

SOCIAL JUSTICE ACROSS THE CURRICULUM
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SOCIAL JUSTICE ACROSS THE CURRICULUM
SOCIAL JUSTICE ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: RESEARCH-BASED COURSE
DESIGN

Abstract: This Programmatic Showcase describes why and how Utah State University redesigned our Technical Communication and Rhetoric program to incorporate considerations of social justice across the curriculum. After describing our programmatic vision, we describe in detail the design of a pedagogical study informing our curricular redesign and then share strategies for course design and university-community partnerships. The course-design strategies include 1) explicitly framing courses around broad issues of social justice, 2) incorporating hands-on practice to connect conceptions of social justice to professional practices, and 3) facilitating opportunities for both students and clients to reflect upon these connections. The strategies for facilitating university-community relationships include 1) collaboratively designing assignments, 2) holding a kickoff meeting, and 3) creating a table summarizing assignments and timelines. We hope this article appeals to all technical communication scholars interested in social justice, though it may be most useful for program administrators interested in incorporating social justice initiatives into their respective programs.

Keywords: Social justice, program redesign, pedagogical research, service learning

Introduction

Fall 2014 marked a turning point in the Technical Communication and Rhetoric (TCR) program at Utah State University. Recognizing shortcomings of our general, “classic” technical writing program, the faculty envisioned a programmatic redesign to centrally incorporate considerations of social justice across the curriculum. The main purpose of this article is to tell the story of why

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we envisioned such a programmatic shift and how we began incorporating changes to reflect that shift. In telling this story, we emphasize that research has informed and continues to inform our programmatic design. In fact, research has played a major part in the journey of our program. After describing our programmatic vision, we describe in detail the design of a pedagogical study informing our curricular redesign and then share some of our strategies for course design and university-community partnerships. While we hope this article appeals broadly to any technical communication scholar interested in social justice, we mean to speak directly to program administrators who might be interested in incorporating social justice initiatives into their respective programs.

First, to provide some context, our move toward developing a social justice identity was informed by a fairly specific philosophy. With Jared Colton and Steve Holmes (forthcoming), we reject the perspective of social justice as *solely* the equitable redistribution of resources by people in power, a perspective that makes social justice contingent upon the approval and actions of the powerful. This more traditional idea of social justice views equality as a resource to be “passively” received rather than Colton and Holmes’ (forthcoming) notion of social justice as a practice of actively verifying the equality of individuals and communities in any context, a position we are dedicated to. This latter, active perspective is consistent with views in the field of technical communication that see social justice as everyday practices that “amplify the agency of oppressed people” (Jones & Walton, forthcoming). Such a notion of social justice is indebted to a revised version of Aristotelian ethics (without the sexism, racism, and ableism), a framework where justice is considered a “virtue.” In brief, a virtue ethics framework argues that justice is a

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hexis, a disposition or orientation toward the world—a disposition that one consciously works to develop into an active habit. In a virtue ethics framework, justice is never accomplished from one act, such as one sees in the phrase “justice was done.” Instead, a virtue ethics perspective on justice recognizes that the work of justice is never completely finished and is an active habit that should be reiterated in one’s daily behavior and reinforced as part of individual and communal identity and practice (Aristotle, 2012). We believe this perspective of social justice is key to technical communication practices invested in the field’s longstanding concern with ethics (e.g., Miller, 1979; Katz, 1992), as well as recent calls to engage in deliberate social justice goals (Jones, Savage, & Yu, 2014). Such calls include the push for more careful attention to localization practices in our research (Agboka, 2013) and the challenge to make social justice a key element of technical communication programs (Savage & Mattson, 2011).

Why the New Programmatic Focus

The Technical Communication and Rhetoric program is housed within the English Department at Utah State University. For the types of degrees we offer, our program is relatively small in the number of dedicated faculty. Six faculty members support three degrees: an emphasis in Professional and Technical Writing within the English Bachelor’s degree, an online Master of Technical Communication, and a doctoral degree in Technical Communication and Rhetoric. Beginning in 2013-2014, several factors culminated to create a kairotic moment to re-envision our program.

First, in the span of about three years, our faculty team welcomed several new members to replace long-standing members: two faculty retired and one left for industry, we hired Walton

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and Colton, and we received approval to hire again (Avery Edenfield, beginning in Fall 2016).

Senior faculty members have established an organizational culture that welcomes the contributions, ideas, and influences of new faculty. This welcoming culture, combined with the percentage of newcomers, prompted much brainstorming from all parties, senior faculty and newcomers alike. Second, we were encouraged to engage in more active recruiting for our programs, particularly for the doctoral program. With one of only two doctoral programs in the College of Humanities and Social Science, we play an important role in supporting the university's Carnegie classification as "doctoral university: higher research activity." To jumpstart recruiting efforts, we were given a generous fellowship to offer the top applicant who would start in Fall 2015. Third, we sought to increase student diversity—particularly geographically and racially/ethnically—across all of our degrees. Although not a new goal, the need to increase diversity was keenly felt by the technical communication and rhetoric faculty and was strongly supported by university administration.

In this kairotic moment for change, we considered several factors that would affect our program's direction. There were constraints we could not change: our relatively small number of faculty and our location in a small town in the United States' Mountain West. We decided that if size or location would not (necessarily) be our main selling point, our program should become known for something specific—become a "themed" program that would draw students who have or want to develop expertise in a particular area. Three considerations led us to social justice. First, social justice is an umbrella under which everyone's research fit; TCR faculty members are each committed to engaging in critical action as scholars. Second, we recognized the early wave

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of what we believe is a social justice turn in the field. Growing numbers of conference panels, journal special issues, edited collections, and other scholarship reflect this turn from critical analysis to critical action. And third, we enjoyed institutional support at every level—department, college, and university—for this type of focus. Our department head welcomed a programmatic focus on social justice, a focus that promised to resonate with faculty members beyond the TCR program, further strengthening connections across programs within our large, widely varied department. The dean of the college had long supported teaching and research with humanitarian aims. Our vision aligned well with his priorities. At the university level, civic engagement and community partnerships have thrived for years, with the campus hub of service activity, the Center for Civic Engagement and Service Learning opening officially in 2013 to coordinate a group of related programs. These programs, largely grant-funded national service organizations, are collaborating to apply in 2018 to achieve a Carnegie Foundation Classification for Community Engagement. This classification requires alignment between university mission, verification of data from the National Center for Education Statistics and National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, and documented effort at every level of university activities and policies (NERCHE.org). An academic program centered on considerations of social justice offers an excellent example of university efforts congruent with the Carnegie classification.

Implementing the New Programmatic Focus

We took several steps to enact the new programmatic focus on social justice. For example, we sought to attract both students and job applicants who share our vision: creating materials to advertise the doctoral fellowship and crafting a job ad with preferred areas of research

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specialization including social justice, diversity, and activist literacies. In addition, we created a new website to convey our vision across programs, and in doing so, we noted that our curriculum did not clearly reflect this vision. Therefore, we also reviewed the undergraduate curriculum, identifying existing course numbers that we could use for new courses (a strategy for curricular redesign with a shorter review and approval process at our university). We added two upper-division undergraduate courses, neither of which is required but both of which count toward the Professional and Technical Writing emphasis and are repeatable for credit. One is titled Social Justice in Technical Communication, and the other is a project management course with a catalog description conveying an explicitly inclusive approach: “Students study project management strategies involving and affecting diverse groups of stakeholders. Students learn how gender, race, culture, age, ideology, and socioeconomic class influence the design, execution, and outcomes of projects.”

The programmatic design is also being informed by a pedagogical research study. Inspired by a shared commitment to education, research, and social justice, the research team includes both professors (Walton and Colton) and the leaders of a local chapter of a national service organization (Wheatley-Boxx and Gurko), who partnered for service-learning courses. We designed an IRB-approved study (protocol #6070) to

- Explore students’ perspectives of social justice and its relevance to their professional field and professional goals.
- Identify effects of the service-learning partnership on the partner organization.
- Explore whether students' work has any social justice impact (and if so what impact).

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- Glean pedagogical implications useful for future courses that view technical communication through a social justice lens.

We systematically studied three upper-division undergraduate courses in the Professional and Technical Writing emphasis, each class with approximately 20 students. (See Table 1.) These courses represented our earliest efforts to officially enact the new programmatic vision of incorporating considerations of social justice across the curriculum (i.e., not only in the Social Justice in Technical Communication course but throughout the curriculum in ways that support and enrich each course’s learning objectives):

Table 1: Courses Studied in Pedagogical Research

Semester	Course	Instructor	Partner Organization
Fall 2014	Document Design (focus on print documents)	Walton	National service organization with a mission to combat poverty through education (led by Wheatley-Boxx and Gurko)
Fall 2014	Studies in Digital Media (focus on accessibility)	Colton	National center dedicated to research, education, and services for people with disabilities and their families
Spring 2015	Document Design (focus on digital)	Walton	National service organization with a mission to combat poverty through

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	documents)		education (led by Wheatley-Boxx and Gurko)
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We collected data throughout and immediately after each semester, using multiple methods:

- Interviews with Partner Organization Clients: About midway through the semester and shortly after the end of the semester, Walton and Colton conducted individual, audio-recorded interviews of less than an hour with the partner organization members who had worked most closely with students from their respective classes. (Note: In the Document Design classes, clients were not Wheatley-Boxx and Gurko but instead, those whom they supervised.)
- Interviews with Students: To avoid coercion and to encourage frank responses, Walton and Colton recruited and conducted individual, audio-recorded interviews of less than an hour with students from *each other's* class(es). We informed students that their professor would not access the interview data, nor even know which students participated, until after grades were submitted.
- Analysis of Assignments: We analyzed student assignments, including reflection essays—both written and multimedia reflections in which students directly addressed issues of social justice. We also analyzed the documents that students produced for their partner organization clients.

Students could opt out of the study at any time without their instructor knowing until after grades had been submitted. In addition to reviewing the Letter of Information (LOI) in class and answering questions, Walton and Colton posted the LOI on their respective course websites.

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This document included a simple form allowing students to decline participation with two choices: 1) remove individual assignments from consideration and 2) remove collaborative assignments from consideration. Students could select one or both options, sign and date the form, and submit it to a professor who was unaffiliated with the study and who would hold forms until after grades were submitted. No students opted out of allowing their assignments to be analyzed, and approximately half the students in each class volunteered to participate in the optional interview during finals week.

Thus far, our research team has analyzed student interviews and assignments from Colton's digital media class for insight into how disability studies can inform broader social justice pedagogy (Colton & Walton, 2015), and most recently, we iteratively inductively coded the 20 partner interviews (mid-semester and post-semester interview with five clients per class) from Walton's two document design classes. A complete data analysis is ongoing and is outside the scope of this Programmatic Showcase, but we want to share some strategies that have emerged as we formally analyze data and iterate course designs across our curriculum (at the time of this writing, the document design course is on its fourth iteration). In the first section, we present three course-design strategies: 1) explicitly frame courses around broad issues of social justice, 2) incorporate hands-on practice to connect these conceptions of social justice to professional practices, and 3) facilitate opportunities for both students and clients to reflect upon these connections. In the second section, we present strategies for facilitating university-community relationships, strategies selected and written by Wheatley-Boxx and Gurko as particularly valuable from their perspective. These strategies include 1) collaboratively designing

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assignments, 2) holding a kickoff meeting, and 3) creating a table summarizing assignments and timelines. We close with a discussion of how this research has informed curricular revision that is already improving student literacies, and we end by looking ahead to what's next for our program.

Course Design Strategies

Here we share course-design strategies that are informing our curricular redesign and that are reflective of the larger programmatic shift toward social justice. These strategies are general enough to apply to several courses across our curriculum, such as Document Design, Social Justice in Technical Communication, Project Management in Technical Communication, Studies in Digital Media, and various topics courses. Specific applications of these strategies vary by instructor, of course. Thus, in presenting these strategies, we tell stories from recent Document Design courses to give a clearer illustration of what the general course-design strategies may look like when implemented.

Explicit Framing

The first readings, activities, and assignments that students encounter center on social justice, social change, and social issues specific to the service-learning community partner. These readings introduce students to definitions of social justice and explicitly address roles of communication in the work of social change. After the first set of readings, students may participate in a class activity in which they present main ideas from the readings and relate those ideas to the particular course and to the field. Iteratively throughout the semester, students return to these concepts with social-justice-relevant readings about specific considerations related to the

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particular course. For example, in the Document Design course, these issues include presenting quantitative data, selecting images, designing logos, and developing websites. Readings on these topics were selected to be brief and accessible, and they included a range of genres including policy briefs, blog posts, online comics, news articles, excerpts from academic publications, and reports written for policy makers and advocacy organizations.

When we first began implementing the new curricular redesign, many students indicated in their reflection exercises, in-class discussions, and interviews that before their classes began, they were either entirely unfamiliar with the term “social justice,” that they had a vague idea it related to protesting, or that they associated it with “doing good” but could not define it more specifically. This lack of understanding prompted a key strategy informing our course designs moving forward: students should study social justice at two levels of abstraction—1) broad critical concepts (e.g., social justice, privilege) and 2) specific social issues relevant to the partner mission (such as homelessness, wrongful incarceration). This strategy is congruent with service-learning approaches that ask students to learn about the partner organization’s mission (Bourelle, 2012; Scott, 2008). However, we find that by also defining and reflecting upon foundational issues such as social justice, privilege, and social change, students become better prepared to apply skills and concepts beyond a single course or organization.

The pattern of unfamiliarity with foundational critical concepts was especially strong among students in Fall 2014 courses, who had not encountered these concepts in other TCR courses due to the newness of our curricular redesign. But students are now encountering considerations of social justice in different ways and to different degrees in multiple courses

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across our curriculum. We have observed the value of the two-level approach to social justice as students make connections among concepts across courses, social issues, and professional practices. For example, in the Spring 2015 Document Design course, students created screencast instructions. The practice of creating rhetorically significant closed captions (Zdenek, 2011) was key to Colton's digital media course focusing on accessibility the previous semester. Even though the document design course focused on poverty and education (not accessibility), students who had taken the digital media course immediately noted that captioning their screencasts would be one way to enact equity, a foundational critical concept addressed in the document design course.

To summarize, we find that delving into the partner organization's mission is useful but insufficient alone to meet goals of social justice pedagogy. To scaffold students in learning about social justice, we believe it is important to also have readings, discussions, and activities about broader critical concepts such as privilege and social change. These foundational readings equip students to recognize and apply social justice concepts across courses and contexts.

Hands-On Practice

The explicit framing provided in part by reading about concepts such as privilege and social justice was useful for developing a shared vocabulary and foundation on which to build. But students consistently indicated hands-on practice helped them to bridge big ideas with the specific ways they enacted their professional expertise. For example, in the Spring 2015 Document Design course, students read in Loretta Pyles's (2013) *Progressive Community Organizing* that people in varying positions of privilege buy into and reinforce oppression when it seems natural to them. In other words, people can unintentionally perpetuate marginalization

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when they do not question the “naturalness” of their assumptions (p. 14). But it was through hands-on practice of document design that the insidious nature of oppression became easier for students to recognize and, importantly, that alternatives to perpetuating oppression became visible.

For example, students read that the Pew Internet and American Life (Duggan & Smith, 2013) study found that people most likely to access the Internet primarily or solely through mobile devices include racial and ethnic minorities, people living in low-income households, and people with lower levels of education. Awareness of this fact provided a concrete example of oppression relevant to communication design: websites that are not fully accessible and usable on mobile devices are likely to further marginalize people in positions of lesser privilege. Thus, when one student team was asked by their client to make a particular change to the website the students were developing, the students explained the significance of mobile accessibility for marginalized populations and that accessibility would be compromised by the requested change.¹ The client was grateful for the explanation and agreed with the students’ original design choice. In their reflection writing as well as in interviews, students said that they recognized this exchange as an opportunity to avoid perpetuating oppression through the decisions they made about document design—recognition that we suspect may have been less likely (or less concrete) without hands-on practice.

Multiple Reflections

¹ The change in question was to increase the size of the organization’s logo to a point that would interfere with the responsiveness of the page layout. We recognize that a more advanced web designer would likely know how to implement the client’s request without compromising accessibility.

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To overview, explicit framing provides a shared vocabulary; hands-on practice bridges social justice concepts with professional practice; and multiple reflections provide an impetus for students to articulate what they are learning about social justice and its relation to technical communication. The importance of reflection in service learning is well documented (e.g., Bourelle, 2012; Bringle & Hatcher, 1999; Hanson, 2004; Sapp & Crabtree, 2002; Scott, 2008). Therefore, at multiple points during the semester students engage in different types of reflection writing. For example, in the Document Design course, these types of reflections include

- Graded essays at the beginning and end of the semester reflecting upon their perspectives of social justice: for example, what they thought of the term before the class began, how they would define social justice now based on readings and class discussions, whether and how they thought social justice is relevant to their professional field, and whether and how it is relevant to their own professional goals.
- In-class freewriting exercises: for example, reflecting on the ethical selection of graphics after reading about the #iftheygunnedmedown hashtag and its message about representations of Black Americans in the media.
- Classwide reflection exercises: for example, collaboratively brainstorming how social justice relates to specific considerations of document design, while concurrently producing a shared Google document that the class could later reference.

Extending existing approaches to reflection, TCR faculty have begun the practice of prompting not only students but also service-learning clients to reflect upon social justice: to define it, to relate it to their work, and to share their perspectives with students. We see this

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expansion as a key strategy for implementing our emphasis on social justice across curriculum:

one way for any service-learning course to intentionally engage members of the partner organization in reflections on social justice.

This strategy emerged from interviews with service-learning clients in the Fall 2014 Document Design course. This course included three graded reflection essays by students, each responding to the prompt summarized in the first bullet above. The first essays (produced during the second week of the semester) and second essays (produced two-thirds of the way through the semester) differed quite a bit as students developed more nuanced and concrete understandings of social justice. But several students struggled in the final essay to say anything they hadn't already said. Three essays responding to the same prompt appeared to be excessive. Interviews with the fall semester clients indicated that little, if any, explicit discussions of social justice had occurred between them and their students. Both clients and students were busy, so their conversations focused on specific tasks (e.g., designing websites, brochures, instructions, and other documents). Some of the "why behind the what" factored into discussions, but it was not an intentional and in-depth part of their interactions. In the post-semester interview, one client recommended adding an assignment where students collaboratively reflected with clients about their day-to-day work, their organizational mission, and their views of social justice. This assignment solved the problem. In spring semester (the second iteration of the document design course), students produced only two graded reflection essays, and their first assignment involving the client was the collaborative reflection. In class discussions, as well as in their design justifications, the spring students were more specific in relating their design decisions to

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the client mission and in articulating the potential social impact of their documents. As we continue a full data analysis, we anticipate discovering additional course-design strategies that can be incorporated across our curriculum.

Community Partnership Strategies

In the previous section, we shared some strategies beneficial for students; here we share strategies beneficial for partner organizations. Many TCR courses now involve partnering with community organizations because these partnerships are invaluable for enacting a curricular focus on social justice. In a spirit of collaboration and mutual benefit to both members of community-university partnerships, we now share some strategies implemented during our curricular redesign that magnify positive outcomes for community organizations. These strategies are selected and written by Rikki Wheatley-Boxx and Krista Gurko as particularly beneficial from the community-partner perspective.

Each semester the partnership produced valuable, professional-quality materials that allowed community organizations to reach and serve more community members over time. These materials are particularly valuable because many nonprofit organizations face increasing demands for support services and decreasing revenue streams (Salamon, 2002). These capacity constraints make it nearly impossible for nonprofits to create and update appealing materials that are critical to the accomplishment of their missions. Therefore, clients experience both tangible (e.g., professional-quality materials) and intangible benefits (described below). To allow both sides of university-community partnerships to share concerns at each step of the process, it is vital to open pathways of communication regarding goals and expectations early in the

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relationship (Bringle, Clayton, & Price, 2009), such as starting well before the beginning of the semester. This relationship provides an impetus for clients to articulate the impact of their daily work for social justice, creating reflexivity that strengthens organizations by enriching the individual client's experiences and effectiveness. Building on these best practices, we describe three strategies integral to the university-community partnerships at the heart of the TCR curricular redesign: 1) assignments and timelines that are collaboratively designed, 2) kickoff meetings among instructors and service-learning clients, and 3) client-targeted tables that signpost assignments and timelines.

Collaboratively Designed Assignments, Timelines, and Delivery Formats

Prior to the beginning of each semester, partner organizations and instructors meet to review the course syllabus and finalize assignments. We work together to oversee project goals and to facilitate communication between student teams and clients. This coordinated approach to designing course materials ensures that both university and community needs are met and helps avoid the "community as a laboratory" approach that has historically characterized many community-university partnerships (Cushman, 2002). Collaboratively designing assignments gives community partners a voice that often is unrepresented in service learning (Sandy & Holland, 2006). This approach also enables each document produced by students to meet a client need (cf. Cronley, Madden, & Davis, 2015; Hollis, 2009). Continued collaboration is important to achieve an ideal win-win-win among the university, students, and community organizations (Vernon & Ward, 1999). Instructors need each course to fulfill specific curricular objectives, and partner organizations need each course to meet community and/or organizational needs. For

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example, in the fall and spring Document Design courses, an instructions assignment provided a good example of a win-win-win. Instructions are a classic genre of the technical communication field, so it was important for students to gain hands-on experience with this genre. Clients needed instructions in order to update the student-designed materials, so a well-written set of instructions made the students' efforts sustainable, a goal of the client.

Collaborating on assignment design includes setting due dates. Addressing this level of detail ensures that clients are able to provide necessary information in time for students to produce their assignments (Bushouse, 2005). When students design a graph, for example, clients must have already collected data. It is not enough, therefore, to solely establish that clients collect data. The timeline of data collection must also be taken into account. Another aspect of collaborative assignment design includes consideration of technology access and capacities. For example, the final assignment in the Fall 2014 Document Design course required designing five brief, design-intensive documents selected by clients (e.g., an invitation, a brochure, a certificate). Built into this assignment was a flexible software requirement. At least two of the five documents designed by student teams had to be produced using industry-standard software (Adobe InDesign). Students and clients worked together to decide which software to use for the remaining three documents. Documents unlikely to need updating, such as invitations, were typically produced with Adobe InDesign. This flexibility enabled 1) students to gain experience with industry-standard software, 2) clients to receive documents they can update themselves, and 3) both parties to discuss affordances and constraints stemming from software selection. This type of flexibility is relevant across our curriculum, as students may work with community

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partners in courses such as Project Management in Technical Communication, Studies in Digital Media, Methods and Research in Technical Communication, and others.

In the first semester of the Document Design course, students were not required to provide editable electronic copies of documents to the clients; however, it was expected that this would happen. Unfortunately, some student teams did not provide electronic versions of documents to clients, and when clients requested electronic documents after the end of the semester, students had deleted the files. This one-and-done approach to providing client materials directly conflicts with the TCR program's social justice philosophy: social justice is an active habit to be continually recultivated rather than a state to be achieved. This problem prompted a change in requirements for future courses: students are required to provide clients with editable versions of all materials.

Kickoff Meetings

A kickoff meeting is held each semester before clients are introduced to student teams. The kickoff meeting

- Allows the instructor to make personal contact with clients and build rapport before the semester starts.
- Provides clients with a thorough understanding of what information the student teams will request from them on which dates *and* what types of materials the students will produce for them.
- Offers an opportunity for clients to ask clarifying questions, express concerns, and make suggestions.

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- Encourages and empowers clients to act confidently in their roles when negotiating with students on behalf of their organization.

This meeting produces the same benefits as the request-for-proposal process described by Brenda Bushouse (2005): anticipating the opportunity cost of participation, clearly specifying projects and outcomes, and negotiating levels and types of student-client interactions. However, our approach requires significantly less initial effort on the part of the clients.

We find that one of the most important outcomes of a kickoff meeting is the opportunity for instructors to outline exactly what tangible materials clients should expect to receive by the end of the semester. Addressing these tangible needs early on increases the success of community-university partnerships (Bushouse, 2005, p. 40). Clear expectations early in the semester motivate clients to remain focused and invested, even as their other responsibilities increase. This consistent engagement is important for facilitating student success, not only in terms of completing assignments but also in understanding the contexts for and potential impact of their work (Pope-Ruark, Ransbury, Brady, & Fishman, 2014).

Detailed Table of Assignments and Timelines

The third partnership strategy emerged directly from a misstep in university-community collaboration at the very beginning of our curricular redesign. In the Fall 2014 Document Design course, Walton followed up on the kickoff meeting by sending clients assignment descriptions in a lengthy email, which some found overwhelming and, therefore, did not read. Thus, clients were unclear about upcoming assignments and information students needed to produce those assignments. The resulting lack of clarity about student needs exacerbated clients' discomfort at

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fulfilling what was for them a new role, that of the client. Their discomfort was increased by an email that couldn't easily be skimmed. From this experience, our third strategy emerged: instructors now create a concise table with names of assignments, descriptions of assignments, what is needed from clients, and a timeline. The timeline column includes information on both 1) when clients should expect to hear from student teams regarding each assignment and 2) each assignment due date. (For an example table, see appendix A.)

We have found that clients need to know exactly what information students are going to ask them to provide, when to provide it, and what to do if things are not going as expected. It is critical for instructors to communicate this information well ahead of time, as it is often difficult for clients to provide quick feedback unless planned ahead of time. Having a table supports successful communication and timely delivery of information to students. We have seen that clients' anxiety about their new roles is reduced when they can quickly reference a concise table summarizing student needs. This type of documentation is especially helpful when working with national service organizations, which tend to have a strong commitment to making sure everyone benefits from the partnership (Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006).

Conclusion

We conclude this Programmatic Showcase by turning briefly to assessment. TCR faculty members have discovered that a benefit of the programmatic emphasis on social justice is students' improved ethical and critical literacies. This improvement is not merely anecdotal. In the capstone course, undergraduates produce portfolios showcasing their best work. Class size varies from 12-20 students. Our process involves selecting 12 portfolios that represent a range of

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grades (purposive sampling) and assessing them using Kelli Cargile Cook's (2002) six layered literacies: basic, rhetorical, social, technological, ethical, and critical. Each faculty member assesses six portfolios, and two faculty members review each assessed portfolio. In the assessment of Fall 2012 student portfolios, we found that student performance was mixed. Students were exemplary in literacies such as basic, technological, and rhetorical, but many had trouble demonstrating ethical and critical literacies, especially regarding issues of privilege, equity, and power. In contrast, the next assessment (see figures 1 and 2) showed that by the Fall 2014 capstone, students demonstrated greatly improved ethical and critical literacies. Most of these students concurrently took at least one of the newly designed TCR courses, courses reflecting our first efforts to incorporate a social justice focus. Improving critical literacies remains a programmatic priority, but the assessment suggests that our new programmatic focus may help students leave the program with a richer understanding of ethics and critical thinking in technical communication. We look forward to assessing later portfolios produced by students with greater experience of our new curriculum.

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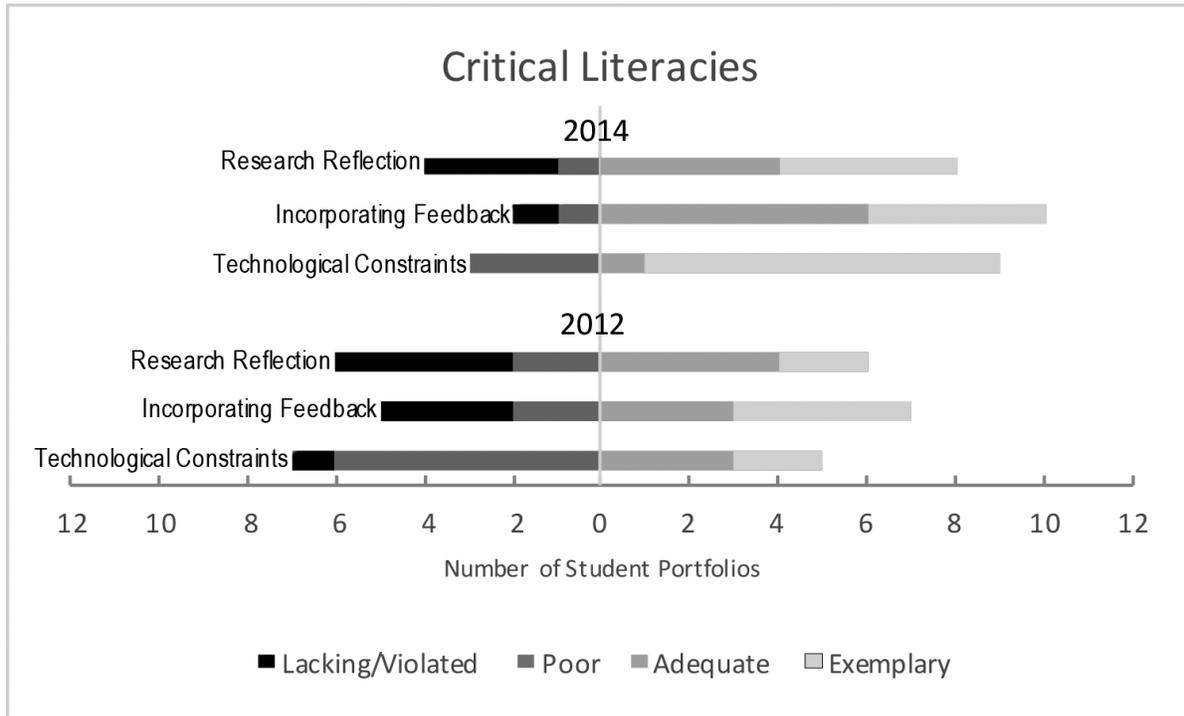


Figure 1: Comparison of Critical Literacies in 2012 and 2014 Student Portfolios

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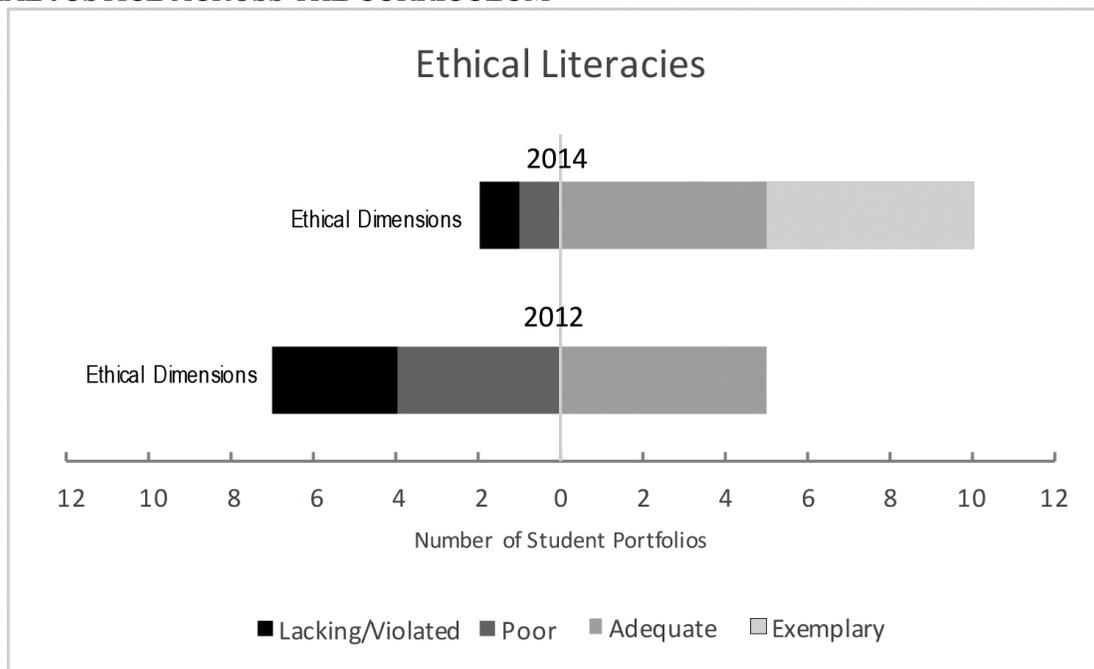


Figure 2: Comparison of Ethical Literacies in 2012 and 2014 Student Portfolios

In telling the story of Utah State University's new program identity, we hope to have given program administrators and teacher-scholars a sense of not only where we are but also how we got here. The strategies we are implementing across our curriculum allow us to incorporate considerations of social justice in layered ways in multiple courses. At the course level, changes have ranged from entirely redesigning courses to simply incorporating a few of the strategies presented in this showcase; (e.g., assigning readings that address issues of privilege, communication for social change, and ethics beyond legality). Framing courses on document design, technology use, rhetoric, usability, and even editing with a social justice lens is catalyzing student discussions of social justice well beyond a single course. Looking ahead, as

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we continue analyzing the data from our pedagogical study, we anticipate incorporating additional strategies. Next steps also include revising our graduate curriculum to parallel some of the changes we've made at the undergraduate level, amplifying the legacy of our program as students embark on their own academic careers.

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Appendix A: Example Assignments Table

Partnership with ENGL 4410 Student Team

Assignment	Description	Need From You	Timeline
Interview	Interview you to better understand what you do, the mission of your school/partner site, your VISTA goals, and also your own motivations and perspectives on your work (one interview per team)	About an hour to meet in person if possible	You should start hearing from students about this after Thursday Assignment due Feb. 2
Reading	Read about a specific social issue, trend, or policy that is relevant to your work (Other readings address broad concepts like social justice, social change, and privilege)	A brief reading of ~5 pages or shorter (e.g., a policy brief, news article, excerpt of an online report) A few sentences about <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • why you selected this reading • what it has to do with your work • what you hope students take away 	Please send me the reading and framing sentences on or before Feb. 2 (Note that Krista and Rikki can help you with this if nothing comes to mind! 😊)
Website Analysis	Analyze the design of a website to show that they understand the design principles they will employ when designing your logo/set of icons and website (students will produce analyses individually or in pairs)	A link to a website that <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your team will replace (preferred) or • You select for its content or qualities Response to a survey re: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why you selected this site • What you like about the site and why • What is relevant to your new site • What is problematic or irrelevant to your new site 	You should start hearing from students about this in late January Assignment due Feb. 16
Website	Website of at least 5 pages (one website per team)	Ideas for use <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who would use/visit the site • Any concerns or needs of those users/visitors • Purpose the site serves • What “feel” you want the site to have • Who will update and maintain the site over time 	You should start hearing from students about this in mid-February Project plan due Feb. 25 Draft 1 (no images) due March 22 Draft 2 (with images) due April 14 Final website due April 28
Logo or Set of Icons	Logo or set of at least three icons to be incorporated into your website (one logo or set of icons per team)	Ideas for use <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What organization or program needs a logo • The mission/purpose of that organization or program • The “feel” of the program or organization • Any required/preferred colors 	You should start hearing from students about this at the very beginning of April Draft website 2 (with images) due April 14 Final website due April 28

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Assignment	Description	Need From You	Timeline
Images	At least two images that your team finds online, has the legal right to use, and incorporates into your site (at least two images per team)	Ideas for images like “happy children of diverse races and ethnicities” or “adults and children engaging in art activities”	You should start hearing from students about this at the very beginning of April Draft website 2 (with images) due April 14 Final website due April 28
Screencast	Video instructions regarding how to do something relevant to document design (one video per team)	Things you’d like to be able to do that you don’t know yet or that you’d want to show future VISTAs (like how to update content on the website)	You should start hearing from students about this in mid-February Assignment due April 21
Volunteer Hours	Each student on your team will volunteer onsite for at least 2 hours over the course of the semester: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be individual or group • Should be at least 30 min. at a time • Must be physically onsite • Doing whatever activity would be helpful to you • Can volunteer more for extra credit • Will keep a log of their dates, times, activities, and your signoff 	Ideas for volunteer activities that would be useful to you	You should start hearing from students about this in mid-February Assignment due May 2

Thank you, thank you, thank you for partnering with our class! I fervently hope that this collaboration will be beneficial to you and that you’ll have a great experience in working with your student team. If you have suggestions for how this collaboration could be better designed, I’m all ears. In fact, some of your VISTA predecessors/colleagues have suggested tweaks/criteria/assignments that are now incorporated into the course design.

One educational goal for this course is to help students learn how to interact with clients, so I’ve instructed students to contact you directly. You should please feel free to contact your student team directly as well. They will look to you to help them understand how to support your goals and organization: what you need, what constraints are relevant to the materials they’ll design, how you prefer to communicate, etc. Although most/all of your communication will be directly between you and your team, I’m available if you have questions or run into any major problems. Please absolutely feel free to contact me: [Name Redacted] (call me [name]), email [redacted], phone [redacted]. If you get my voicemail, please leave a message; voicemails are emailed to me as audio files, so I shouldn’t miss them. Thanks again!!!

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Author Information

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Jared S. Colton is an assistant professor of technical communication and rhetoric at Utah State University. His research addresses the intersections of rhetorical theory, ethics, and politics, whether in pedagogy or sites of social justice. He is particularly interested in how classical and contemporary ethical frameworks inform the production, practice, and critique of collective activism via social and mobile media and accessibility technologies. His work has appeared in the *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, *Computers and Composition: An International Journal*, the *Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*, and other journals.

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Krista Gurko, Program Coordinator at Utah State University's Public and School Partnership, draws upon her experience as a doctoral student in Human Development. She has spent most of her career working with community non-profit organizations and on university-community research partnerships in homes, childcare facilities, and schools in the United States and abroad. She aims to understand the roots of social justice by studying how interpersonal relationships impact individuals' development and can improve opportunities and resources for people of all ages who may be considered underprivileged in various settings.