

Application for Paid Sabbatical, Spring 2012
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III. Leave Information

Technical Writing and Community Action

I. Intent and Plan

I plan to spend Spring term 2012 as a volunteer writer for local, community-oriented non-profit organizations. I will do this in order to gain valuable first-hand knowledge of what it is like to be a writer in this type of environment, and to better understand how to apply that knowledge in the classroom and our program. I will enhance this experience by conducting research and engaging in professional conversations that will deepen my understanding of how these approaches are being discussed and applied throughout my discipline.

Background:

I was hired, in part, to help guide and shape our department's Technical and Professional Writing program. Technical/Professional Writing is a relatively young discipline that has grown and changed rapidly in its short existence. Initially a field that focused on specific forms and methods for workplace writing such as reporting technical information, documenting processes, etc., it has grown more recently to include considering “the human”: the fact that these documents are written by real people and affect real lives. This prompted classrooms to explore incidents such as the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion, and how examining the communications surrounding that tragedy may help us understand why it happened. Important issues of ethics and writers' responsibility are becoming more commonplace in Technical/Professional Writing curriculum.

This, in turn, led to a recognition that writers, through their writing, can make decisions not only to alleviate risk, but to do a great deal of good – in their workplaces, certainly, but also in other communities they're part of. Service Learning courses have become more common, as ideal ways for students to see their writing “in action,” to gain experience with workplace writing while also contributing to change they'd like to see. At LCC, many of us who teach this class require students to design a “real” project that addresses something in their world they would like to change or improve. In these ways, Technical and Professional Writing is becoming more and more about not only how to set up a report, for example, but how one might use reports and other types of documents to actively, responsibly, and compassionately participate in their communities (workplace and otherwise).

For my sabbatical project, I would like to immerse myself in Technical and Professional Writing for community action. My primary activity will be to volunteer as a writer for non-profit, community-oriented organizations in Eugene. This will provide opportunities to engage in this type of writing and to fill a real need; it will also give me first-hand experience in the non-profit environment, which presents unique challenges and opportunities for writers. I will also conduct broader research in order to put my experience in context, and engage in professional communities (academic and industry) to explore these questions with colleagues.

Goals:

The overall goal for this project is to gain first-hand experience with writing for community action, and to place that in the broader context of scholarship and other professional activity in the field right now. More specifically, through this experience I would like to explore first-hand the ways real world writing situations will help students better prepare for the writing they will do as professionals, and can do as members of their other communities; and how classrooms might incorporate these opportunities for students. Classroom assignments generally lack the "messiness" and unpredictability of true workplace writing; it is very difficult, if not impossible, to truly recreate the problem-solving, critical thinking, and complicated decision-making that real life writing demands. The guidance we offer students must also include an awareness of workplaces as human institutions, with real impact on real people's lives; and of the roles writers play in the interactions between organizations and broader communities. The more aware our student writers are of these matters, the better able they will be to take this sense of ethics and responsibility back to their professions, and the more empowered they will feel to make change in their communities beyond the workplace.

I will be able to apply this experience to my own teaching, certainly; I will be a resource for colleagues in my department who share these interests; and I will apply this understanding as I contribute to the growth and direction our Technical and Professional Writing program takes. I will gain contacts in the community who may be able to provide similar learning experiences for my future students, in the form of Service Learning activities or co-ops; and professional contacts so that I might continue engaging in broader conversations.

Activities and Timelines:

Following is a general discussion of the three main activity areas I am proposing: writing for the non-profit partners, research and professional engagement, and on-site volunteering. A detailed timeline is attached as Appendix I.

1) Volunteer Writing. My primary activity will be to work as a volunteer writer for two or three non-profit, community action-oriented organizations in the Eugene community. The precise nature of these projects will be determined, of course, in collaboration with these organizations, but could include documents such as: reports, grant proposals, manuals, procedures, administrative documents, customer/client communications, fundraising materials, etc.

In addition to the documents I produce for the non-profit organizations, I will keep an ongoing journal of my experiences, to help guide the research that I do as well as the reflection and report produced at the end of the project.

During the 11 weeks of the term, I will work with each organization's staff to design, research, draft, revise, and present/publish documents that will further the work that they do. This will involve activities such as planning and conducting meetings, interviewing staff and experts, observations, general research using libraries and electronic resources, studying existing resources in order to be consistent in look and message, soliciting and incorporating feedback, etc.

Preparation:

In order to be able to start right away in Spring 2012, I will prepare in the following ways:

Summer 2011: I will further refine my “short list” of non-profits with whom I might work for this project (see preliminary list and discussion in Appendix II). Depending on the organizations, I may visit the site(s) and/or make initial contact with staff to brainstorm possible opportunities and determine whether they would be interested in such a partnership. It will be far too early to ask these organizations to identify projects, but this will lay the groundwork for these conversations.

Winter term 2012: Contact potential non-profit partners in the area to discuss opportunities, and secure partnerships by the end of week 5. The organizations listed in Appendix II are some with whom I have worked in the past. These relationships could be renewed; there are also, of course, many other organizations in the area doing important work and in need of help. In general, for underfunded and understaffed non-profit organizations, writing tasks often fall by the wayside in light of more pressing and urgent matters; however, the documents they need often make a big difference in these organizations' ability to run efficiently, communicate with their clients or partners, and/or secure funding.

Based on the reception I received when securing Service Learning partnerships, I fully anticipate that these organizations will be eager for this kind of help. My working criteria for identifying and selecting project partners are:

- *Need and potential impact.* I will seek projects that seem likely to make a substantial difference for the organizations I work with, and therefore for the community.
- *Size and scope of project.* I would like to work with at least two, possibly three organizations during my sabbatical; I will therefore seek projects that will fill those hours in a manageable way without consuming time I'd like to spend on research.
- *Variety.* I will strive to work with two or three different types of organizations (areas of difference might be the organization's size, type of work, type of community issue they address, etc.) and/or projects of different types (reports, proposals, manuals or process documents, communications, etc.).
- *Volunteer opportunities.* Because I believe that engaging in more routine volunteer activities on-site is crucial to providing me with a deeper and more complete understanding of the work a non-profit does, I will ensure that such opportunities exist on a schedule I am able to meet.
- *Logistics.* The organization's time frame for completing the project will need to fit with my availability; I will need to have access to staff and resources as needed; etc.

Depending on the project and organization's wishes, I may meet with them or communicate by phone or email prior to Spring term 2012 to discuss the project(s). Many organizations require orientations prior to volunteering; I will also complete those during Winter term 2012.

2) Professional research and engagement: I also will spend between 4 and 10 hours each week (variable, depending on the demands of the writing project(s) at any given time) immersing myself in professional research and conversations.

Research:

A great deal of scholarship has been generated in this area in recent years, along with some earlier, important pieces that shaped this conversation. My working bibliography (see Appendix III) includes pieces ranging from theoretical to practical, and from pieces that laid the groundwork for these

conversations to some that are carrying it forward today. In particular, I sought scholarship that would help me explore how writing in the community, particularly in non-profits engaged in community action, might help writers develop not only important writing skills, but also skills in critical thinking, problem-solving, and ethical, compassionate decision-making that will make them better contributors to their workplaces, as well as advocates for those whom their organizations serve. My bibliography also includes several sources that connect these pedagogies with fields such as health professions, engineering, and environmental / sustainability professions, as these are areas that many of our Technical Writing students at LCC pursue.

I will create a literature review from my research, which will become a resource for others in our department who also teach this course, and also for myself as I continue to mentor other faculty and contribute to the direction of our Technical Writing program.

Online Communities:

Technical communicators, both academic and in industry, have very rich and active online communities. I will take this opportunity to become more engaged, and to connect with others who share these interests and who are taking these approaches in their teaching.

In particular, I will "attend" (virtually) the online portion of the national Computers and Writing conference, which takes place each May both at an onsite location and virtually. This conference is loosely coordinated by the national Conference on College Composition and Communication, and the group behind it has long been on the cutting-edge of composition and technology theory and practice. They are closely associated with the Association for Teachers of Technical Writing, and there is a great deal of overlap in its members and interests.

I will also renew my reading and participation in several listservs (included in my bibliography; see Appendix III).

3) *On-site volunteering:* In addition to specific writing projects, I plan to spend between 4-6 hours each week volunteering on-site for these organizations, participating in their more routine volunteer activities. I consider this absolutely critical to any writing that I do for them, as I would gain important insight into how the organization functions, I would get to know the staff and resources available to help me, and I would see their role in the community on a more first-hand basis.

II. Growth

As a professional, the activities I propose would put me more in touch with current and exciting conversations about teaching Technical Writing, and provide me with first-hand experience with the type of writing more and more classrooms around the country are asking students to do.

Teaching Technical Writing in ways that empower students to make changes and take action on things that matter to them is something that motivates me; helping students think about acting ethically, compassionately, and responsibly as they enter into their professions is something I am absolutely committed to. This would be not only energizing, but would immerse me in the real work of thinking about writing as affecting real lives of real people, just as I ask my students to do.

The opportunity to research and involve myself in professional conversations would give me important

context for my community experiences, and would allow me to strengthen my understanding of the current scholarship in this area. I would also have the opportunity to join (or re-join) very active and extremely supportive and helpful professional discussions that my field is very fortunate to have available.

I would directly apply all of the above as a faculty member teaching this course, supporting and mentoring my colleagues, and helping to shape future directions for our program.

III. Relevance and value to division/ department, discipline, program, profession, students and/or college

The English Department hired me, in part, to guide and shape the direction of our Technical and Professional Writing program. Since I joined the faculty, I have been a mentor for numerous colleagues interested in teaching this course, and otherwise acted as the “go to” person for questions about the direction of our Technical Writing classes. I believe that the knowledge, understanding, and experience I bring back from this project would enhance all that I do in this role.

Because my proposed activities directly immerse me in the type of writing approaches that are becoming more common and valued in Technical Writing classrooms, I believe I will have a great deal to contribute to others in my professional life. I would be able to directly explore relatively new and important instructional approaches, both through first-hand experience and through research and professional conversations. From this experience I would bring both broader and deeper understanding of these approaches, both in principle and practice. My written literature review would be a concrete contribution to my colleagues and department; my ability to be a better resource in this important area would be an ongoing benefit.

I also feel strongly that this will be a great benefit to students in my own classroom as well as throughout our program as they learn to be writers and participants in their professional, and other, communities. In writing documents for community action, or for “real” community-oriented purposes, our students learn to write the very types of documents they will use as professionals in their workplaces. They are also learning all the other ways in which this writing can help them participate in the world around them – as community members, as family members, and as citizens.

Long term, our department would like to explore developing more of a Technical Writing program: perhaps another course, perhaps even a certificate. Understanding these conversations would certainly help us build the program in ways that are in keeping with current thinking about curriculum and practice. This would also have implications for strengthening partnerships with community organizations for Service Learning projects or similar collaborations.

Finally, the project I propose dovetails perfectly with LCC's Strategic Directions and Core Values. It is constructed around the principle that "students occupy many roles, including those of family members, workers, members of social groups, and citizens of an increasingly connected world." It strives to "empower all students; . . . to grow, to take risks, and to assume responsibility for succeeding in all aspects of their lives" (LCC Strategic Directions, March 23, 2010). The project also contributes to the Core Values in important ways, including:

- *Diversity*, particularly as the project explores ways that writing for community action can contribute to diverse communities and help writers "understand issues of difference, power and privilege";

- *Innovation*, as it explores creative methods of responding to changes in our world in a courageous and deliberate way;
- *Collaboration*, as it explores partnerships with community organizations;
- *Integrity*, with the focus on responsibility toward the public good;
- *Sustainability*, as it consciously strives to locate our work as writers in the larger systems that sustain us, and to both motivate and empower students to actively contribute to this work.

IV. Evaluation and dissemination

I will of course create a written report and present it during the planned inservice for the college. In addition, I plan to arrange a time to discuss my research and reflections on my experiences with my departmental colleagues during a workshop or brown bag discussion. I hope to make this part of a larger conversation among those of us who teach this course, or who are interested in doing so. My literature review and the report I create will also be a resource for colleagues as they prepare to teach this course for the first time, or as they continue to develop and enhance their existing classes.

Appendix I: Timeline

This timeline details the specific schedule for project activities. The schedule for writing activities is very preliminary, as the exact timeline will of course depend on the nature of the project and existing schedules for the organization(s) and staff.

Date	Activities
Summer 2011	Refine “short list” of potential project partners; conduct site visits and/or communicate with staff as appropriate.
Winter 2012, weeks 1-5	Secure partnerships and identify projects.
Winter 2012, weeks 6-11	Work with partners on preliminary planning and preparation. Schedule first meetings, collect existing publications to use as background and context; complete volunteer orientations as needed.
April 2-6	<p>Writing: Meet with non-profit staff for information-gathering, goals-setting, and specific direction and design; collect resources relevant to writing project.</p> <p>Research and Online Communities: Re-join online professional discussions; review archives for threads of interest. Read or review texts providing historical and theoretical frameworks for considering Technical Writing and community action.</p> <p>Volunteering and Reflection: Volunteer 2-4 hours in non-profit organizations; 1 hour journal entries to record and reflect on volunteer writing experiences.</p>
April 9-13	<p>Writing: Create a written proposal, including details on document content and project schedule, for staff to review and comment on. Meet with staff for feedback.</p> <p>Research and Online Communities: Continued participation in online communities; continue reading and reviewing texts providing historical and theoretical frameworks; notetaking.</p> <p>Volunteering and Reflection: Volunteer 2-4 hours in non-profit organizations; 1 hour journal entries to record and reflect on volunteer writing experiences.</p>
April 16-20	<p>Writing: Conduct research, interviews, and other information-gathering; notetaking.</p> <p>Research and Online Communities: Continued participation in online communities; reading and notetaking: focus on texts relevant to risk communication, accounts and analyses of communications and documents connected to major public health and safety issues.</p> <p>Volunteering and Reflection: Volunteer 2-4 hours in non-profit organizations; 1 hour journal entries to record and reflect on volunteer writing experiences.</p>
April 23-27	<p>Writing: Conduct research, interviews, and other information-gathering; notetaking.</p> <p>Research and Online Communities: Continued participation in online communities; research and notetaking on Technical Writing, citizenship, and social responsibility.</p> <p>Volunteering and Reflection: Volunteer 2-4 hours in non-profit organizations; 1 hour journal entries to record and reflect on volunteer writing experiences.</p>
April 30-May 4	<p>Writing: Create a detailed outline / plan. Contact staff with any questions or additional information needs that surface; solicit feedback as needed.</p> <p>Research and Online Communities: Continued participation in online communities; research and notetaking on current pedagogical approaches involving community action and Technical/Professional Writing.</p>

	Volunteering and Reflection: Volunteer 2-4 hours in non-profit organizations; 1 hour journal entries to record and reflect on volunteer writing experiences.
May 7-11	Writing: Write first draft; provide copy to staff at end of the week. Research and Online Communities: Continued participation in online communities; review textbooks relevant to Technical Writing and Service Learning, ethics, community action, social issues, etc.; notetaking. Volunteering and Reflection: Volunteer 2-4 hours in non-profit organizations; 1 hour journal entries to record and reflect on volunteer writing experiences.
May 14-18	Writing: Meet with staff to discuss the draft. Research and Online Communities: Participate in Computers and Writing 2012 Online Conference* Volunteering and Reflection: Volunteer 2-4 hours in non-profit organizations; 1 hour journal entries to record and reflect on volunteer writing experiences.
May 21-25	Writing: First revision, including additional information-gathering as needed. Research and Online Communities: Participate in Computers and Writing 2012 Online Conference* Volunteering and Reflection: Volunteer 2-4 hours in non-profit organizations; 1 hour journal entries to record and reflect on volunteer writing experiences.
May 28- June 1	Writing: Share revision with staff; meet with staff to solicit feedback. Research and Online Communities: Continued participation in online communities; follow up on research directions gained from the online conference. Volunteering and Reflection: Volunteer 2-4 hours in non-profit organizations; 1 hour journal entries to record and reflect on volunteer writing experiences.
June 4-8	Writing: Final revision; share with staff. Research and Online Communities: Continue participating in online communities; write draft of literature review. Volunteering and Reflection: Volunteer 2-4 hours in non-profit organizations; 1 hour journal entries to record and reflect on volunteer writing experiences.
June 11-15	Writing: Final touches; send for printing, publication, and/or presentation as appropriate; debrief. Research and Online Communities: Revise literature review. Volunteering and Reflection: Volunteer 2-4 hours in non-profit organizations; 1 hour journal entries to record and reflect on volunteer writing experiences.

*The dates for the Computers and Writing 2012 Conference have not been announced yet, but it falls each year during two weeks in the middle of May. This online conference has a full schedule each day of synchronous and asynchronous discussions, readings, and activities.

Appendix III: Bibliography

Book-Length Studies and Anthologies

Bridgeford, Tracy, Karla Saari Kitalong, and Dickie Selfe, eds. *Innovative Approaches to Teaching Technical Communication*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2004.

Dubinsky, James M., ed. *Teaching Technical Communication: Critical Issues for the Classroom*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.

Faber, Brenton D. *Community Action and Organizational Change*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*. Lanham: Rowman, 1998.

Johndon Johnson-Eilola and Stuart A. Selber, eds. *Central Works in Technical Communication*. Oxford UP, 2004.

Kates, Susan. *Activist Rhetorics and American Higher Education, 1885-1937*. Southern Illinois UP, 2001.

Miller, Richard E. *Writing at the End of the World*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005.

Segal, Judy Z. *Health and the Rhetoric of Medicine*. Southern Illinois University, 2005.

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Simmons, W. Michele. *Participation and Power: Civic Discourse in Environmental Policy Decisions*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007.

Blyler, Nancy Roundy. "Pedagogy and Social Action: A Role for Narrative in Professional Communication." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 9.3 (Jul 1995): 289-320.

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Brock, Cynthia J. "Ecological Literacy and Advocacy through Technical Communication: From Industrial Communication to Community Activism." *Society for Technical Communication Proceedings*. 1998.

Dragga, Sam. "A Question of Ethics: Lessons from Technical Communicators on the Job." *Technical Communication Quarterly* 6.2 (1997): 161-178.

Eble, Michelle F.; Gaillet, Lynee Lewis. "Educating 'Community Intellectuals': Rhetoric, Moral

Philosophy, and Civic Engagement" *Technical Communication Quarterly* 13.3 (2004).

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Mara, Andrew. "Pedagogical Approaches: Using Charettes to Perform Civic Engagement in Technical Communication Classrooms and Workplaces." *Technical Communication Quarterly* 15.2 (2006): 215-236.

Moore, Patrick. "Legitimizing Technical Communication in English Departments: Carolyn Miller's 'Humanistic Rationale for Technical Writing.'" *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 36.2 (2006). 167-182.

Ornatowski, Cezar M.; Bekins, Linn K. "What's Civic About Technical Communication? Technical Communication and the Rhetoric of 'Community'." *Technical Communication Quarterly* 13.3 (2004).

Samuels, Robert. "Promoting Social Change through Higher Education." *JAC* 27.1/2 (2007).

Sapp, David Alan; Crabtree, Robbin D.. "A Laboratory in Citizenship: Service Learning in the Technical Communication Classroom." *Technical Communication Quarterly* 11.4 (2002).

Schafer, Robert. "Introducing Heuristics of Cultural Dimensions into the Service-level Technical Communication Classroom." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 39.3 (2009): 305-319.

Scott, J. Blake. "Rearticulating Civic Engagement Through Cultural Studies and Service-Learning." *Technical Communication Quarterly* 13.3 (2004).

Sullivan, Dale L. "Political-Ethical Implications of Defining Technical Communication as a Practice." *JAC* 10.2 (Winter 1990).

Turnley, Melinda. "Integrating Critical Approaches to Technology and Service-Learning Projects." *Technical Communication Quarterly* 16.1 (2007).

Williams, Miriam F.; James, Daisy D. "Embracing New Policies, Technologies, and Community Partnerships: A Case Study of the City of Houston's Bureau of Air Quality Control." *Technical Communication Quarterly* 18.1 (2009).

Wolters Hinshaw, Wendy. "Teaching for Social Justice? Resituating Student Resistance." *JAC* 27.1/2 (2007).

Textbooks:

Bowdon, Melody and J. Blake Scott. *Service-Learning in Technical and Professional Communication*.

New York: Longman. 2003.

Deans, Thomas. *Writing and Community Action: A Service-Learning Rhetoric with Readings*. New York: Longman. 2003.

Dombrowski, Paul. *Ethics in Technical Communication*. Needham Heights, MA: 2000.

Peebles, Tim. *Professional Writing and Rhetoric*. New York: Longman. 2003.

Ross, Carolyn and Ardel Thomas. *Writing for Real: A Handbook for Writers in Community Service*. New York: Longman. 2003.

Online Communities:

Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW) discussion list: Association members are subscribers to *Technical Communication Quarterly*, though anyone can participate on the listserv. Participants are primarily Technical Writing/Communication teachers.

Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC) discussion list: Participants are Technical Writing/Communication administrators and program directors/coordinators.

TechRhet discussion list: Participants are primarily faculty and graduate students doing innovative work with technology and composition instruction.

TECHWR-L Discussion List: 3,000 subscribers worldwide, primarily professional technical writers.

Appendix II: Potential Partners and Projects

The following table lists a number of organizations with whom I have worked in the past, and who I would be likely to contact in order to arrange partnerships for my project. It is difficult to know what their precise needs will be more than a year from now, but based on my understanding of the work they do, the table also indicates writing needs they may have and that I could fill. When I conduct more research and site visits in Summer 2011 (see timeline), I may identify additional organizations for potential partnerships as well.

Organization	Contact(s)	Prior Relationship	Notes and Potential Projects
NextStep Recycling	Lorraine Kerwood, Executive Director Isbel Ingham, Development Manager	Yes: Service Learning partners, two terms.	NextStep is best known in the community for its re-use stores and electronics. They are also very involved in efforts to close the gap in education, both here and abroad, through equipment donations to schools and educational organizations. I would explore grantwriting or research projects that would help them reach their goals. Because of their technical work to repair or dismantle electronics, they may include technical documents and manuals; or administrative documents such as training manuals, procedure documents, job descriptions, etc.
	Gene Obersinner, Volunteer Coordinator	Yes: Service Learning partner	In addition to ongoing administrative and fundraising needs, SFLC is a fundraiser, a Housewarming auction, each May at the Fairgrounds. I would include public relations and communications materials, manuals, and other documents to help organize, and/or a report at the event's conclusion.
Food For Lane County	Sheyla Norte, Volunteer Coordinator	Yes: Service Learning partner, one term	FFLC is in the position to collect important data about hunger in the community. In addition to other needs they may have, a possible project would be to research, analyze, and report some of this information.
HIV Alliance	Byron Snapp, Volunteer Coordinator	Yes: Service Learning partner, one term	HIV Alliance is a multi-faceted organization that provides a wide range of resources for HIV prevention and supporting those with living HIV. In their four large annual events, the "Riverwalk," is held in May. I would include publicity, process documents for coordinating the events, and reporting. In addition, they do ongoing work in program evaluation, research, and education, and others, all of which suggest project possibilities.
Cascades Raptor Center	Louise Shimmel, Executive Director; Laurin Huse, Assistant Director	Yes: Service Learning partner, one term	Cascades Raptor Center is involved with rescue and care of wild birds in the community about the importance of these animals in the natural world. Possible projects may be educational materials and research reports.
Lane County Animal Shelter	Kylie Belachaikovsky, Foster and Volunteer Coordinator	Yes: ongoing volunteer activities on personal time	LCAS cares for animals, manages animal issues in the community, and educates adopters and the public. Possible projects would include administrative documents to improve efficiencies in and create resources for the volunteer staff; community education materials; grant writing and/or research.