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WRIT 4995

Senior Capstone Reflection

Introduction

Being a technical writing and communication major, one of the greatest struggles that I've had to wrestle with while completing my degree was understanding what a technical writer truly is. One of the very first articles I had to read as a TWC major in WRIT 3001 was *The Case Against Defining Technical Writing* by Jo Allen (1990), which as you can tell by the name, discusses why we shouldn't try and put a restraining label on the field. "Ongoing attempts to define technical writing are inevitably confounded by problems caused by an excessively broad focus, which obscures the basis and usefulness of the definition, or by an excessively narrow focus, which arbitrarily – and sometimes oddly – relegates samples of writing as in or out of the realm of technical writing" (pg. 68). Almost every TWC class that I've taken has made an effort to discuss this confusing topic; none have led to consensus on what the field encompasses. Some might find this disconcerting that their bachelor's degree in TWC doesn't really have a defined area, but I find it as a breath of fresh air. Also, after reading *The Golden Age of Technical Communication*, there was an interesting comment made about the profession of TWC, "a common (though not universal) underlying assumption [is] that the purpose of a technical communication program is to prepare future technical communication professionals" (pg. 330-331). When I first read about this assumption in my intro TWC course, I realized that although we assume that everyone studying technical writing will become a tech writer, few were actually going on to be a technical writer explicitly. This degree allows me to use my skills in so many

different areas, I've even been able to get internships in PR and marketing and continue to be able to use my skills.

My classes have allowed me to write journalism articles, do research on environmental issues, understand the complexity of language, and even create complex digital projects. The purpose of my senior capstone portfolio is to highlight some of my favorite projects that I have revisited and revised in order to show the knowledge I have gained through the TWC program. Each of the pieces I chose to showcase in my TWC capstone portfolio was picked because it features a different aspect of the degree that I got to learn and expand on throughout my four years.

Blue Line Light Rail Extension (BLRT) Magazine Article

This was possibly my favorite project as I loved every aspect of making it. One of my minors is journalism, so this magazine article gave me the perfect opportunity to compliment my technical writing skills with those of my journalism skills. Document design is something I've often had to do for student groups and other volunteer organizations that I have been a part of, so getting the chance to improve these skills to look more professional was extremely helpful. This project forced me to consider so much more than just the information I was researching but also the organization of the pages, the fonts, the colors, the images and the infographs. Some of these things were easy, such as picking out the color theme for the magazine as it was about a metro transit project, I just borrowed the color scheme from their logo to create a more cohesive feel. Figuring out how to use my newly purchased publishing software and deciding how I wanted to incorporate headings/images in with my text was a major process. Learning to use new software programs was important to developing one of the 10 core career competencies that CLA defines in order to be ready for a career after graduation; the competency that I developed with this

project was innovation and creativity. This project was a great opportunity to learn and create something new that I could showcase, culminating multiple skills that I have acquired and put them together in a visually interesting assignment. This project was most exciting to me because once I finished my magazine spread, it felt like a real product that I could create at a job in the future. There were a few changes and fixes that needed to be made of course; I worked on updating the infographics as numbers and dollar amounts had changed, and also worked to incorporate an accurate map of the light rail into the infographic with major highways included in order to make it more spatially accessible.

Dakota Access Pipeline Environmental (DAPL) Research Paper

The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) research paper was one of my first major papers that I had to write within the major as WRIT 3102W was one of the first TWC classes that I had taken. This was an exciting project as we were expected to do professional level research paper on a major environmental issue, I chose the pipeline construction as my environmental project because it was timely and proximally relevant to me. Interestingly enough, choosing a project that was so recent actually posed its own challenges in which this senior project has allowed me to rectify; being that the pipeline became operational in 2017 there was very little literature about that specific pipeline available so many of my sources are from other similar pipelines. One realization that I had while revising my paper was that I did not include any maps of the pipeline or where the Standing Rock reservation was in relation to it, which I feel hindered the understanding and significance of my research, so this was one noticeable change I made in order to make the paper more coherent. I also did not get the opportunity to address the social/cultural impacts of this construction project, so these important changes were made in the recent months as I worked to revise my projects for the senior capstone portfolio. Adding a

section that dives deeper into the social/cultural impacts allowed me to develop career readiness skills in community engagement and ethical reasoning. I wanted to use this research to accurately inform others of what effects this pipeline has on Minnesota and our neighboring states, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and the environment. The involvement of a Native American tribe really brought out the necessity to ethically analyze this issue also; taking a look at both short- and long-term consequences of this construction and what can be done now.

Female Athletes Don't Throw Like Girls

In WRIT 3244W we learned *How Words Change the World* which was quite appropriately the name of the course as well. After finding more sources in order to expand upon my initial research on the topic, I found some really interesting studies on women's representation in the news and how they represent themselves on social media. Although I had already written on a campaign that a collegiate athletic team had used to promote positive language surrounding the discourse of women athletes, I felt it was important to say more about how this is a complicated and thin line that they walk between either being too feminine or masculine in their line of work. Being a woman who played sports in college, this topic was very important to me; it also required me to use the core competency of analytical and critical thinking due to the broad range of views there are regarding this subject. It was interesting to read about multiple perspectives and think deeper about the positive and negative effects that language can have on a group of people.

Portfolio Website

Yes, the website itself is part of my portfolio as well; I couldn't miss an opportunity to show off my new coding skills that I learned in my WRIT 4662 course. Originally, I had planned on just using a site hosting platform like Wix or Wordpress, but they didn't allow me to

customize my projects and information as much as I needed, so I decided to put in a little extra work and design my own website from scratch now that I have the skills to do so. Since this website is essentially the culmination of everything I have learned through my degree program and I think it has created an opportunity to show off a pseudo-portfolio that exemplifies my core competency of career management. It shows my exploration of different career opportunities that may be viable options for me, such as structured authoring and content management through my website, document design and journalistic skills through my magazine and thorough research abilities in my DAPL/Female Athletes Don't Throw Like Girls papers.

Conclusion

This degree program has been an invaluable resource for me as I continue on in my career; I've been able to learn so much, not just about writing but also coding, document design, journalism, content management, client proposals and so much more. I feel I have gained such a broad spectrum of skills during this 4-year process that I feel greatly prepared to start a career in whatever field I so choose. Technical writing – I believe – opens the door to many different paths because of its wide variety of learning which again goes into the reason why I believe that not defining the field of TWC as strictly one thing is so important. It has given me the ability to be a 'jack-of-all-trades' which gives me the ability to be useful in more than just one area.

Works Cited

- Allen, J. (1990). The case against defining technical writing. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 4(2), 68-77.
- Kimball, M. (2017). The Golden Age of Technical Communication. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 47(3), 330-358.