ABSTRACT

This paper explores service-learning as a mode of cultivating student stakeholders in university education. Previous studies have examined increasing student engagement through experiential learning, writing across the curriculum, and recognizing the interdisciplinarity of general education classrooms, but few have brought these elements into conversation as contexts that might foster students' sense of ownership of their education. While students are recipients of carefully planned faculty-designed curricula, this study suggests that cross-curricular programs, such as writing in the disciplines, could benefit from student input given their direct experience of writing assignments and expectations in multiple classroom environments. This study investigates, in hybrid mode (intersectional pedagogy and auto-ethnographic case study), a plan aimed at developing cross-campus knowledge about writing instruction through an inter-campus service-learning project. The featured project underscores the importance of experiential learning that enhances student estimation of writing as a mode of learning, involves students in the evaluation of campus writing curricula, and develops a sense of writing as highly valuable to university education and integral to all fields in subsequent professional lives.

TOWARD A MODEL FOR SERVICE-LEARNING IN ADVANCED WRITING CLASSROOMS: CULTIVATING INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDENT STAKEHOLDERS

Cameron Bushnell
Clemson University

Henna Messina
Eastern New Mexico University

Introduction

It is a truism to note that students are the reason that institutions of higher education exist. Although universities are unlikely to forget their missions of educating students, few have clear mechanisms for inviting students to participate in the creation of the signature product of the university: scholastic value. Kroot and Panich (2020) suggest that the university's aim of "educating people" entitles "students to be included, in some form, in the planning and execution of how knowledge about their home institutions will be produced and communicated" (p. 135). Additionally, Rutti et al. (2016), while focusing more on value for students post-graduation, make the case for service-learning during university as one significant means for empowering students in ways beyond traditional classroom routines (see also Rosenberg 2000) and suggest service-learning will "enhance the student's sense of civic responsibility and/or civic leadership" (Rutti, 2016, p. 425) in their career.

This essay looks at service-learning as one means for developing greater student engagement in university education. The scope of our work looked at the results of a service-learning project for an on-campus client, conducted by undergraduate students in five sections of advanced technical writing over three semesters. The service-learning client, a professional communication center at a large R-1 university, sought information from students about the quality of their writing education across the campus. The client, hereinafter the PCC, wanted to understand, in advance of launching a concerted Writing Across the Curriculum

program, where on campus writing instruction was already happening, and thus, what departments were likely partners for future WAC and Writing in the Discipline collaborations. One traditional method of identifying departmental partners—i.e., faculty surveys—proved to be a challenge for two main reasons: 1) bad timing given a high-level of turnover among Deans and upper administration officials; and 2) complex campus structures, given more than 55 departments, each disparate in size, student reach, and organization. To obtain timely and consistent information, we decided on a backdoor approach—surveying students—which we soon realized had an extremely fortuitous side benefit: cultivating stakeholder awareness for students.

The specific service-learning project, The Writing Across Campus Survey (Writing Survey, in brief), takes full advantage of writing: as the subject of student survey and analysis, as the medium that facilitates the interdisciplinary methodology of the project, and as the vehicle of knowledge transfer that offers a pivot point from university education to workplace communication and back again. To use an agricultural conceit suitable to our land grant university, our project encouraged cross-fertilization of ideas among teams of students working across disciplines, dug deeply into practices grounding the pedagogical practices for writing activities in various campus sites, cultivated student belonging to the university while on campus, and planted seeds that might flower into rich attachments to the collegiate sphere after graduation.

We open with a brief description of the project—which will be elaborated in an autoethnographic mode later in the paper—then we shift to discussing the contexts informing this service-learning project, which we understand as educationally "intersectional." Four pedagogical practices deeply influence this venture, experiential learning structure, writing across the curriculum (WAC) aims; interdisciplinary practices, and stakeholder theory. In other words, the Writing Survey provides an inter-campus opportunity for students to use writing to learn, to immerse themselves in diverse modes of thinking and conducting work, and to develop attachments to the university through active participation in educational content.

The Project

The authors of this essay, constituting a faculty-administrator partnership, designed, planned, and executed The Writing Survey. This partnership prepared and activated undergraduate students within several technical writing classes housed in the English Department in order to take on an internal college-level "client," the Professional Communication Center. The PCC wanted to learn where its potential partners for WAC programming existed on campus. The underlying questions motivating the client were these: where on campus, given the university's heavy emphasis on science, engineering, and business, is writing instruction already being used as a tool and strategy for learning? What, in the student view, is the quality and benefit of this writing instruction, particularly as it is being deployed in non-English classrooms? Where are the partners for building disciplinary knowledge through writing?

The project involved student-designed surveys calculated to meet the client's interest in understanding the quantity and quality of student writing, not only in a broad range of classrooms, but also in non-academic (i.e., personal) situations. The rationale for this project was that students could give the client, but also the writing instructor,

valuable feedback on their experiences of writing in a variety of classes, disclosing "pockets" of interest in writing in non-English classrooms, while also giving students practical experience and training in the kinds of writing likely required in the students' future career fields (i.e., surveys, progress reports, presentations). Additionally, the project had the potential to bring students into the process of developing the writing curriculum of which they were subject; that is, the PCC planned on future faculty development programs in WAC and WID, making these students stakeholders and co-producers, and not just consumers, of their university education (Langrafe et al., 2020).

In schematic terms, The Writing Survey gave student groups responsibility for writing two short progress reports during the data collection phase; required them to collate, analyze, and present their collected data, and, finally, produce a written formal research report to the client and to the instructor.

The client-faculty partners hypothesized that the data would show what writing looked like in several disciplines and classrooms, which in turn, could be used to improve writing pedagogy and writing experience at the university. The hypothesis informed the aims of the project; students were 1) to produce for the client a portrait of the writing activity that happens across campus, not only in English classrooms, but also disciplinary classrooms across a broad array of science and engineering courses, the university's largest departments; 2) to develop a survey instrument that would be used to canvas selected students interviewed in ways that produced both qualitative and quantitative date, and 3) to analyze the results of their survey, drawing conclusions about the quantity and quality of writing instruction in its various manifestations.

The project began with several premises: 1) the university's advanced technical writing classrooms are interdisciplinary; 2) the "client" in this project is internal to the university, and 3) the writing assignments are non-traditional in that they were student-designed and deployed. In the next section this essay examines various elements that contextualize the student work proceeded, asking: 1) what is beneficial, even necessary, to project aims about interdisciplinary work environment; 2) what unique contributions to the university itself arise from university students working with a university client, and 3) how does this project cultivate student stakeholders invested in university curriculum and in more long-lasting ties to the university after graduation?

The Contexts

The Writing Survey was conducted as an intersectional activity. Its contexts include client-based practices, writing across the curriculum, interdisciplinarity, and stakeholder theory. Each of these contexts is discussed below before we turn to the case study, the project methodology, and the project outcomes. At end, we make recommendations for future development of service-learning as a component of WAC programs.

Client-based Projects in the Advanced Writing Classroom

Working through the questions raised above, we begin by detailing the benefits and need for interdisciplinary environments. The two-part short answer is that 1) interdisciplinary is the nature of the modern work environment, and 2) more immediately interdisciplinary work can be a revelation to students deeply involved in learning the

thoughts and strategies of their majors. That is, the interdisciplinary writing classroom can offer comparative perspective that interrogates the singularity of a disciplinary mode.

The site of the client-based project at our institution is the advanced writing classroom. Though not the only CBP site at our university, it is one of the longest running and has proved fruitful because they are sites of interdisciplinarity (about which we say more below). Advanced writing is often a required, but not necessarily anticipated course in the careers of science and engineering undergraduate students. Our experience suggests client-based projects can change their perspectives. In our university's English department, writing courses that include client-based projects have earned a reputation for being meaningful and purposeful. Students working on projects that have a real-world client for whom work is prepared and to whom a final report is presented learn to write to meet the needs of that client. Questions concerning the rhetorical situation, which may seem esoteric and not applicable to their disciplines, e.g., questions of audience, tone, style, and language use, are made immediately relevant.

Client-based projects, part of a broad category of experiential learning that includes service-learning, study abroad, co-ops, internships, among others, has been a growing movement for two decades (Gaumer, et al. 2012, pg. 70). It has become particularly important as a tool by which the university assures students, parents, and future employers that it is adequately preparing students for real-world careers. Encouraging students to think not only beyond the classroom, but also beyond their disciplinary constraints is an important aspect of experiential learning. Experiential learning has been adopted as a strategy in the academic realms of greatest practical application. For example, Cooke & Williams (2004) suggest that experiential learning addresses the shortcomings of the business course case studies (pg. 140), which are too academic in focus and often pose crisis situations, rare in actual business operations (pg. 139). Experiential learning may be particularly important to professional and technical writing courses. Not only do students who find academic writing of little use – Kiefer and Leff (2008) describe student lackluster attitudes towards "writing tasks […that] have no real audience or purpose beyond fulfilling course assignments" – but also STEM students often think that they will not need to write once they are on the job. Kiefer and Leff (2008) have attempted to surmount this barrier through a client-based Writing for Science course that operates similarly to the one we propose here. For their course, campus and community clients volunteer to become "site partners" to the class "because they need various documents for the audiences they want to communicate with" (pg. 3); the focus of the writing in the Kiefer-Leff project was translation: students were required to "translate complex disciplinary knowledge for non-expert readers" (pg. 2).

In our venture, we have created a particular kind of client-based project, one in which technical writing students provide a service to a university "client." We describe this particular service-learning project as "client-based" so we might emphasize its inter-collegial, cohesive potential. Working against the silos that often form in response to departmentally organized campuses, that at times pit departments against one another for the same resources, internal client-based projects reach across disciplinary boundaries to create working partnerships, not only among faculty and administrators,

but also in this case among students. Also, and unlike traditional service-learning projects that most often involve partnerships with community members, client-based projects can, we suggest, identify broad range of organizations within, as well outside the university, as "clients."[i]

Client-based projects often emphasize that students will be working on "work that *matters*" (Dingus & Milovic, 2018, p. 65); authentic work projects make for committed student engagement, and "students begin to see how work really works" (Cooke & Williams, 2004, pg. 148). However, finding a client is often a major challenge (Dingus & Milovic, p. 66) and often depends on a professor's personal network of non-profit or corporate contacts (Cooke & Williams, 2004, pg. 144).[ii] The professor often has the extra pressure of choosing the "right" client, given that a "bad" client may be over- or under-involved, or may present a project that is too simplistic and not challenging (Gaumer, et al., 2012, pg. 71). Client-based projects may also require extra work from faculty. For example, those with a strong iterative focus mean that students need more frequent feedback in terms of revision and resubmission (Gaumer, et al., 2012, pg. 71). For a client-based project at University of North Texas, the professor acted as project manager for several groups of four to five students, facilitating communication between clients and students (Cooke & Williams, 2004, pg. 142). Client-based projects aimed at building "academic consultancy services" (Cooke & Williams, 2004, pg. 143) may require the involvement of outside experts. For example, an early client-based project for Venture Guide at Clemson University enlisted outside support from computer programmers, lab associates, and the project director (Cooke & Williams, 2004, pg. 142).

The challenges of client-based projects also provide potential upsides. Schmitt, et al. (2018), suggest using client-based projects to stage "productive failure" and thus have students (and clients) experience the transformation that comes with disorientation, learning from being "at sea" in a project when expectations are not met and disappointments accumulate (pg. 37). In Schmitt's view, productive failure is not a project bust, but rather a situation in which students cannot reach a final solution on their own (pg. 38), resulting in transformative learning that moves from the "disorienting dilemma," to "critical reflection," dialogue, and action (pg. 39). Risking failure is a possibility we were willing to entertain by giving students leeway in designing and executing the project.

In sum, The Writing Survey, took advantage of the existence of an interdisciplinary environment of the English department advanced writing classroom, avoided over-burdening the instructor with concerns about client suitability, and yet provided opportunity for flexibility and experimentation from students in designing elements of the assignment, risking failure and gaining in learning the consequences of decisions.

Writing Across the Curriculum

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) has always considered itself to be interdisciplinary. In a seminal article recording the first fifty years of WAC programs, Palmquist, et al. (2020) write: "WAC draws on theory, research, and practice within writing studies even as its interdisciplinary nature positions WAC at the intersection of a wide array of disciplines" (33). However, for all its focus on student writing—and indeed

it is *the* focus of WAC, which considers supporting writing as "an integral part of the learning process throughout a student's education, not merely in required writing courses but across the entire curriculum" (Principles, pg. 1)—WAC is largely a faculty-led initiative. While one strategy for assessment of WAC programming has been student surveys and focus groups, the assessment tools, like the programs, are crafted by faculty. Our project is unique in having students themselves craft the questions they will ask about writing. Each student group devised questions unique to their team, but several questions had common concerns that might be identified by their student-orientation, such as "what formats do you often have to write in?" and "how much feedback do you receive from your instructors?"

Bazerman et al., (2005), in their reference guide to writing across the curriculum (WAC), made particular note of the importance of WAC programs attending to "student position, stance, voice, and agency with[in] academic and disciplinary discourses" (98). Specifically, they espoused "the ideals of student empowerment through language" (100). Recently, student position has been seen as a way to counter an "assimilationist" nature of disciplinary discourses (Villanueva 2001, Delpit 1993, McCrary 2001, LeCourt 1996). That is, if disciplinary discourses tend toward the homogeneity of standard discourse, then "WAC instructors [need to…] become aware of the voices students bring with them from their cultures" (LeCourt, 1996, 101). Although beyond the scope of this paper, these scholars bring to our attention the work that interdisciplinary environments can do towards increasing inclusivity in classroom settings.

Related, and more on point for our study, WAC programming has an important role in creating student stakeholders in the university. Thomas Deans (2000) highlights nine potential points of intersection between WAC and service-learning programs. Bazerman reviews and summarizes these intersections, suggesting they boil down to the centrality of writing in both WAC and service-learning (Bazerman 2005, 115). Although Deans' frame of reference is service, his conclusions apply to our client-based project in that it requires students to think beyond the enclosed classroom and "promote[s] re-visioning within disciplines" as students grapple with non-traditional assignments. In our study non-traditional assignments included composing survey questions, testing them for usability, conducting surveys, analyzing the data, and finally synthesizing the collective information into recommendations for action.

At each step of our project, WAC-informed notions emphasized writing as crucial to individual student understanding and writing as facilitating interdisciplinary interaction among students while recognizing disciplinary differences in writing genres, styles, organization, and structures.

Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinarity is a key premise of our project; however, realizations about the practical meaning of interdisciplinarity also constitute a key outcome of the project. That is, given the composition of the English Department based technical writing classroom at our university, students are perforce working in teams comprised of students from various disciplines. Learning what that key buzz word—*interdisciplinary*—means in practice was a major constituent of the learned outcomes associated with the client-based project. The research on interdisciplinarity provides context.

Fang and Chak (2021) define interdisciplinarity, following Laura Bronstein (2003), as individual, interdependent units working toward the same ends: “Interdisciplinary collaboration refers to a team comprising members from different disciplines who bring to the collaboration their expertise that is complementary to each other, share a common purpose in what they intend to achieve, and work towards achieving the same goal” (pg. 20). Fang and Chak cite the benefits of service-learning in promoting key components of interdisciplinarity, including not only interdependence, but also creativity, flexibility, collective ownership of goals, and reflection on the process to assess outcomes of their service-learning project (i.e., social work with immigrant children in China to develop language competencies (pg. 21)). They credited the interdisciplinary nature of the instruction, between social work faculty and English language faculty, with expanding the instructors’ perceptions of the field and the students’ engagement with the practical tools of language learning.

Zawacki and Williams (2011) pose a learning community (LC) as a particularly effective mode of interdisciplinarity. The LC model focuses on curricular change: they identify LCs as “curriculum change initiatives that link, cluster, or integrate two or more courses during a given term, often around an interdisciplinary theme, and involve a common cohort of students” (pg. 109). Additionally, despite the range of structure and implementation, the LCs “all have the common goal of fostering greater academic coherence and more explicit intellectual connections among students. between students and their faculty, and among disciplines” (pg. 109). This latter point—working toward internal academic coherence—within the university is a major aim of our client-based project.

Zawacki and Williams (2011) also discuss the model of linked courses with an experiential learning component, which as they emphasize, ensures students are engaging with “the kind of writing practitioners in the field might be doing” (pg. 119). A key element of the learning process arising from experiential learning is “action-reflection-action” (pg. 120): beginning with “field notes,” this model “required students to be careful observers, write factual descriptions of what they observed, reflect on and analyzed these observations, and pose questions arising out of their observations and reflections” (pg. 120).

Similarly, the Writing Survey asked students to take their questions to the field, to survey their classmates regarding their writing experiences, and then, to compare those experiences with their own coursework, including the advanced writing course. The surveys functioned as a kind of reflective two-step field note. That is, the surveys made visible a step-wise process that field notes require: observation: description: reflection, which taken together result in the questions that drive the research outcomes. The end-of-project surveys suggest that students experienced interdisciplinarity even if they were not aware of it. Several students suggested that major diversity within groups (since they were often grouped by major) might help them derive a better understanding of WAC for the project, while others acknowledged they experienced something knew, such as gathering primary research and analyzing data.

Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory emerges to analyze the effectiveness of partnerships and relationships in the realm of business. Lau (2014) suggests stakeholder theory functions toward four intentions: descriptive, instrumental, normative, and managerial (pg. 762). These intentions lead to strategic tasks associated with an institutional stakeholder approach: identifying interested partners and defining the relationships, evaluating the success and satisfaction generated by those relationships, articulating the ethical grounds and the best practices associated with maintaining satisfied stakeholders (pg. 763). Stakeholder theory is beneficial to our project in its broad definition of interested parties in higher education.

The study by Langrafe et al. (2020) provides a crucial connection between business and higher education, extrapolating from the foundational document for stakeholder theory, R.E. Freeman's *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (1984) and adapt the theory to higher education. Originally, Freeman suggested that organizations would run more effectively if a broad network of people invested in the outcome of a particular organization were consulted. Further research, (Freeman et al., 2015) extended this idea to maximizing value by managing the relationships between interested parties. In particular, stakeholder theorists began to consider: "both tangible and intangible factors […] are important to stakeholders. […] Value can refer, for instance, to community service programs, employee participation in the decision-making process, better payment conditions for suppliers, lower prices for customers, etc." (Langrafe 2020, 299). That is, if values, demands, and resources are optimized, then not only management and administrators should decide how an organization best meets its goals, but also employees, customers, shareholders, and suppliers should also be engaged in organizational management.

Expanding stakeholder theory to higher education, Langrafe et al. (2020) consider a broad range of stakeholders that include both internal stakeholders (i.e., administrators, faculty, students, staff), as well as external stakeholders (i.e., community members, future employers in business and government, alumni, and suppliers). Important for our analysis, Langrafe et al. consider students to be members of both the internal and external stakeholders; they are both co-producers of the "product" of the university (i.e., education) *and* consumers of that product. It is important to note that students occupy a liminal role; they are a hinge between production and consumption of university value (i.e., education).

Although the researchers affirm that the very existence of the university depends on students, and thus advocate along with other researchers the need for satisfaction surveys and other measures of student approval of the university business, their particular study indicated a low correlation between strategic planning and value creation, suggesting that "current students are not considered as being well prepared to participate in decision-making processes" (pg. 309). The researchers noted that their institutional findings (from Brazil) may not be broadly applicable, but we think it important to note the disconnect between planning for the work of the university and the creation of value from that work when it comes to students, especially when they occupy a crucial position. That is, they have a viewpoint of great importance to the university, being both involved in the inner workings and primary beneficiaries of the outcomes.

A recent study by Degtjarjova et al. (2018), following Garvin (1984) and Newton (2007), comes to the same conclusion: students are pivotal as educational stakeholders. Degtjarjova et al. see Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as offering "both a service and a product" (pg. 389) that can be measured along a continuum spanning the dual offerings. That is, they suggest an Input-Process-Output (IPO) model defines a continuum along which the quality of HEIs might be measured. Importantly for our study, in this model, stakeholders have different interests and investments: "Students and faculty members' attention is usually drawn to the quality of the process, whereas employers' attention – to the quality of the result" (390). The authors find, in an extensive review of the literature that "[…] most of the researches (*sic*) show that the students are the most important stakeholders and failure in fulfilling the students' needs and expectations may dramatically affect the operation of HEIs" (pg. 391). They find students to be particularly important stakeholders because they are pivotal, literally standing at the hinge point between faculty inputs and employer expectations for output. This hinge point, while between two other critical players, is not narrow. Students occupy a broad threshold and "have a multi-faceted understanding of quality in higher education as interested party (*sic*), study members, external and internal assessors, advisors, direct and indirect investors, beneficiaries" (pg. 391).

These contexts—client-based practices, advanced writing, writing across the curriculum, and stakeholder theory—demonstrate the student-centric focus of university business. But even in the most aware circumstances, students are often left to the margins in terms of their participation in university decision-making. For example, In *Sustainable WAC,* Cox et al. (2018) consider stakeholders within each of five theoretical frames that the authors bring to bear on the question of how to establish and sustain a viable writing program. But despite considerable attention to the complex interaction of stakeholders, including students, faculty, administrators, and board members, there is little attention to student involvement in the process of developing a sustainable university writing program on campuses. Additionally, in typical client-based projects, the emphasis is on student opportunity to interact with stakeholders—participating in negotiations over project elements, deliverables, and timelines; preparing proposals and plans to meet client expectations (Cooke & Williams, 2004, pg. 148); but at end, the term "stakeholders" does not include students. We suggest involving students in these processes and decisions is a form of interdisciplinarity because it extends boundaries of authority and knowledge beyond the professoriate and administrators.

Our project addresses this oversight. In an autoethnographic style, Professor X describes the tasks given to her technical writing students; they were to design, implement, and analyze a Writing Survey that would collect students' opinions on the amount and quality of writing instruction and practice they were receiving during their university experience. The technical writing students, thus, created the measurement tool, collected data with the self-designed tool, analyzed that data, and made conclusions about the content and quality of their education, granted in a limited area—writing practice. The technical writing students were treated as both producers of educational material and beneficiaries of its product. The Writing Survey, then, allowed students to inhabit a crucial role as student-stakeholder, producing and consuming the

data gathered through work in interdisciplinary teams examining writing practices across the campus.

The Writing Survey: A Case Study
(A first-person autoethnography)

At our R1 institution, technical writing is taught in the English Department and, with few exceptions,[iii] the classes are interdisciplinary; the university, at this time, makes no particular effort to schedule technical writing by major. Over the course of three semesters, the technical writing courses had students from major fields, such as engineering, computer science, agribusiness, and packaging science. As noted earlier, the partnership between the authors resulted in a client-based project allowing students an opportunity to work in groups on a project with stakes beyond just their classroom. Client-based projects, though well-established pedagogical tools within advanced writing classroom, were new to me. As instructor of record, I taught the classes and oversaw the design and implementation of the project, saw it as an exciting opportunity both to expand my expertise from literature to writing, and for my students, to learn the practical value of writing in non-academic genres and for using writing as both the medium (of reporting) and subject (of reporting on). In the paragraphs below, I recount the steps taken to execute the project from methodology to outcomes.

Methodology

The course began in Spring 2019, a year before instruction was coopted by the pandemic. Although the methodology developed over three semesters, several main elements remained the same: the class 1) received a detailed assignment sheet with deliverables and deadlines, 2) were organized into groups, 3) heard the project aims and an overview from the client, and 4) then, by group, developed a plan for writing survey questions, conducting the survey, and analyzing data.

My goal with my assignment design was to provide as much structure as possible (since it was an ambitious project) while also allowing the students some flexibility in how they designed their surveys; what questions they asked; how they organized work distribution within the group; and, most importantly, what information they thought was most illuminating and what the significance of that information might be. Each group had to create surveys; conduct usability tests on those surveys; write two memos over the course of the project to update me on their progress; and write a final report that they would present on to the class. I tied these deliverables to the topics we were learning about in class so that the students would see how even within the straight-forward templates in which we had been writing (memos, reports, instructions, etc.), there was space to alter these templates to meet a given project's needs. Finally, the students had to fill out feedback forms on each of their groupmates to encourage accountability throughout the project, as well as feedback on the project in general and how it could be improved in subsequent semesters.

A client-based project requires an enormous amount of cooperation and organization. I created a Google folder for each group so that they could easily collaborate with one another and share information with me. The deliverables were

sequenced to ensure students remained on track with their projects and were steadily making progress in the month they had to work on it in class. I gave each student the goal of distributing the survey to 10-15 people who would likely respond to it. The students could use whatever method they wanted to distribute surveys, but many chose Google Forms or Survey Monkey. One group decided to interview an engineering professor about how he viewed student writing, and they included the interview in their final report. Though this was not a requirement, it proved illuminating to hear a faculty member from a different discipline discuss his views on student writing.

The second semester I taught the client-based project (Fall 2019), the structure and requirements of the project were the same (I added a request for recommendations in the conclusion of the report), but I had a clearer understanding of the project based on my experience designing and teaching it in the previous spring. I also had strong final reports from the previous classes to show my students as examples to help guide them in their project construction. One issue I noticed in the spring semester was my students got bored with working on the project for the entire last month of the semester. For Fall 2019, I restructured the project over the course of the semester so that they would work on it periodically, a move I hoped would keep the project fresh for them but would also allow them more time to distribute the surveys and collect data. This change would be fortuitous for the spring semester when COVID-19 would force us to move online in March. Because my students had established their group dynamics and begun their survey gathering, the conclusion of the project was much smoother than it might have been.

Outcomes

Regarding learning outcomes, our client-based project yielded a variety of results. Speaking from an instructor perspective, my students spent time in composing low stakes writing (e.g., informal memos updating me on their progress; composing their surveys; and communicating with one another on messaging apps and email threads), which as WAC programming has demonstrated, gives them practice on the type of writing they will very likely be doing in their workplaces. While students can be dismissive of low stakes writing, writing instructors know that it is crucial for developing essential communication skills.

In addition to low-stakes writing skills, our client-based project encouraged the students to reflect on writing in a deeper way. Developing the surveys required them to think metacognitively about writing: what “counts” at writing in the university classroom beyond the academic essay? Many of the survey questions ticked the same boxes: what is your major? What is your class standing? How much time do you spend (in hours) working on a typical writing assignment? What type of writing assignments are you given? However, beyond this basic information gathering, many groups came up with interesting questions to elicit deeper information: do you receive helpful feedback from your instructors? Who sees and evaluates your writing (e.g., professors or graduate students)? Do you write collaboratively? Do you feel prepared to write in your future career field? What does writing look like in non-English classes? When the first semester students were building the surveys, they were frustrated with what they perceived to be a lack of guidance on my part, but since the client genuinely wanted

their insight into what they thought about writing, it was necessary to challenge them to come up with their own questions. Later classes benefited from being able to review strong sample reports, but groups still produced a variety of questions such as: what are the benefits of peer review in the workplace? Are you aware of/do you use the campus writing center? Do you get your writing reviewed before you submit it?

While these questions afford a substantial amount of insight into what student writing looks like across the curriculum, they leave many questions unanswered. While it is possible and/or generative to debate the merits of quantitative and qualitative data, the realities of this particular classroom did not afford us the space and time for qualitative data gathering, though that is a promising future path. Several groups reported that half of their respondents do feel prepared to write in their workplace while half do not. What accounts for this discrepancy? What criteria is behind a student's response to that question? Would these judgements align with how an instructor or supervisor thinks about those individuals' writing? In many ways, the survey data elicits as many questions as it supplies answers, but an important part of the project not only yielded, but also developed student interest in writing by cultivating as sense that students were stakeholders in the process.

While the data students gathered illuminated how their peers experienced and thought about writing, we are more interested in student response to the project in our discussion here. By asking students to analyze the data they collected, we challenged them to reconsider their own understanding of writing. What do these results mean? What recommendations can you make for us (instructors, supervisors) based on them? These processes go beyond telling the students writing is an important skill; the premise of the project requires them to take it seriously before they have written anything. If students think the writing they are doing might impact future students' learning, they have a stronger incentive to "buy in." Some students might not care ("I will not personally benefit from it"), but many students have already bought in to being part of their college or university community; improving that community for others is an additional way students can think about the practical impacts of their own writing. This kind of student involvement encourages students to move away from thinking of themselves solely as consumers of their education by helping them model how to be co-producers of it, a participatory behavior that emphasizes a culture of building useful knowledge for ourselves and others.

The feedback I received from student evaluations for the Spring 2019 project suggests that, while many students enjoyed the project (or at least found it preferable to a final exam), there was a lot of frustration with how we articulated the goals of the project, finding the exploratory nature too vague. A handful of students wrote that they found the project interesting and challenging; several students mentioned liking the project in tandem with being part of an effective group. Students did see clear links between the lessons we were going over in our textbook and the deliverables they were submitting for the project. One student mentioned that it would be helpful to have the whole semester to work on the project so that the groups had more time to collect data, advice I would implement into the second iteration of the project.

Student feedback from the Fall 2019 semester skewed more positive though there were critiques. Positive feedback included that the assignment was well-structured and enjoyable/interesting. However, students continued to struggle to make connections

between what they were doing and the larger goals of the project. Some students wrote that they were not sure of the tangible outcomes of the project and how it would benefit writing across campus. A handful of comments reflected a similar frustration with vagueness around the project prompt, which I attribute to our inability to explain to our students that they were helping to produce knowledge and to many students' desire to have stricter guidelines. Thus, student stakeholder engagement depends partly on the project designer's ability to articulate project goals in a compelling way.

An interesting piece of feedback that I received from a handful of students is that it would have been preferable had they been grouped with students from a variety of majors. Originally, I thought that the students would develop stronger survey questions if they were grouped with classmates with the same or similar majors to them, leading them to develop questions tailored toward their disciplines that they would likely distribute to their friends and classmates from their major classes. One student commented that there would have been more diversity in the survey questions and responses if there had been different majors grouped together. Another student wrote that because people in the same majors tend to think alike, collecting meaningful data about writing across the curriculum was difficult because those majors tended to answer questions in very similar ways. My original idea to group them by major reveals my own academic biases and training; I assumed that only engineering students should speak to engineering students, without thinking about the way that limits the information the students could gather. By breaking students into groups with different majors, perhaps they would have broken down some of those barriers in their own minds and felt more connected to students outside of their departments.

Collecting specific student feedback each semester helped improve the project. For the final semester, Spring 2020, there were fewer student complaints about the vagueness of the project. This was probably because we had developed a clearer idea of what the project was and grew more skilled at explaining it to the students. There was positive feedback that the project was well-constructed, and more students expressed enjoyment in the project this semester even if their enjoyment was often tempered by disinterest in the topic (STEM students do not tend to like writing—got it!). COVID-19 complicated the project by moving us online to asynchronous class. Students inevitably struggled to complete the project on top of their other work, and some mentioned the difficulty of working in groups with people who were hard to reach. While not ideal, these conditions challenged students to tackle a group project and adapt to the virtual environments we would all face for two years, meeting with one another on Zoom and recording and editing their presentations together.

Overall, I view the project as successful because it required students to work together in groups (a common feature of many professional jobs); to conceive of and execute their visions of the task we assigned them; to analyze data; and to present their findings to a client. A few students in every set of evaluations expressed interest or found value in what the project was trying to do: explore what writing looked like across the curriculum. I did not have the student stakeholder language to work with when I taught this project. Future iterations could benefit from having instructors articulate these ideas when introducing a client-based project, possibly even having the students read a short and accessible essay that explains student stakeholder theory, a method described by Honadle and Kennealy (2011). If students thought of themselves as co-

producers of knowledge, would they find more enjoyment in writing and tackling a project like this? Stakeholder theory is often conceived of as a means of bridging the university with the communities in or by which it is located; the connections that can be forged between the two are deeply important and valuable. However, by bringing it into the advanced writing classroom, we propose that stakeholder theory can also strengthen the relationships across campus by teaching students to think of themselves as knowledge producers capable of impacting curricula, improving their own understanding of written communication, and fostering student investment across the disciplines.

Recommendations

In this essay, we have advanced the thesis that intra-collegial client-based projects can cultivate a deep investment in the university during the period of student matriculation, and further that advanced writing is an apt, unique topic for service-learning. Given that writing, as a subject and a process in and of itself, provides the perfect vehicle for intensifying connections with subject material and with process of learning. It is a long-established precept that writing engages students in critical thinking (Miller 2002, Yancey 2015, Rademaekers 2018, Nicholes & Lukowski 2021) through its attention to the power of words, to the necessity of logical organization for persuasive purposes, to its ability to draw upon a writer's tacit knowledge to use in combination with new material for solving problems, to its invitation to reflect on learning and to situate new information in unfamiliar circumstances to wrestle with difficult challenges.

When employed in the service of a real-world client, writing allows students to pay particular attention to its creation of a particular discourse community. That is, client-based learning can cultivate for students a sense of belonging to the university, not only through material content, which especially in the sciences and health fields may change rapidly, but also through a particularly way of thinking through contemporary issues. More long-lasting than the mere content of a major at a particular time in history, the process of approach, evidence gathering, interpretation, reflection, and problem solving is likely to be more persistent, thus structuring a sense of "thinking together" that will outlast time at the university, but which will have firm grounding during the university experience.

Timely and active investment in experiential learning will lead to stronger post-graduation attachments to the university. After graduation, factors such as employment, student debt, the conditions of an individual's social environment may enhance, but may detract from attachments to the university. Client-based and service-learning has often had an outward-facing objective, not only building skills that help students function more effectively in the labor market or in graduate school (Rutti, et al., 2016), but also helping students understand problems of communities, including potentially unfamiliar social problems, as well opportunities for civic engagement and for real-world projects. These outwardly directed projects consider community members the stakeholders. Studies like Honadle & Kennealy (2011) engage students in stakeholder analysis as part of their service-learning project. Students learn to consider all those "affected by the outcome of a community or environmental initiative" (Honadle & Kennealy, 2011, p. 4). However, we suggest service-learning might focus on campus challenges, so that students not

only think of others as the stakeholders in a certain community project, but instead consider themselves as stakeholders not only in the campus project, but also in the university. Campus-based service-learning projects develop student stakeholders and in the process life-long supporters of the university.

Client-based projects can bridge between more traditional writing classrooms and writing in the disciplines. Students advanced writing classrooms are in unique positions, taking classes across departments, to design the research survey questions that will elicit information about the state of writing instruction on campus, in all its manifestations. If information from the survey is put toward campus initiatives, such as WAC and WID faculty development, writing-enhanced (WE) and writing-intensive (WI) courses, a campus Writing Board, increased locations where STEM communication is taught on campus, then experiential learning will have created a strong sense not only of stakeholder engagement, but also material results from developing student stakeholders.

Conclusion

Students, of course, often greatly value the education they receive at the university or college of their choice. The degree they earn opens doors to careers and social opportunities; students who remember fondly their experiences at university become alumni who give back to the university, sometimes in the form of substantial donations. The faculty-student relationships they cultivate offer opportunities to learn how to be critically involved with their social environments, whether textual, personal, or professional, thus ready to be life-long active learners and discerning citizens of the world. This essay opens with the observation that the university is highly aware of the importance of cultivating in current students a desire to become active alumni, who continue to support its efforts as an institution and in the community, but concludes that it is missing an opportunity to consider students as stakeholders in the most active sense of the term, involving them in planning educational mission, goals, and learning objectives.

This essay investigates the opportunity of cultivating student stakeholders through a client-based project focused on a critical, but underappreciated aspect of university education: advanced or professional communication. We have presented a two-pronged hypothesis: 1) client-based programs are an under-cultivated aspect of engaged learning practices at universities, which not only put students in real-world circumstances, but also cultivate cross-university ties, and 2) professional communication is highly valued by employers and employees after graduation but is often under-appreciated during the college years, we suggest in part because students are not consulted as to the kinds of professional writing and communication they would find most valuable not only after, but also during college years.

Through experiential learning projects, informed by stakeholder theory and WAC principles, faculty and students can become more interdisciplinary in their thinking, teaching, and research. As academic disciplines continue to grow more siloed, student stakeholder theory might be one way to resist the rigid boundaries between departments, a development that we can pass down to our students who might enjoy writing more if they learn to see it as integral to all fields.

Notes:

[i] While the distinctions are not hard and fast – that is some client-based projects work with community partners and some service-learning projects are cross-departmental – for the purposes of this paper, we find the term "client-based" useful as defined by Waldner and Hunter (2008), who explain that the "'client' terminology signals to the student the importance of their work—the client is counting on them, and nothing less than their best output will be acceptable" (pg. 220).

[ii] Julie Watt (2010) suggests one solution: "student-professionals" involved in Independent Research (IR) projects at the university while working at industry jobs, "are uniquely poised to collaborate with faculty and industry colleagues" (pg. 319).

[iii] An exception has been carved out for Nursing majors, who had a need for online technical writing courses even prior to the pandemic, and thus they are collected into mono-disciplinary groups for this course. Randomly, courses will be majority engineering- or science-major, but not by plan.

References

Bazerman, C. (2005). *Reference guide to writing across the curriculum*. West Lafayette, Ind: Parlor Press. Retrieved from http://bvbr.bib-bvb.de:8991/F?func=service&doc_library=BVB01&local_base=BVB01&doc_number=024755979&sequence=000004&line_number=0002&func_code=DB_RECORDS&service_type=MEDIA

Bronstein, L. R. (2003). *A model for interdisciplinary collaboration*. United States: Deutsches Zentralinstitut für soziale Fragen/DZI. doi:10.1093/sw/48.3.297 Retrieved from JSTOR https://www.jstor.org/stable/23721052.

Cooke, L., & Williams, S. (2004). Two approaches to using client projects in the college classroom. *Business Communication Quarterly, 67*(2), 139-152. doi:10.1177/1080569904265321

Cox, M., Galin, J., & Melzer, D. (2018). Building sustainable WAC programs: A whole systems approach. *The WAC Journal, 29*(1), 64-87. doi:10.37514/WAC-J.2018.29.1.03

Deans, T. (2000). *Writing partnerships: Service-learning in composition*. National Council of Teachers of English. Retrieved from ERIC (No. ED445338). https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED445338.pdf.

Degtjarjova, I., Lapina, I., & Freidenfelds, D. (2018). Student as stakeholder: “voice of customer” in higher education quality development. *Marketynh i Menedzhment Innovatsiĭ,* (2), 388-398. doi:10.21272/mmi.2018.2-30

Delpit, L. D. (1993). The politics of teaching literate discourse. *Freedom's plow* (pp. 285-296) Routledge. doi:10.4324/9781315021454-17 Retrieved from https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781315021454/chapters/10.4324/9781315021454-17

Dingus, R., & Milovic, A. (2018). It takes two: Developing a successful partnership between clients and students in client-based projects. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice, 18*(1), 64-69. doi:10.33423/jhetp.v18i1.535

Fang, F. and Yammy Chak (2021). Supporting undergraduate student learning through reflective journal writing in a service-learning subject: An interdisciplinary collaborative approach. *English across the curriculum: Voices from around the world* (pp. 17-33). University Press of Colorado: The WAC Clearinghouse;. doi:https://doi.org/10.37514/INT-B.2021.1220.2.01

Freeman, E. (2015). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/2078/ebook:231874

Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management*. Boston [u.a.]: Pitman.

Garvin, D. (1984). What does "product quality" really mean? *Sloan Management Review, 26*(1), 25-43. Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/1303000001

Gaumer, C. J., Ashley-Cotleur, C., & and Amone, C. (2012). Use of client-based projects in business education: A comparison of undergraduate and graduate pedagogy. *The Coastal Business Journal, 11*(1)

Harvey, L., & Newton, J. (2004). Transforming quality evaluation. *Quality in Higher Education, 10*(2), 149-165. doi:10.1080/1353832042000230635

Honadle, Beth Walter and Patrick Kennealey. (2011). Using service-learning & civic engagement to educate students about stakeholder analysis.*2*(1), 1-19.

Jolliffe, D. A. (2001). Writing across the curriculum and service-learning: Kairos, genre, and collaboration. *WAC for the new millennium: Strategies for continuing writing-across-the-curriculum programs* (pp. 86) National Council of Teachers of English. Retrieved from https://cdn.ncte.org/nctefiles/resources/books/sample/56487chap04.pdf.

Kiefer, K., & Leff, A. (2008). Client-based writing about science: Immersing science students in real writing contexts. *Across the Disciplines, 5*(1), 1-11. doi:10.37514/ATD-J.2008.5.1.02

Kroot, M. V., & Panich, L. M. (2020). Students are stakeholders in on-campus archaeology. *Advances in Archaeological Practice : A Journal of the Society of American Archeaology, 8*(2), 134-150. doi:10.1017/aap.2020.12

Langrafe, T. d. F., Barakat, S. R., Stocker, F., & Boaventura, J. M. G. (2020). A stakeholder theory approach to creating value in higher education institutions. *The Bottom Line (New York, N.Y.), 33*(4), 297-313. doi:10.1108/BL-03-2020-0021

Lau, J. W. C. (2014). Enriching stakeholder theory: Student identity of higher education. *American Journal of Industrial and Business Management, 4*(12), 762-766. doi:10.4236/ajibm.2014.412082

LeCourt, D. (1996). WAC as critical pedagogy: The third stage? *JAC : A Journal of Composition Theory, 16*(3), 389-405. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/20866089

McCrary, D. (2001). Womanist theology and its efficacy for the writing classroom. *College Composition and Communication, 52*(4), 521-552. doi:10.2307/358696

Miller, D. (2002). Developmental writing: Trust, challenge, and critical thinking. *Journal of Basic Writing, 21*(2), 92-105. doi:10.37514/JBW-J.2002.21.2.07

Nicholes, J., & Lukowski, A. (2021). Assessing perceptions of critical writing across a career-focused campus. *Double Helix: A Journal of Critical Thinking and Writing, 9*(1), 1-19. doi:10.37514/DBH-J.2021.9.1.02

Palmquist, M., Childers, P., Maimon, E., Mullin, J., Rice, R., Russell, A., & Russell, D. R. (2020). Fifty years of WAC: Where have we been? where are we going? *Across the Disciplines, 17*(3-4), 5-45. doi:10.37514/ATD-J.2020.17.3.01

Parsons, A. L., & Lepkowska-White, E. (2009). Group projects using clients versus not using clients. *Journal of Marketing Education, 31*(2), 154-159. doi:10.1177/0273475309334169

Rademaekers, J. K. (2018). Getting specific about critical thinking: Implications for writing across the curriculum. *The WAC Journal, 29*(1), 119-146. doi:10.37514/WAC-J.2018.29.1.06

Rosenberg, L. (2000). “Becoming the change we wish to see in the world: Combating through service-learning learned passivity”. *Academic Exchange Quarterly, 4*, 6-11.

Rutti, R. M., LaBonte, J., Helms, M. M., Hervani, A. A., & Sarkarat, S. (2016). The service-learning projects: Stakeholder benefits and potential class topics. *Education & Training (London), 58*(4), 422-438. doi:10.1108/ET-06-2015-0050

Schmitt, K., Yogan, L., & Johnson, A. (2018). Transformative learning in client based research projects. *Journal of Transformative Learning, 5*(2), 36. Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/2217255775

Villanueva, V. (2001). The politics of literacy across the curriculum. *WAC for the new millennium: Strategies for continuing writing-across-the-curriculum programs* (pp. 165) National Council of Teachers of English. Retrieved from WAC Clearinghouse https://wac.colostate.edu/books/millennium/chapter7.pdf.

Waldner, L. S., & Hunter, D. (2008). Client-based courses: Variations in service-learning. *Journal of Public Affairs Education: J-PAE., 14*(2), 219-239. doi:10.1080/15236803.2008.12001521

Watts, J. (2021). Rethinking graduate school research genres: Communicating with industry, writing to learn. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication, 51*(3), 313-337. doi:10.1177/0047281620981568

Yancey, K. B. (2015). Relationships between writing and critical thinking, and their significance for curriculum and pedagogy. *Double Helix: A Journal of Critical Thinking and Writing, 3*(1), 1-14. doi:10.37514/DBH-J.2015.3.1.02

Zawacki, T. M., & Williams, A. T. (2001). Is it still WAC? writing within interdisciplinary learning communities. *WAC for the new millennium: Strategies for continuing writing-across-the-curriculum programs* (pp. 109) National Council of Teachers of English. Retrieved from WAC Clearinghouse: https://wac.colostate.edu/books/millennium/chapter5.pdf.

Author Information:

Dr. Henna Messina is Assistant Professor of English at Eastern New Mexico University; Dr. Cameron Bushnell is Director of the Pearce Center for Professional Communication and Associate Professor of English at Clemson University.

Contact Cameron Bushnell at cbushne@clemson.edu.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Ashley Fisk and Sarah Costley of the Pearce Center for Communication for helping us arrange this service-learning project and for providing comments on student responses to this project.