Preparation of Faculty Who Teach Technical Writing in Kentucky Colleges and Universities

by

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ABSTRACT

In 1981 a questionnaire was mailed to personnel at 42 Kentucky colleges and universities to determine the number of faculty members teaching technical writing, the academic qualifications and professional experiences of these individuals, and the methods they used to teach technical writing. Of the 29 responding, 20 (68.9%) institutions offered courses in technical writing. Five (25%) of the 20 colleges had one full-time instructor who taught technical writing. Seventeen (85%) of the 20 institutions had at least one full-time instructor who taught technical writing part-time, while seven (35%) of the 20 colleges had nine adjunct faculty members who taught technical writing.

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INTRODUCTION

Technical writing courses are being developed in two- and four-year, public and private colleges and universities across the country. In fact, some colleges and universities are offering majors in it. According to Paul V. Anderson, "There were twenty-nine schools believed to have major programs in 1977."[1] According to the *Directory of Science Communication Degrees and Programs*, there were 58 schools that had technical writing programs in 1978.[2] The number of colleges and universities offering technical writing apparently doubled in one year. Its importance in today's world is evident. Businesses, scientific enterprises, engineering concerns, technological firms, industries, and the U.S. Government need additional writers. But where do Kentucky's institutions of higher education fit into this picture?

Although Kentucky does not necessarily have numerous corporations large enough to hire large numbers of technical writers, what corporations it does have offer the aspiring technical writer a chance to practice his or her craft. Therefore, Kentucky's institutions of higher education should offer courses in this field, preferably taught by instructors who have some technical writing experience and/or technical writing teaching experience.

PROBLEM

The problem of this study was to determine the preparation of faculty who taught technical writing in two- and four-year, public and private institutions of higher education

in Kentucky for the academic year 1980-81 by means of a specially designed questionnaire.

Therefore, the questions pertained to the respondents' educational and professional preparation as well as their methods of instruction when teaching technical writing.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to provide information about faculty who teach courses in technical writing as well as what they require from their students.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A Survey of the Structure of Science Writing Courses was a supplement to the *Directory of Science Communication Courses and Programs*. This survey inventoried the content of some of the courses listed in the directory. It examined the types of resource materials utilized in the courses and described the number and nature of major writing assignments required by the various science writing instructors of the 58 colleges and universities listed.

This survey revealed that these courses emphasized writing skills and sociological, philosophical, and political aspects of science. It found that an extreme variety of texts and resource material were used. However, use of available science communications research was minimal. Lastly, the information in the courses' syllabi varied greatly but was minimal: text citations were incomplete and descriptions of course objectives were fuzzy.[3]

The second study, "Career Opportunities for Teachers of Technical Writing: A Survey of Programs in Technical Communication," was designed to inform teachers of

technical writing about the career opportunities that programs in technical communication offer.

The survey found that the number of openings for instructors of technical writing would increase through the 1979-80 academic year, if not longer. Furthermore, the faculty that would fill these positions would be treated like their equally qualified and experienced peers, at least with respect to teaching loads, salaries, promotion, and tenure.

The results also showed that four-year and graduate programs in technical communication look for experience—both in teaching and in working as a technical writer or editor—more than the formal study of technical writing. Two-year programs, however, placed a higher value on formal study.[4]

Ideas for questions were formed from these studies as well as from "How Important is Technical Writing? A Survey of the Opinions of Successful Engineers"[5] and "Evaluation of a Master's Program in Technical Communication—Results of a Questionnaire."[6]

METHODS OF PROCEDURE

Research

The information desired and the population (Kentucky colleges and universities) involved determined that a well-designed questionnaire should be used.

Population

The colleges making up the population were two- and four-year, public and private institutions in Kentucky (Appendix: Institutions). The 42 institutions were selected from the state pamphlet *Facts 1979-80*[7] and *Yearbook of Higher Education—*

1980-81.[8] Business schools, theological seminaries, and schools of mortuary science were excluded from the survey.

Data Collection

A cover letter that explained the study, along with a copy of the questionnaire, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope was mailed to the appropriate person at each of the colleges and universities. Twenty-nine (69%) of the 42 questionnaires were returned.

FINDINGS

Full-time Instructors of Technical Writing

Of the 29 respondents, 20 (68.9%) institutions offered a total of 28 courses in technical writing. Fourteen (70%) offered one course, four (20%) offered two courses, and two (10%) offered three courses.

The first question asked if any of the full-time instructors taught technical writing full-time. Of the 20 institutions, five (25%) had one full-time technical writing instructor. Three (60%) of these five instructors were teaching in a two-year private institution. Another instructor (20%) was in a four-year institution.

Part-time Instructors of Technical Writing

The second question asked if any of the full-time instructors taught technical writing part-time. Of the 20 institutions, 17 (85%) had one full-time instructor who taught technical writing part-time. For the exact number of instructors who taught technical writing part-time see Table 1.

In two-year public institutions, six instructors (21.4% if the total 28 is used, or 20% if the total 30 is used) were teaching technical writing part-time. In four-year institutions, 14 to 16 instructors (50% if 28 is used, or 46.6% if 30 is used) were teaching.

In two-year institutions, three instructors (10.7% if 28 is used, or 10% if 30 is used) were teaching. In four-year private institutions, five instructors (17.8% if 28 is used, or 16.6% if 30 is used) were teaching.

Adjunct Faculty of Technical Writing

The third question asked if any adjunct faculty had been hired to teach technical writing. Of the 20 institutions seven (35%) had hired nine adjunct faculty members. One of these seven institutions had hired three (33.3%) of the nine. Thirteen colleges (65%) had not hired any adjunct faculty members.

Degrees Earned by Instructors of Technical Writing

The fourth question asked the respondents to indicate from a list the highest degree earned by each instructor of technical writing, and whether each was a full-time or part-time faculty member. For the results see Table 2.

Among the 22 instructors employed full-time who taught at least a course in technical writing, nine (49.9%) were employed by four (20%) of the 20 institutions. Nine institutions (45%) employed 11 instructors who had M. A. degrees. Two institutions (10%) employed five instructors with Ph. D. degrees. One of these institutions had two (9%) while the second had three (13.6%).

Twenty part-time faculty members taught technical writing in the 20 institutions. Twelve of these instructors (60%) taught in five (25%) of the institutions. One institution employed three faculty members with B. A. degrees (15%). Another employed three faculty members (15%) who had Ph. D. degrees. One institution employed two faculty members who had M. A. degrees (10%). Two employed two (10%) with Ph. D. degrees.

Respondents were asked to write in the instructors' last field of study. For the results see Table 3.

Under M. A., respondents at seven institutions failed to respond; under Ph. D., respondents at two institutions failed to respond. Twelve (48%) of the instructors teaching technical writing had their last degree in English. Five (20%) had majored in Education. Three (12%) had majored in Business Education. Two (8%) had majored in Linguistics. One (4%) had majored in Speech Communications and one (4%) had majored in German.

Teaching Experience of Instructors of Technical Writing

The fifth question asked for the average number of years full- and part-time faculty have taught technical writing. Table 4 presents the results.

Under full-time, one institution had two instructors (9%) with 1-3 years teaching experience. A second institution had two (9%) with 7-9 years, and a third had two (9%) with 10 or more. Under part-time, one institution had five instructors (38.4%) with 4-6 years teaching experience.

Technical Writing Experience of Instructors of Technical Writing

The sixth question asked for the average number of years' technical writing experience of full- and part-time instructors of technical writing. For the results see Table 5.

Under full-time, two institutions had two instructors each (11.7%) with 1-3 years of technical writing experience. Under part-time, one institution had seven instructors (43.7%) with 10 or more years of technical writing experience.

Instructors of Technical Writing and Other Courses

Question seven asked if the instructors of technical writing taught other courses, and, if so, what were the courses. Of the 20 colleges, 18 (90%) had instructors who taught other courses. Two of these 18 institutions had instructors of technical writing who taught business-related courses. Two (10%) of the colleges had instructors who taught only technical writing.

Most of the other courses taught by instructors of technical writing were composition. In fact, 12 (23%) of the 52 courses mentioned were composition. Literature was second with seven (13.4%). Speech and English were third with three each (5.7%). Secretarial Science, English Literature, Western Literature, and Writing were fourth with two each (3.8%). Each of the following was mentioned once (1.9%): Accounting, Management, Business English, Composition for Technical Students (I and II), Writing for Business and Industry, Introduction to Theatre, Performance Practicum, Communications Practicum, Developmental Reading and Writing Lab, World Literature, Linguistics, Business, Modern Grammar, History of English, Communications, Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Anglo-Irish Literature.

Salaries of Instructors of Technical Writing

Question eight asked if the instructors of technical writing earned the same as equally qualified and experienced instructors of literature. Sixteen (80%) of the 20 respondents marked "Yes." One (5%) marked "No." Three (15%) wrote "Not Applicable." (These were probably adjunct faculty members.)

Teaching Loads of Instructors of Technical Writing

The ninth question asked if the instructors of technical writing taught comparable loads as the equally qualified and experienced instructors of literature. Nineteen (95%)

marked “Yes.” One (5%) marked “No,” and then explained that the technical writing class allowed 35 students to enroll while the typical literature class allowed only 25 students.

Opportunities of Instructors of Technical Writing

The tenth question asked if the instructors of technical writing received the same opportunities for promotion and tenure as the equally qualified and experienced instructors of literature. Eighteen (90%) marked “Yes.” One (5%) marked “No,” and one (5%) wrote “Not Applicable.” The respondent that marked “No” did not provide an explanation.

Last Instructor Hired to Teach Technical Writing

The next question asked the respondents to indicate from a list the year in which the last faculty member to teach technical writing was hired. Since six of the respondents wrote “Not Applicable,” they were not included in calculating the percentages.

As Table 6 shows, six (42.8%) of the instructors were hired six or more years ago; three (21.4%) were hired one year ago; two (14.2%) were hired two years ago as well as two three years ago; and one (7.1%) was hired five years ago.

Ranks of Last Hired Technical Writing Instructors

Question twelve asked the respondents to indicate from a list the rank of the last hired instructor of technical writing. Since five of the respondents wrote “Not Applicable” they were not included in the percentage calculations. See Table 7 for the results.

It is apparent that one of the respondents included an instructor for this question that he or she did not include for the previous question, since there are 15 mentioned.

It is interesting to note that five (33.3%) of the instructors hired were given the rank of Associate Professor. Four (26.6%) were given the rank of Instructor. Only one (6.6%) was given the rank of Professor. One (6.6%), probably a part-time instructor, was titled a Lecturer. Another (6.6%) did not have any rank.

Summary

The data indicated that most of the institutions surveyed had at least one faculty member who taught one or more courses in technical writing. Most of these faculty members were located in four-year public colleges and universities.

Notes

1. Paul V. Anderson, "Career Opportunities for Teachers of Technical Writing: A Survey of Programs in Technical Communication," *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1978, p. 176.

2. Sharon Dunwoody and Ellen Wartella, *A Survey of the Structure of Science Writing Courses*, Document No. 163 477 (Washington, D.C.: Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), August 1978), p. 3.

3. Dunwoody and Wartella, *A Survey of the Structure of Science Writing Courses*, pp. 18-19.

4. Anderson, "Career Opportunities for Teachers of Technical Writing: A Survey of Programs in Technical Communication," p. 191.

5. Richard M. Davis, "How Important is Technical Writing? A Survey of the Opinions of Successful Engineers," *Journal of Technical Writing and Communications*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1978, pp. 207-216.

6. Jay R. Gould, "Evaluation of a Master's Program in Technical Communication—Results of a Questionnaire," *Journal of Technical Writing and Communications*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1977, pp. 55-73.

7. *Facts 1979-80* (Frankfort, Ky.: Kentucky Council on Higher Education, 1979), pp. 1-2.

8. *Yearbook of Higher Education—1980-81*, 11th ed. (Chicago, Ill.: Marquis Academic Media, 1979), pp. 195-205.

Appendix: Institutions

Two-Year Public

Ashland Community College, Ashland, Ky.

Elizabethtown Community College, Elizabethtown, Ky.

Fort Knox Community College, Fort Knox, Ky.

Hazard Community College, Hazard, Ky.

Henderson Community College, Henderson, Ky.

Hopkinsville Community College, Hopkinsville, Ky.

Jefferson Community College, Louisville, Ky.

Lexington Technical Institute, Lexington, Ky.

Madisonville Community College, Madisonville, Ky.

Maysville Community College, Maysville, Ky.

Paducah Community College, Paducah, Ky.

Prestonsburg Community College, Prestonsburg, Ky.

Somerset Community College, Somerset, Ky.

Southeast Community College, Cumberland, Ky.

Two-Year Private

Alice Lloyd College, Pippa Passes, Ky.

Lees Junior College, Jackson, Ky.

Lindsey Wilson College, Columbia, Ky.

Midway College, Midway, Ky.

Saint Catharine College, St. Catharine, Ky.

Sue Bennett College, London, Ky.

Four-Year Public

Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, Ky.

Kentucky State University, Frankfort, Ky.

Morehead State University, Morehead, Ky.

Murray State University, Murray, Ky.

Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, Ky.

University of Louisville, Louisville, Ky.

Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Ky.

Four-Year Private

Asbury College, Wilmore, Ky.

Bellarmine College, Louisville, Ky.

Berea College, Berea, Ky.

Brescia College, Owensboro, Ky.

Campbellsville College, Campbellsville, Ky.

Centre College, Danville, Ky.

Cumberland College, Williamsburg, Ky.

Georgetown College, Georgetown, Ky.

Kentucky Christian College, Grayson, Ky.

Kentucky Wesleyan College, Owensboro, Ky.

Pikeville College, Pikeville, Ky.

Spalding College, Louisville, Ky.

Thomas More College, Ft. Mitchell, Ky.

Transylvania University, Lexington, Ky.

Union College, Barbourville, Ky.

Table 1

Full-time Instructors Who Taught Technical Writing Part-time

College Type	Number of Instructors	% (of 28)*	% (of 30)*
	2	7.1	6.6
	1	3.5	3.3
	1	3.5	3.3
2-Year Public	1	3.5	3.3
	0	0	0
	No Response	--	--
	0	0	0
	1	3.5	3.3
	1	3.5	3.3
	1	3.5	3.3
4-Year Public	2	7.1	6.6
	3	10.7	10
	5-7	17.8	23.3
	2	7.1	6.6
2-Year Private	1	3.5	3.3
	2	7.1	6.6
	1	3.5	3.3
4-Year Private	1	3.5	3.3

	1	3.5	3.3
	2	7.1	6.6
Total	**28-30**	**99**	**99.3**

***One institution had five to seven instructors who taught technical writing. Five was used in calculating one total (28); seven was used in calculating the other total (30).**

Table 2

Degrees of Instructors of Technical Writing

Degree	Full-time Faculty	%	Part-time Faculty	%
B. A.	1	4.5	5	25
B. S.	0	0	0	0
M. A.	11	50	5	25
M. S.	0	0	1	5
Ed. S.	1	4.5	1	5
Ed. D.	0	0	0	0
Ph. D.	9	40.9	8	40
No Degree	0	0	0	0
Total	**22**	**99.9**	**20**	**100**

Table 3

Majors of Instructors of Technical Writing

Degree	Number of Respondents	Field of Study
B. A.	2	English
	1	Business Education
	2	Education
M. A.	2	Business Education
	4	English
	2	English Literature
	1	Education
M. S.	1	Education
Ed. S.	1	Education
Ph. D.	6	English
	1	Linguistics
	1	Speech Communications
	1	German
Total	**25**	

Table 4

Teaching Experience of Instructors of Technical Writing in Years

	Full-time		Part-time	
Number of Years	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
1-3 years	6	27.2	4	30.7
4-6 years	2	9	6	46.1
7-9 years	6	27.2	0	0
10 or more	8	36.3	3	23
Total	**22**	**99.7**	**13**	**99.8**

Table 5

Technical Writing Experience of Instructors of Technical Writing

	Full-time		Part-time	
Number of Years	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
1-3 years	10	58.8	5	31.2
4-6 years	3	17.6	1	6.2
7-9 years	2	11.7	0	0
10 or more	2	11.7	10	62.5
Total	**17**	**99.8**	**16**	**99.9**

Table 6

Year in Which Instructors of Technical Writing Were Hired

Year	Number of Instructors	%
1 Year Ago	3	21.4
2 Years Ago	2	14.2
3 Years Ago	2	14.2
4 Years Ago	0	0
5 Years Ago	1	7.1
6 or more	6	42.8
Total	**14**	**99.7**

Table 7

Ranks of the Last Hired Technical Writing Instructors

Rank	Number of Instructors	%
Instructor	3	20
Assistant Professor	4	26.6
Associate Professor	5	33.3
Professor	1	6.6
Lecturer	1	6.6
Unranked	1	6.6
Total	**15**	**99.7**