

Writing for Organizational Change: A Programmatic Assessment of an On-Campus Service-Learning Partnership

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Abstract: This program showcase draws on the long history of client-based service-learning scholarship in professional and technical communication. The authors add to this conversation by focusing on two underexplored areas: writing toward workplace change and partnering with on-campus organizations. The authors argue that, when fully integrated into a professional writing program, course partnerships with evolving on-campus organizations may allow students to study and practice writing for change, perhaps more fully than they can when their client is an off-campus organization that may be less accessible physically and conceptually. To illustrate their argument, the authors describe a multiyear partnership between their university's writing center and professional writing program.

Keywords: service learning, client-based projects

In the past two decades, numerous Professional and Technical Communication (PTC) scholars have argued for the pedagogical and programmatic benefits of client-based service-learning projects that ask students to write for, with, and about community organizations. In the 25 years since Thomas N. Huckin (1997) argued for service-learning in technical communication, scholars such as Jeffrey T. Grabill (2004), J. Blake Scott (2008), and James Dubinsky (2010) have studied how we may engage our communities while providing professional and technical writing students with "real" audiences and purposes for writing the kinds of documents they may encounter in PTC jobs. In many cases, client-based service-learning projects are viewed as part of an ongoing job preparation process in PTC programs. When fully integrated into a PTC program, service-learning projects often function as learning locations where students can apply the theory they learn in the classroom in workplace practice.

This program showcase describes an ongoing multiyear service-learning partnership we developed in the professional writing program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), a four-year public university situated in the heart of downtown Birmingham. By immersing them in an evolving organization, the partnership helps students learn to write toward change. More specifically, we describe how the partnership seeks to help students learn how professional and technical research and communication practices can help drive positive changes within a professional organization and manage those changes that are less ideal and/or beyond the organization's control.

We have both integrated client-based service-learning into nearly all our PTC courses, but we focus here on our ongoing partnership between the professional writing program and writing center for three main reasons. First, focusing on one partnership allows us to include detailed accounts of our rationale and methods. Second, this focus allows us to include detailed information about the types of projects our students have completed. Third, and perhaps most importantly, our different roles within the partnership allow us to offer different programmatic perspectives regarding the collaboration. Bacha, a professor in the professional writing program at UAB, provides the voice of the faculty member, while Wells, UAB's writing center director, provides the voice of the client. Increasingly, scholars include the clients' voices in their assessment and research about service-learning projects, but the scholarship overall still tends to focus more on the faculty members' perspectives. By presenting part of our argument as narratives from the perspectives of client (Wells) and instructor (Bacha), we hope to continue filling this gap and add to a conversation that integrates client and instructor views on service-learning. This approach also allows us to provide a model that readers can adapt for developing sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships between PTC programs and on-campus organizations experiencing change.

Professional Writing and the Writing Center at UAB

Our courses include students with diverse goals and experience because our department offers several different options for focusing on Professional and Technical Communication (PTC). Professional Writing is one of four concentrations students can select when working toward a B.A. in English and one of two focus areas of the department's new B.A. in Writing and Media. Additionally, the English department offers a minor in Professional Writing, which is an attractive option for students from outside of English. Finally, all English majors must take one professional writing course as part of their degree requirements. The range of student goals and levels of interest in PTC can create challenges when selecting course outcomes. In one example, all PTC courses must include some overview of basic concepts because English majors who concentrate in literature, creative writing, and linguistics often come to the 300 and 400-level courses without any background in PTC. For these students, our courses may offer their only opportunity to practice writing for non-academic audiences and produce common workplace documents. On the other hand, students concentrating in PTC as part of the English or Writing and Media major may have lots of experience with professional writing, particularly if they have completed an internship as their

capstone experience, as many professional writing concentrators do.

Client-based service-learning offers many advantages within our program, including helping bridge and even embrace the knowledge gaps among our students. The collaborative nature of these projects means students with more PTC experience become group leaders who gain leadership experience while also helping less experienced students. Further, our experiences support Huckin's (1997) claim that service-learning in technical writing courses offers students "better writing skills and opportunities for civic education" (p. 57). We find our students' products are often much more sophisticated when they are paired with a "real" client, and the students often see their work as more than just a classroom project. Further, incorporating service-learning into many courses builds a human element into the PTC program overall, meaning that students leave the PTC major or minor with a strong sense of how professional and technical communicators work within real human contexts that can be messy, stressful, and ever-changing. Finally, service-learning provides our students an opportunity to conduct primary research activities discussed in most PTC handbooks and collections like those from Tim Peebles (2003) and James Dubinsky (2004). According to Kelli Cargile Cook (2014), requiring fieldwork methods like interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, and archival research helps students gain a stronger understanding of what their clients need and how their clients will eventually use the documents they create (p. 37-39). Our students have not only conducted these research activities but have also applied their research results as they worked with clients and made rhetorical choices. Primary research fits particularly well at UAB, given the strong university-city connection that even led to the "city as classroom" theme becoming a central part of our new core curriculum.

Along with the benefits, service-learning projects in PTC courses can also present pedagogical challenges, especially when students collaborate with off-campus organizations. Off-campus partners may offer only limited access that prevents students from becoming fully aware of the organization's external pressures, ongoing changes, and plans. Students may only interact with a few members of the organization (and sometimes only one). Further, students may have limited access to their clients' workplace when partnering with an off-campus organization. Even when schedules are considered well before a service-learning project begins, students may only visit the partner's site a few times. These limitations situate students "outside" the organization and can create a flawed sense of rhetorical awareness and rhetorical affordance.

If the students remain in the position of outsider for the duration of the project, the rhetorical artifacts they produce will not necessarily be user-centered. In our experiences, what the students produce often only matches the needs of the contact person they work with during the project cycle. Unless that contact person is the only person in the organization who will use those documents, the students may miss a fundamental principle embedded in most contemporary approaches to PTC pedagogy. To be truly user-centered, the documents need to match the needs of all the organization's employees in content, style, and reading level. That level of user-centeredness can only occur if the students interact with the organization's employees, learn the actual steps the employees take to complete work-related

tasks, and learn the discourse the employees use to describe their own workplace practices (see Clay Spinuzzi, 2003). These challenges may be particularly intense when the project's deliverables are connected to organizational change, since understanding how an organization is evolving requires even greater insider perspective.

Pairing students with an on-campus organization may address the challenges of access and outsider status and help better introduce students to rhetorical situations revolving around organizational change. The proximity and accessibility of on-campus partners allow students to become immersed in the organization's discourse in ways that help them see how that discourse contributes to changing workplace practices. Working with a university's writing center, for example, offers a situation where the students are already enmeshed—as university members themselves—in that organization's larger institution. This physical and intellectual proximity can help students better understand the institutional pressures that the organization faces and how the organization is responding. Perhaps more importantly, partnering with an organization whose broader institution is more familiar may allow students to go deeper into their study of how organizations use professional communication to deal with external pressures.

University organizations like writing centers certainly offer great examples of workplaces that are frequently pressured, and sometimes forced, to adjust their practices. Major changes can happen without notice and have immediate consequences. In one example, an increase or decrease in enrollment may alter the organization's budget. These changes may be hard for the organization to manage on its own, especially if a decreased budget means reducing payroll, but it does create an incredible learning opportunity for students to see first-hand how professional writing and research may be used to help organizations change, grow, and thrive amid external forces. And, this type of partnership often produces a high potential for the students to see how their work impacts the organization years after they have finished a client-based project. Such partnerships may help students understand how they can use the products they create to become agents of organizational change.

When working with an on-campus organization, students may be even more motivated to be agents of change, since the college or university is their primary community (or one of them). When they learn organizations face funding cutbacks and pressures, even when their tuition dollars are increasing, they may be even more likely to question what is going on in their community and even more likely to become agents of change than they would be for off-campus partners. From a programmatic perspective, partnering with a university-based client like a writing center may also allow the PTC program to function more as insiders and to develop a more varied array of client-based experiences for their students, such as internships, student organizations, and course-based projects that all involve writing and research toward organizational change. A partnership with a university-based client can provide students a fuller, more nuanced understanding of how language in action functions so that they may be better equipped to write and research for change. As our experiences will demonstrate, PTC students can be the kind of change agents that David Allen Sapp and Robbin D. Crabtree (2002),

Brenton D. Faber (2002), and Grabill (2004) described when they partner with an on-campus organization like a writing center.

Programmatically Reframing the Goals of Service-Learning Partnerships

In this section, we offer our perspectives as the client (Wells) and the faculty member (Bacha) in the service-learning project. We begin with narrative from Wells to provide context for why the UAB writing center provided the ideal client for a service-learning project focused on writing for change.

Wells: The UAB writing center underwent several major changes during the roughly four-year period that is our focus. These changes included the loss of a full-time staff person who was responsible for keeping records, scheduling appointments, managing the tutors' schedules, and communicating policies to students and faculty. Happily, I successfully argued for bringing back and ultimately even upgrading this position, but the interim period without the full-time staff member greatly changed the center's day-to-day operations. Despite losing this staff position, the writing center also expanded greatly during this time, often due to increasing enrollments and other changes that were beyond my control. Specifically, the center's number of tutoring sessions, clients, and operating hours all increased dramatically. New services were added, including synchronous online tutoring (the center had only offered asynchronous to that point). To manage the increased traffic, writing center budget increases were approved to hire student front desk staff and more tutors, and the center was permitted to adopt a commonly used online scheduling and record-keeping system, WOnline. In sum, the center was navigating the loss of a full-time staff position, the addition of part-time tutoring and front desk positions, a new online system for keeping records and scheduling, and increased usage, clients, and services.

Professional documents helped the tutors and me manage these changes. Writing center scholarship supports this observation—journals and blogs are filled with examples of how centers use professional communication to enact their day-to-day work, initiate change in their organization, and navigate the currents of their broader institutions. The topic even received book-length treatment in R. Mark Hall's (2017) *Around the Texts of Writing Center Work: An Inquiry-Based Approach to Tutor Education*. Hall argues, as I have observed, that print and digital documents play an essential role in the writing center, particularly in educating tutors and building community among a part-time, high-turnover staff. In one example, without a full-time staff member, the writing center needed internal documents to inform its part-time staff about workplace policies and procedures. Losing the full-time staff position also meant the center needed clearer external documents for writing center clients, since we no longer had a person to do the time-intensive work of communicating policies and services one-on-one when students called, emailed, or dropped by. WOnline, the scheduling and record-keeping system the center adopted, is not only important as a professional digital tool itself but also because of the professional communication required to help staff and clients use it. Finally, documents like annual reports and newsletters helped

communicate that increased funding for tutoring staff and resources were paying off and advocate for bringing back the staff position. Specifically, the writing center needed attractive, well-designed documents to share its success and to argue that further growth would be impossible without increased support.

Due to the sheer number of professional documents needed to support the center's many changes, some of the professional writing needs could not be handled internally. Most importantly, the center needed a living professional document all staff members could use to stay informed about the writing center's policies, services, and procedures. The center needed an easy-to-access policy library and manual that staff members could reference while completing day-to-day tasks. The same document also needed to help new employees adjust to their roles inside the organization. While I was navigating changes at UAB's writing center, Bacha was looking for ways to increase service-learning opportunities throughout the university's professional writing program. As described below, the center's professional writing needs fit perfectly with the pedagogical and programmatic changes Bacha was looking to make to the professional writing program through the development of service-learning partnerships.

Bacha: Before developing any client-based service-learning partnership, I start with a programmatic and pedagogical assessment of my course. This approach helps accomplish one important aspect of any client-based partnership, as Danielle Nielson (2016) argued, "Ideally, the service performed corresponds to the student's course work for the class in which the service is embedded" (p. 237). In other words, by establishing the pedagogical goals of the course before approaching a potential client, I ensure whatever the students produce will match those specific goals. Determining how students would be situated within a service-learning partnership with the UAB writing center was no different. Around the time Wells received the news that the writing center would be losing its staff member, I was redeveloping and preparing to teach a technical communication course. One of my main pedagogical goals, and one of our overall program goals, was to have students produce user-centered documents for actual people. I wanted to find a non-profit organization that would allow students access to the actual workplace environment so they could interact with the organization's employees while they worked.

The more I learned about the challenges Wells was facing in the writing center, the more interested I became in developing a service-learning partnership with the organization. As our conversations and the situation at the center progressed, it became clear to me that losing the full-time staff member would have long-term implications for the writing center. Based on Wells' descriptions of the situation, it appeared that the writing center was losing a pivotal aspect of how the organization functioned. From a technical communication standpoint, the organization was losing an important piece of how Wells communicated to the organization's staff and clients. It was this discovery and this gap in the center's technical communication needs that shifted our general conversations toward developing a service-learning partnership that focused on writing for organizational change.

Specifically, Wells wanted to produce what would become the *University Writing Center (UWC) Policies and Procedures Manual* to help the organization fill the technical communication gap associated with losing its fulltime staff member, gaining more part-time employees, and adopting a new online scheduling and record-keeping system. Wells' goal was to create a document that would become a shared repository of knowledge and that would help the organization's employees communicate to each other the policies they needed to follow when interacting with students and what day-to-day activities they needed to do to keep the organization running smoothly. In addition, the document would help Wells continue to establish a stronger community and an "everyone knows everything" mentality among the writing center's employees, which was necessary now that the center lacked a full-time presence to manage scheduling and other front desk work and keep employees on the same page.

Learning how to build and produce content for a policies and procedures manual directly corresponded to the learning outcomes I had developed for my technical communication course. Part of what I learned from talking to Wells about the organization is that many of the tutors and front desk staff often did not interact with each other for extended periods on a regular basis. As part-time employees, their schedules often do not overlap. The document would need to fill that communication gap as well so the employees could "talk" to each other even if they rarely saw each other. The document needed to be written from the perspective of the employees and, as much as possible, written in their own words. Large sections of the document needed to be written as a dialogue between two employees helping each other understand the in-context activities of their job-related duties, rather than as an out-of-context list of managerial expectations. Lastly, because of where the writing center was located on campus, students would easily be able to conduct the type of observation-based and interactive research activities I was looking for from a service-learning partner (see Table 1).

First Attempt: Technical Writing Course
Assignment Description
During the client-based project, we will be working with the University Writing Center to create the UWC Policies and Procedures Manual. Specifically, students will be assigned groups and each group will be given a section of the manual to research and then produce (your documents will contain both text and visuals). The document will be published and, starting next semester, will be used by the Writing Center employees on a regular basis. Although this is not a typical group project because each group will be solely responsible for their own sections, we will work as a class to edit each other's work to make sure it is consistent and can function together as one large document.
Required Research
Each group is required to schedule and conduct an intake interview and a follow-up interview with our client. The intake interview is your only chance to gather the information you will need to start working on your portion of the manual, so make sure you gain a clear understanding of what you will be writing about. During your second interview, you will share your work with our client. This step of the process must be completed because our client needs to approve your portion of the manual. In addition, students will also need to spend some time inside the writing center observing the organization's employees while they work and will need to collect visuals for their portion of the manual. Our goal will be to have at least one image on each page of the final document.
Required Deliverables
Weekly Progress Reports, Technical Editing, Final Document Design Proposal, The Final Document

Table 1 — Summary of assignment sheet provided to technical writing students during the first iteration of our partnership. This was a six-week project.

As Table 1 illustrates, my technical communication students were split into groups, each of which was assigned one out of nine predetermined sections of the manual. To complete their section of the document, each group needed to perform three different activities. First, the students needed to become subject experts. Second, they needed to find out how the organization functioned before it lost its full-time staff member. Third, they needed to understand how their specific section would help the organization's employees adjust to their changing workplace. The only way the students could complete those activities was by entering the discourse of the organization. In other words, the students needed to work directly with Wells and the center's staff. Those interactions and interviews would also need to happen multiple times.

After five weeks of working directly with Wells and the center's employees, the students compiled their work and began drafting a design for the 40 pages of content they had developed. As an instructor, I was very impressed with the content and Wells agreed that, as a first draft, the document my students had produced fit the needs of the organization. Part of what made the project successful— and different from other client-based service-learning projects I had previously run in

my classes—was how much time the students had to spend involved in discourse with each stakeholder group who worked in the writing center. To prepare content for their section of the *UWC Policies and Procedures Manual* that would successfully function within the writing center, the students needed to first become part of the organization’s discourse. The students needed to become “insiders” and, as Catherine Matthews and Beverly B. Zimmerman (1999) argued, “[this] may not be possible unless students spend enough time in [an] organization to take part in its daily activities and to see for themselves the people it helps and the services it provides” (p. 399). The students not only needed to use the organization’s vocabulary in their writing, but they needed to also base their instructions on how actual employees completed their work inside the physical writing center.

Getting the students to situate themselves inside the organization was what made their work different from some of the work students had completed in previous client-based projects. For example, if the students had not spent time interacting with and observing the organization’s employees, they may have missed learning about the staff members’ comfort with technology and may have mistakenly prepared their content for a more technologically advanced user population. In essence, the ethnographic research activities the students performed helped them craft a document any employee in the organization could use and would not exclude anyone from the “everyone knows everything” directive provided by the client.

Second Attempt: Technical Writing Course
Assignment Description
During the client-based project, we will be working with the University Writing Center and revising the UWC Policies and Procedures Manual. Specifically, working in pairs or working individually, students will be given a section of the manual to research and revise (your documents will contain both text and visuals). The document we will be creating will be published and used by Writing Center employees on a regular basis.
Required Research
During this project, you will need to schedule and conduct an intake interview with our client. Although you are free to try and talk to our client more, the intake interview must be completed by the end of week two (I will get a report from the client regarding how the interviews went). Your intake interview is the only way you can gather the information you need to start revising your portion of the manual, to check the accuracy of the document you are given, and to make sure if anything needs to be added or removed from your section. In addition, you will also need to spend some time interacting with and sharing your drafts with the organization’s employees.
Required Deliverables
Content Markup Workshop, XML Document, Plain Text Document, Formatted Images

Table 2 – Summary of assignment sheet provided to technical writing students during the second iteration of the partnership. This was a five-week project.

Second Attempt: Document Design Course
Assignment Description
During the client-based Professional Document Redesign Project, you will create documents working professional and technical communicators design on a regular basis. The goal of this project is to get you to create your own unique page design by redesigning an 8.5 X 11-inch document currently in public use: The University Writing Center’s UWC Policies and Procedures Manual. Obviously, this project has a real audience. The main challenge of this assignment is that you are not allowed to use any pre-formatted templates. Additionally, the color palette, text, and images you will be working with have already been prepared for you. Although this will not impact your grade on the project, the Director of UWC will select one design that best matches the organization’s needs and will use that design for the official document.
Required Deliverables
Design Sketches, Font Book, InDesign Page Templates, Fully Designed and Paginated PDF

Table 3 – Summary of assignment sheet provided to document design students during the second iteration of the partnership. This was a five-week project.

Admittedly, the first version of the *UWC Policies and Procedures Manual* was somewhat lacking. Balancing both content production and document design proved challenging for the students in a relatively short amount of time (six weeks). However, based on the success of the first attempt and because the writing center remained accessible, Wells and I decided to continue developing the partnership and provided an opportunity for other students to continue the work. As Table 2 and Table 3 illustrate, the second attempt was a little different. Using what I learned from the first project, I decided to take an approach other PTC scholars and theorists have suggested and split the work between two different courses (see J. Blake Scott, 2004; H. Allen Brizee, 2008; Giuseppe Getto, Liza Potts, Michael J. Salvo, & Kathie Gossett, 2013). As shown in Table 2, a new group of technical communication students with the same pedagogical outcomes I describe above would reexamine the document’s content. Students in a document design class I was developing, as shown in Table 3, would work on the document’s design. The work the document design students would need to complete to revise the design of the *UWC Policies and Procedures Manual* fit the pedagogical outcomes of the document design course I was developing. I wanted the students to design a professional document that required them to explore the context in which that document would be used and test their designs with actual users.

As with our first attempt, students involved in the second service-learning project had to work directly with the organization and its employees to successfully navigate the requirements of both courses. During the project, the document design students needed to understand how the manual would be used, where it would live once it was produced, and how much content it would eventually include. All that information needed to be provided by Wells, the organization’s employees, and the technical communication students. Meaning, for their work to be successful, the

document design students needed to interact with both the client and members of the technical communication class. On the other hand, the technical writing students needed to know how much technological expertise the writing center employees had, when the staff would most frequently use the document, and for what purposes they would need to access the content contained within the document. The technical communication students would also need to understand what changes within the organization their section of the document would be addressing and how closely the first draft came to helping the organization's employees adjust to those changes. In addition, the technical communication students needed to convert their work into XML and would need to use tags that exactly matched the InDesign style tags used by the designers in the document design course.

As with the first project, the final deliverables the technical communication and document design students produced were viewed as successful by Wells and me. Like before, part of what made the project successful was how much time the students had to spend involved in discourse with each stakeholder group within the organization. To prepare the content and to design a document that would successfully function within the evolving writing center, both sets of students needed to first become part of the organization's discourse. The students needed to become "insiders." They not only needed to use the organization's vocabulary but also to create a document that matched the client's "brand" and was appropriate for an audience with mixed technological expertise. In addition, the two sets of students had to communicate electronically with each other so they could work collectively.

The cross-course collaboration that developed by breaking the project up and having two sets of students from different courses work on the *UWC Policies and Procedures Manual* offered one of the project's most significant advantages. Students not only found themselves embedded within a client organization to understand its discourse and changes, but they also collaborated closely with another group to complete the work. This added another useful layer of complexity to an already complex project, but the complexity was logistically manageable because of the proximity of the on-campus partner. Students not only created "real" documents for a client to help them manage their organization's changes, complex as that exercise alone would have been; they also created documents amid their client's many changes, meaning that they had to get used to the idea that answers to their questions may shift as they were working. Further, they experienced working with another group of outside collaborators that mimicked a different department in a workplace. This complex situation may be replicable with a community partner, but working with a close, accessible, on-campus partner allowed students to more easily do the research and collaboration necessary to navigating this complex situation successfully. From the instructor's perspective, the proximity of the on-campus organization was incredibly beneficial for managing the workload of a complex, two-course service-learning project. Bacha and Wells met on many occasions to discuss the project, and being able to walk across campus compared to driving across town made the situation more sustainable for both, especially since Bacha had two different classes engaged in the service-learning project at the same time.

Some Conclusions: Preparing Professional Writing Students to Engage in the Discourse of Change

As we have demonstrated, the service-learning partnership we developed between our professional writing program and writing center has created an opportunity for our students to engage in activities that revolve around organizational change. At its core, the service-learning partnership we have developed stems from our belief that Professional and Technical Communication (PTC) students should be afforded as many opportunities as possible to interact with actual clients and produce rhetorical artifacts that “live” outside the classroom.

The partnership has proven mutually beneficial for the writing center and professional writing program. The document that was developed during our first attempts is currently being used by the writing center’s employees and has helped the organization overcome some of the challenges it faced when the full-time staff member’s position was eliminated. Even now that the full-time position has been reinstated, the document supports the center’s work by carefully outlining practices that may otherwise get lost in the shuffle of day-to-day busy-ness. In addition, the partnership has allowed us to further integrate other service-learning opportunities through our professional writing program. Programmatically, this potential for future work is one of the major advantages offered by the kind of on-campus service-learning partnership we describe, especially since its ongoing nature provides students with histories to look back on when they begin writing new organizational documents. Like the projects described in the previous section, all ongoing work has focused on helping the writing center to manage its ongoing changes.

How we developed and continued the service-learning partnership over the years directly relates to a number of conscious decisions we have made. Along the way, we have also both learned a number of important lessons associated with building this type of partnership. In what follows, we offer four recommendations for professional writing faculty and program administrators who are interested in developing similar on-campus partnerships. The recommendations also emphasize ways to build a sustainable partnership with the potential for ongoing work. Our hope is that readers will not only get ideas for course projects that help students learn to write for and amid organizational change, but also for thinking about how developing on-campus partnerships may help them manage new circumstances and drive exciting changes at their own institutions.

Our first recommendation is to be transparent with students about the kinds of challenges and changes the client is experiencing as early in the process as possible. Explaining to the students that they are about to engage in an activity requiring them to learn how to write for and amid change will influence how the students approach the assignment. Communicating this point early in the process helps establish an understanding among the students that even the most mundane documents they produce should eventually function as a means for the organization to manage change and promote positive change. As Stuart Blythe (2007) argued

when discussing the impact mundane documents can have on an organization, “Rhetorical action is a way of exercising transformative capacity because so much of an institution and its maintenance involves reading and writing” (p. 181). Making this point clear to students early helps them understand that they are using writing toward action, and more specifically, action focused on changing the organization or managing changes outside its control. For the students engaged in the types of assignments we discussed earlier, the documents they completed as part of their course work were the result of conscious decisions and rhetorical actions intended to transform and maintain the organization’s relationship with the larger institution.

Our second recommendation deals with student-client engagement. Quite simply, we suggest that instructors take advantage of the proximity of campus partners. Our partnership has worked in large part because Bacha encouraged students to visit the writing center regularly to observe and talk to staff members and Wells created an environment that welcomed these regular, and sometimes spontaneous, visits. As much as possible, the students were invited to see themselves as part of the writing center’s team, which was made easier by the fact that, as students, they were welcome to use the center and even apply for peer tutoring positions. When talking with students, we regularly underscored that learning how to write for the writing center meant learning about the center itself as an evolving workplace.

As we discussed earlier, when students are paired with an off-campus client during service-learning projects, the interaction between the students and the client may be rather minimal, perhaps too minimal to allow this kind of learning. Time constraints and travel concerns may limit the amount of time the students get to spend with the client and the amount of time they spend “on site.” Working with an on-campus organization is different. Although time constraints are still an issue, the issue of travel becomes less of a concern due to the shared location. This provides the opportunity for the clients and students to meet more regularly. Plus, the location of the organization provides the students with an opportunity to make more spontaneous visits, which allows the students an opportunity to engage with the employees and study the organization more fully. The students not only have a chance to work with a “real” client, but they also have the opportunity to practice examining how an organization functions, a skill they can later use during an internship or job.

Third, the type of service-learning partnership we have developed also works, from one perspective, because we have a shared sense of commitment and see our own participation as a mandatory part of the process. We both agree with W. Michele Simmons (2007), who claimed, “Our students must leave us believing that they have the power to bring about change because they are able to articulate their understanding of a situation and the audience affected by that situation” (p. 161). However, the type of understanding Simmons describes is difficult to replicate unless the students are actively involved in multiple discourses with actual stakeholders. We have both learned from our own experiences that students rarely arrive at this conclusion on their own. Whenever we present an assignment attached to the service-learning partnership we developed to students, we have learned it is best to first include engagement activities—ones the students must set up themselves and others we set up for them—into the requirements for the

assignment. Usually this includes an in-class introductory presentation by Wells, an intake interview completed before students start working, and a mandatory follow-up interview where the students take their work to Wells for approval before they submit it for a grade. As we demonstrated earlier, once a majority of the students become embedded in the project, most of them move beyond the required meeting times and start interacting with the client more frequently. The more interactions we can promote among the students, client, and instructor, the better. Understanding how an audience will be impacted by a situation means studying the situation and having direct knowledge of how the work they produce will change the workplace situation of the writing center employees.

Our final recommendation deals with having multiple classes and/or groups work on the same projects simultaneously and having students work on the same projects over multiple semesters. As we stressed earlier, when engaged in a service-learning opportunity, the students should work on projects that match the pedagogical outcomes established for the course or experience. This can be challenging if what the client needs at the end of the project requires multiple skillsets to complete. In many cases, this means the students would need to learn the skills they do not yet possess on their own time, which in itself is not necessarily a problem. However, if the students need to spend too much extra time learning a new skill not included in the course outcomes, they risk sacrificing time that should be spent on the actual course material. Additionally, the work they produce will often suffer, even if they are able to learn adequate outside skills to complete a project. To mitigate those concerns, for longer projects like the *UWC Policies and Procedures Manual* we discussed earlier, we have developed a practice where students in different classes are broken up into project teams. Thus, while working on the project the students are required to only work on the parts of the project that match the course outcomes.

Finally, we have found that having students work on the same project or revising the work other students have completed over multiple semesters is a necessity. Even small projects can work better across multiple semesters because such work can be more productive when viewed as part of a larger campaign that unfolds over time. Completing work in multiple stages over several semesters has many benefits beyond simply additional time. Pedagogically, the professional writing majors and minors who have taken our courses get to see *change* in action because they will more than likely work with the writing center on multiple occasions. The *UWC Policies and Procedures Manual* provides a great example of this. Some of the students in the document design course that redesigned the manual were students in the technical writing course that produced the first draft of the document. In this case, those students not only got to see how revising their own work would make the document a better fit for the context of the organization, but they also got to see how the text they produced was edited and changed. To continue this trend, we will once again be revisiting the *UWC Policies and Procedures Manual* project during the spring 2024 semester. Wells will once again serve as client, and Bacha's technical writing students will spend the first part of the semester immersing themselves within the Writing Center's organizational culture so they can update the document to reflect the changes that have occurred within the organization since it was last updated. These changes are many, as the COVID-19 pandemic significantly

changed the center's work, and the post-pandemic center looks different still. While the pandemic provides just one example, the overall takeaway is that on-campus organizations like writing centers will always be navigating changes that depend on effective, user-centered professional communication with which students may assist.

When we began writing this article, we wanted to avoid the article's take-away to be simply, "writing centers make good partners in client-based projects." This is part of our argument, yes, but we also wanted to show how this partnership offers strategies readers can use to get students immersed in and situated within an organization's discourse of change. Programmatically, the approach to service-learning we have described has helped our students gain a different perspective regarding the purposes and processes of PTC practices. Many of our students have come into our PTC courses with a view of writing as linear and static. They have often had an oversimplified view of the writing process that looks like: learn about the audience, learn about the purpose for writing, gather information, produce document. What our students have learned, much to their surprise, is that their very audiences, purposes, and circumstances can, and often do, shift as they work on a project in a professional setting. They have also been surprised by the number of unknowns they encountered while engaging in the type of research activities we have discussed. Learning to write about, for, and within these unknowns has become a key learning opportunity for students enrolled in our program. Unlike our previous attempts to incorporate service-learning opportunities into our individual course, collaborating with an ever-changing and accessible organization like the one we describe in this article has provided a sustainable partnership that provides those learning opportunities over multiple semesters and for multiple courses.

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