Technical Communication MA

Recruitment and admissions

Goal Description:

The program will recruit and admit enough students for the 2021-22 academic year to sustain or grow enrollment and increase the academic quality of the program.

Providing Department: Technical Communication MA

RELATED ITEMS/ELEMENTS -

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

Maintain a marketing plan

Performance Objective Description:

The program will identify marketing opportunities and create necessary supporting materials. Additionally, we will complete these marketing initiatives:

- Participate in Saturday@Sam
- Attend on-campus and/or virtual events for prospective graduate students
- Place ads in programs for relevant academic conferences
- Implement a marketing campaign within the Minor in Professional Writing and the service course Introduction to Technical Writing

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Maintain Marketing Plan

KPI Description:

The program will identify marketing opportunities and create necessary supporting materials. Additionally, we will complete these marketing initiatives:

- Participate in Saturday@Sam
- Attend on-campus and/or virtual events for prospective graduate students
- Place ads in programs for relevant academic conferences
- Implement a marketing campaign within the Minor in Professional Writing and the service course Introduction to Technical Writing

Results Description:

Regarding the marketing initiatives, we achieved the following results:

- We did not participate in Saturday@Sam.
  - Our program faculty were engaged on an extensive hiring committee for two new tenure-track professors; this work lasted from August 2021 until March 2022. Because of this service, we did not have time to adequately prepare for participating in Saturday@Sam.
- We held a virtual information session with interested undergraduate students during summer 2022
  - This session was attended synchronously by five students with five more who were unable to attend but requested additional information. I supplied them with this presentation: https://youtu.be/cgEvqEqpSQU.
- We did not receive funding for exhibiting or marketing at conferences.
- The information session mentioned above was part of our concerted effort to recruit more heavily from our undergraduate courses.
  - We must continue implementing marketing strategies within our undergraduate program.

Additionally, our program received funding from the English department and SHSU Online to engage in a digital campaign with enrollment management, which we ran from Summer 2021 through Fall 2021.

Meet enrollment projections

Performance Objective Description:

In the proposal to create this program, we estimated that we would have have 28 total students enrolled by the end of the program's second year. The COVID-19 pandemic altered enrollment throughout year 2 and we ended the year with 20 enrolled students. Our new-enrollment goal for year three is at least 8 students to maintain the program's current enrollment numbers and offset students graduating.

Synthesis of Scholarship in Technical Communication

Goal Description:

Now that the program has graduated six students, faculty have determined that more scholarly preparation is needed throughout the program's coursework that supports the portfolio documents that students produce at the end of the degree program.

Providing Department: Technical Communication MA

Synthesize Scholarship in Technical Communication

Learning Objective Description:

Students will be able to competently synthesize scholarship in technical communication in the following ways:

- Situate the scholarship of a given area or sub-discipline in technical communication historically and currently.
- Situate relevant professional competencies of technical communication with relevant scholarship.
- Situate a student's professional and academic work within relevant scholarship and professional practice of technical communication.

Synthesize Scholarship in Technical Communication

Indicator Description:

Students will be able to competently synthesize scholarship in technical communication in the following ways:

- Situate the scholarship of a given area or sub-discipline in technical communication historically and currently.
- Situate relevant professional competencies of technical communication with relevant scholarship.
- Situate a student's professional and academic work within relevant scholarship and professional practice of technical communication.

Criterion Description:

Starting Spring 2022, students will be required to complete a standard final assignment in all courses that requires them to synthesize insightful scholarship from that course in a reflection that discusses this scholarship in relation to competencies in technical communication and the work the student has completed during the semester.

Students will be evaluated according to a standard rubric.

For Spring 2022, there is no expectation for how students will perform on these final synthesis assignments; rather, the criterion is simply that these assignments are given, completed, and evaluated for all students in every course, with the exception of TCOM 6300, according to the established standardized documentation. From there, the program will begin assessment to determine what future criteria should be.

Findings Description:

We produced a common reflection assignment (attached) for graduate courses but disagreed on which courses to us it in. We decided to table that discussion until our two new graduate faculty join the program in Fall 2022. So the assignment was not used during this assessment cycle. Though the assignment was not used, all faculty committed to more explicitly emphasizing academic writing, research, and synthesis in all courses with all students. During Spring 2022, the faculty unanimously agreed to award High Passes to the Critical Introductions to both graduating students defending their portfolios. The quality of academic writing in these portfolios far exceeded the past portfolios we have assessed, so we believe we are making progress on this objective.

Attached Files

📄 Final Reflection - Grad Courses.pdf

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Action - Synthesize Scholarship in Technical Communication

Action Description:

The most recent graduates of our program have produced excellent work regarding synthesis. This indicates we are ding better collectively to engage students in the theories of the discipline. Initially, we believed we needed a standard final assignment in all classes to address this deficiency, but making faculty more aware of this need and providing students more transparency about expectations may be enough to address this concern.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

Produce Standard Course Requirements for Synthesizing Scholarship in Technical Communication

Performance Objective Description:

Now that the program has graduated six students, faculty have determined that more scholarly preparation is needed throughout the program's coursework that supports the portfolio documents that students produce at the end of the degree program. To that end, faculty will produce a standard final exam/reflection that will be given to students at the end of each semester that situates the scholarship presented in the course with the work the students have completed.

Required documents by end of assessment year:

- Standard final exam assignment that requires students to synthesize of scholarship of a given course with competencies in technical communication and students' specific course projects.
- Standard rubric used to evaluate these projects.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Produce Standard Course Requirements for Synthesizing of Scholarship in Technical Communication

KPI Description:

Now that the program has graduated six students, faculty have determined that more scholarly preparation is needed throughout the program's coursework that supports the portfolio documents that students produce at the end of the degree program. To that end, faculty will produce a standard final exam/reflection that will be given to students at the end of each semester that situates the scholarship presented in the course with the work the students have completed.

Required documents by end of assessment year:

- Standard final exam assignment that requires students to synthesize of scholarship of a given course with competencies in technical communication and students' specific course projects.
- Standard rubric used to evaluate these projects.

Results Description:

Required documents by end of assessment year:

- Standard final exam assignment that requires students to synthesize of scholarship of a given course with competencies in technical communication and students' specific course projects.
  - Aug. 1, 2022 - We produced the standard assignment (attached).
- Standard rubric used to evaluate these projects.
  - Aug. 1, 2022 - We did not produce a standard rubric because the faculty did not agree on which courses to use the final exam for, so we will revisit the discussion this fall.

Attached Files

📄 Final Reflection - Grad Courses.pdf

Theoretical knowledge and practical experience

Goal Description:

Students will gain the theoretical knowledge and practical experience to enter the workforce as technical communicators.

Providing Department: Technical Communication MA

RELATED ITEMS/ELEMENTS ‑‑

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

Demonstrate key skills for technical communicators.

Learning Objective Description:

Students will be able to demonstrate key skills of technical communicators:

- Rhetorical awareness
- Document design
- Technical writing style
- Editing

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Demonstrate key skills for technical communicators

Indicator Description:

At the end of the program, students will curate representative works from across their graduate studies to produce two portfolio documents: a print portfolio and ePortfolio. These portfolios will satisfy the academic requirements for the MA in Technical Communication and demonstrate the students' abilities to potential employers. Students will present their portfolios to a committee of faculty from the program who will assess them according to a predefined rubric.

Criterion Description:

80% of students will score 80% or better. To establish this standard, the graduate faculty consulted other programs' plans and discussed desired outcomes. Because graduate students are required to maintain a B (or higher) average, an 80% score on the portfolio was accepted as the minimum goal; similarly, the faculty agreed that an 80% success rate among our students was the base-level representation of our meeting the needs of students and the program.

Findings Description:

The MA program graduated five students during this assessment cycle. All five ultimately passed their portfolio evaluations, demonstrating their skills as technical communicators, representing a 100% rate, achieving our goal. One student, because of professional circumstances had to take an X for the portfolio course in the fall and complete the course in the spring. Notably, the most recent two students (Spring 2022) produced, as agreed by the entire program faculty, the two best portfolios we have received since the program launched in Fall 2019: both students earned overall high passes. To the program, this indicates that our emphasis on key skills in technical communication is improving.

Additionally, a student who graduated in August 2021 was accepted into one of the best PhD programs in the country for our field, further indicating that key skills are being learned by our students.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Demonstrate key skills for technical communicators
Action Description:
Students demonstrated these key skills exceptionally over the past year. No additional actions beyond maintaining our current course are needed.

Update to Previous Cycle's Plan for Continuous Improvement Item

Previous Cycle's Plan For Continuous Improvement (Do Not Modify):
Closing Summary
In this past year, our program achieved some objectives, including marketing the program and developing forms to evaluate students for key skills, but did not achieve other objectives, such as meeting assessment due dates or seeking additional training for the director and faculty. These shortcoming can be attributed to the mid-summer change in directors. Our program also missed its goal of enrolling 28 students by the end of the second year. With these findings and results from this past year, the MA in Technical Communication will take the following actions:

- Develop stronger ties between coursework projects and the portfolios created for the program's portfolio evaluation
- Ensure that periodic due dates throughout the new assessment period are met
- Seek additional training for the program director and hold additional training sessions for unit faculty
- Continue marketing the program and recruiting new students

Update of Progress to the Previous Cycle's PCI:
We experienced more success than failure this past year. In review to the actions from the previous cycle:

- We developed stronger ties between coursework and portfolios and the fall 2021 and spring 2022 produced the three best portfolios we've seen in our program. Additionally, two of our students were admitted into a rigorous and respected PhD program.
- We met all assessment deadlines.
- The program director attended all trainings hosted by the graduate school, admissions, and other divisions.
- We completed a digital campaign for our program with Enrollment Management and admitted many gifted students, but we are still falling below our original goals and need to increase applications and admissions.

New Plan for Continuous Improvement Item

Closing Summary:

Throughout the 2021-22 cycle, we were able to gain training for our new director, meet assessment deadlines, elevate our students' mastery of important disciplinary competencies, and improve our students' abilities to synthesize important scholarship. Additionally, we hired two new tenure-track faculty members who add to the pedagogical value and tools we bring to our students.

For 2022-23, we need to focus more on recruitment and connecting our program to the wider technical communication industry while maintaining and seeking to further elevate our students' academic success.

Though we demonstrated that our students are mastering disciplinary competencies and improving in their synthesis of scholarship, we will complete the following actions to further elevate their success:

- Develop a second Portfolio course to adequately prepare students for critical reflection, synthesis, and professional development.
- Develop new courses to address student professional goals, including user experience design and a pedagogy course.

Our program needs to recruit more students to replace those graduating and grow beyond 20 students. We will undertake the following actions:

- Develop a comprehensive marketing plan that involves in-person and virtual events, social media, and professional outreach.
- Assess the current design of our curriculum and work to expand it with new courses and tracks.
- Develop a graduate certificate to attract more working professionals who want a new credential.

In service to both our students' academic success and our program's need for recruitment, we will attempt to connect our program more clearly to industry by taking the following actions:

- Create an advisory board comprised of local and national professionals.
- Establish partnerships with organizations to give students more opportunity for networking and practice.
- Showcase our program at national events.