning outcomes (SLOs) and enabling them to ensure that the science-writing course continues to prepare students for more mature writing in their capstone course. Their STEM colleagues provided suggestions but also reported that students thought more critically and wrote more skillfully after taking the science-writing course. Their model includes collaborative discourse with faculty across programs.

In their case study research article "Sustainable Collaboration: A Program Integrating Computer Science and Technical Communication," authors Rebecca Burnett, Andy Frazee, Amanda Girard, Liz Hutter, Halcyon Lawrence, and Olga Menagarishvili share programmatic research, a 10-year case study, from Georgia Institute of Technology to provide computer-science (CS) undergraduate students with technical-communication (TC) training. Building a team/community/network model, the faculty responded to CS graduates' call for more TC instruction for graduates, creating a program (with leadership) that demonstrates decentralized collaboration. The collaborative model includes co-grading, conversation about program development, curricular interdisciplinarity, collaborative assignments, and industry models for performance. The program director serves as the central touchpoint and also oversees faculty onboarding and a community- and industry-involved Expo. The Expo allows students to experience an event like a tech show; involves the community, faculty, and students in experiencing students' work; and markets the program to the greater community. The authors' narrative also addresses funding, legal concerns, and a longitudinal concerns of how the program has developed, considering sustainability and encouraging ongoing discussion about the future of the program.

In his case study research article "Growing Engagement Capacity at a Rural University in a Time of COVID," Patrick Danner shares the challenges of building a new program during the COVID pandemic and in a small, rural school (Misericordia University). His experience focuses on the challenges of finding collaborators; in response to complications related to social distancing, remote work, and complicated

communication processes, he engaged with programs across his university and recruited clients for his "Professional Editing" students. In this way, he demonstrates an interdisciplinary, service-learning stakeholder model based on "magical thinking" (a concept created by Joan Didion and adapted by James Dubinsky) for which his students provided valuable services to research and administrative parties across their university and enabled students to work with clients in a challenging time and in a small, rural community. Danner provides a reflective tone while including commentary from students and university clients, demonstrating the importance of university-wide relationships and service learning for students, and addressing the challenges that smaller universities may face in similar future situations to provide students with active and real-life work experiences.

In their case study research article "Connectivity, Expectations, and Expertise: Co-creation as a Model for Program Development," Katie Walkup, Shahabedin (Shahab) Sagheb, and Robert Smith share details about their program at Virginia Tech University, their external stakeholders, and the co-creation models they have used to develop and assess their program and curriculum. Their program has built an extensive network of industry-academic partnerships (growing from 3 to 75 industry partnerships in 3 years), leaning heavily on a co-creation model in which industry voices and project-based learning influence student learning and program development. Walkup et al. share their process of assessment: through six data-collection points each year, including focus groups, faculty/student discussion groups, and student questionnaires. "We examine transdisciplinary education and socio-technical innovation facilitated by the co-creation model by analyzing how students have adjusted to the educational experience offered by the program, parsing student internship data, and collecting student deliverables related to project development milestones." Through narrative about their program and data to support their growth and observations, the authors provide valuable insight into the continuing growth of a thriving program.

Continuing the Discussion

This special issue provides five models for program development, assessment, revision, and sustainability; however, other models are working in TPC programs around the globe. This issue then begins the conversation and challenges other program administrators and faculty to reflect on their programs, consider their own practices, and evaluate what other collaborative models are working. In this way, we can expand the narrative to also consider how stakeholders—e.g.,

students, faculty, administrators, industry experts, potential employers—are valuable resources in the processes of assessment, development, integration, and network building (among others). The narrative also needs to include how stakeholder engagement can improve TPC programs and instruction as related to cross- and intercultural communication, globalization, diversity, technology development and research, program expansion, and recruitment and retention.

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