

Using Advocacy to Reach out Globally and Locally: Developing Relationships Through an Editing and Publishing Certificate

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Abstract In this article, I argue that the concepts of advocacy, community connections, and relationships help establish the identity of an editing and publishing certificate program in ways that emphasize theoretical and practical value to institutional administrations, students, and community stakeholders. These types of theoretical connections promote career skills development while anchoring to valued, interdisciplinary concepts, including empathy, care, and diversity of community and relationship stories and narratives. After introducing these concepts and their relationship to the fields of technical and professional communication and business communication, I provide a case study of an editing and publishing certificate that joins faculty and students from technical and professional communication and creative writing programs at Tennessee Technological University, as an example of how an editing and publishing program might connect these concepts and skills while also combatting hyper-pragmatist framing. Illustrating ways that core courses in this certificate address theory as well as practice, I discuss ways that this program solidifies its identity by further connecting to values presented in the university's strategic plan and the certificate program's outcomes goals. The article also addresses special challenges that editing and publishing programs face and presents recommendations for establishing and maintaining such programs.

Keywords editing, publishing, certificates, advocacy, community, relationships, empathy, narratives

English departments have experienced declining enrollments in recent years (Ballentine, 2022; Cartwright, 2015; Sánchez, 2025) along with other humanities fields. Some of these lower numbers are likely due to continued negative perceptions about the value of English, the potential for well-paying jobs in a slowing economy, and a persistent

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gender gap: “[M]ore women major in English, women are underpaid, and thus the gender gap in wages disproportionately affects English majors” (Krebs, 2024, p. 1). However, organizations such as the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the affiliated Association of Departments of English (ADE) and its *Ad Hoc* Committee on English Majors’ Careers report that English majors with bachelor’s degrees continue to obtain well-paying jobs that apply skills learned as undergraduates (2024). These graduates also report high levels of job satisfaction and that their jobs provide “intellectual challenge and connection to others” (Krebs, 2024, p. 1; see also the ADE and its “Report on English majors’ career preparation and outcomes,” 2024). Despite this positive news, some English departments within colleges and universities have experienced increasing pressure to justify their programs’ existence and relevance; this pressure has the potential to increase even more with the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and a perception among students and some members of industry that human writers are not as necessary, now that we have generative AI tools. This perception contradicts preliminary research that indicates generative AI can subvert *or* augment writers’ roles (Noy & Zhang, 2023) and that, in fact, the importance of editors has increased, due to AI (Baker, Rawlins, & Pierson, 2024; Teixeira da Silva, 2022).

In response to these perceptions, pressures, and the need to establish continuing relevance, the MLA recommends that “[d]epartments should develop curricular and cocurricular programs that walk through the career-preparation process with clarity and support” (Krebs, 2024, p. 2) and “[d]epartments must develop sustainable career-preparation programs that account for local contexts” (Krebs, 2024, p. 2). Many English departments have tried to accomplish this, but still, departments often struggle with the perception that English degrees are not preparing students for industry. Fernando Sánchez’s (2025) work illustrates the importance of this ongoing issue; he found that students in a qualitative study majored in English due to their love for the literary, but they added a second major to help prepare them with skills they could use in industry. Students in his university’s English program at the time had just two tracks: Literature and Creative Writing, and students did not seem to be able to readily make the leap to conceptualizing ways their English degree could apply to the workplace, even though his department did offer some courses in professional and technical writing. He states, “arguments about the ways in which English opens up career opportunities fell flat for participants [in his study] when thinking about life after graduation...at which point they decided to seek out majors that were more legibly career-focused” (p. 253). One way to address these concerns and recommendations about the relevance of the field of English is to develop interdisciplinary certificate programs, housed within English departments, that draw upon already existing courses and that combine skills that were previously available only through one

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concentration or minor, for example, in a way that emphasizes the development of career-ready skills for students and justifies these programs for university administrations in positive ways. An example of this type of collaborative effort is the Editing and Publishing Certificate at Tennessee Technological University.

Focusing on the research question, “How can a disciplinary identity be established for editing and publishing (E&P) programs,” I argue that creating this disciplinary identity requires tying into established theoretical frameworks in the technical and professional communication (TPC) and business communication (BC) fields, namely those of advocacy, community, and relationships. More specifically, drawing upon theories of an ethic of care and empathy can provide a theoretical grounding for E&P programs in ways that not only help faculty and students relate to the goals and missions of nonprofit organizations but also grow students’ developing self-awareness of cultivating emotional intelligence qualities and soft/essential skills that will serve them when interacting with similar public audiences in the future. Such grounding has the potential not only to unite programs within English departments but also to situate E&P programs within global and local communities in ways that highlight skills development as well as theoretical context. This theoretical framing provides necessary disciplinary context within courses and internships that often can be viewed as skills-based only.

The persistent viewing of TPC programs within a hyper-pragmatist context (Scott, Longo, & Wills, 2006) has likely contributed to a continued devaluing of these types of programs, many of which are housed within English departments. Scholars such as Heidi Lawrence and others (2023) argue that this hyper-pragmatist orientation can contribute to lowered enrollments and students’ becoming “agnostic to the communities they join” (p. 61) through internships and service learning, for example, when what is actually needed is more authentic relationship development among these programs, students, and the communities and industries that they serve (refer also to Kimme Hea & Wendler Shah, 2016). Lawrence et al. recommend an “accountability model” in which “[f]aculty build programs that improve and support the communities to which they are best suited to contribute” and where “[s]tudents become responsive and responsible to one another as a collective” (p. 61). E&P programs can benefit from this type of collaborative, community approach, and, as a result, they can position and define themselves more strategically in ways that can combat hyper-pragmatism and build more effective relationships among the students and between students and industry. Such a positioning is vital for the developing identity of E&P, since the E&P field risks being perceived as hyper-pragmatist, based on the prominent roles of editing and publishing within it.

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Following a literature review in which I connect E&P to scholarship on community relationships and advocacy, I present a case study of a partnership between creative writing (CW) and TPC programs at a regional university that serves rural populations. This collaborative, certificate-program, advocacy approach complements a communities-of-practice orientation, from which students can branch off through different courses that contain service-learning and community-based projects. This approach and case study illustrate ways that students can create stronger relationship connections not only among themselves but also with communities and industries they work with as part of their certificate in E&P.

Literature Review

E&P programs involve editing various types of documents, including text, images, design, and multi-media elements. Delivering those documents via some type of technology is also a focus, including the web, mobile devices, other digital devices, and even, in some cases, hard copy. The documents are often produced using publishing software, such as the layout tool Adobe InDesign, and appear in a variety of formats, such as Microsoft Word documents, PDFs, blogs, image files, audio files, videos, and websites. According to Holly Baker and others (2024), these programs have been gaining popularity in recent years, possibly as a result of AI, which is impacting the publishing industry. Also, as Carolyn Gubala, Kara Larson, and Lisa Melonçon (2020) discuss, industry professionals very much care about errors in documents, especially public-facing ones, so industry may be calling for and supporting these programs in an effort to increase communication professionalism in the workplace, as well as enhanced publishing skills, due to technological advancements.

Baker et al. (2024) provide an excellent overview of such programs, including their prevalence throughout the United States and the English-speaking world (pp. 64–65). E&P programs exist in multiple configurations, including the undergraduate major, minor, and certificate, as well as the graduate certificate and graduate degree (Baker et al., 2024, p. 65). These programs are located “in English departments (to include such departments as English and Philosophy, English and Creative Writing, English and Writing, and Writing and Literature). E&P programs are also hosted by business, communications, journalism, media and creative arts, publishing, typographic and graphic communications, and linguistics departments” (Baker et al., 2024, p. 65). One thing these scholars have noted, however, is that despite their prevalence, E&P programs lack a common curriculum and therefore a common identity, which has caused this evolving field to struggle to maintain a

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unified status as an academic discipline (Baker et al., 2024; Card, Chambers, & Freeman, 2016).

Situating E&P programs within established disciplinary theories, such as those from TPC and BC, is one way to begin establishing the identity of such programs. A lack of a common theoretical framework within the E&P field could be leading to a more skills-based view of these programs currently (Baker et al., 2024); but building on these theoretical foundations can create and elevate unique connections within their local academic contexts and communities, establishing them more as academic fields, as well as useful sets of skills. Two theoretical concepts that have established themselves within the fields of TPC and BC and that also resonate well with goals of E&P programs are advocacy and community relationships, including their stories and narratives. Connecting to these types of theoretical concepts provides an anchoring theoretical foundation that allows E&P program administrators to advocate for these programs in ways that connect specific skills students are learning with broader purposes for those skills, as well as relationships. While developing career-ready skills provides a prominent selling point, the theories help locate these skills within a context that faculty and administrators from other disciplines can recognize, as well, and connecting skills with foundational theories will help further legitimize E&P programs for both academic and community audiences, increase their visibility, and ensure that relevant theories are informing skills development and application.

Advocacy

In TPC, the concept of *advocacy* often relates to some type of need and cause that students and/or professionals can then identify with and help address through communication. Kirk St. Amant (2018) defines advocacy as “effective access to information” (xxi), including the “interlocking parts” of “availability” and “comprehensibility” (xxi). Others connect it to social roles of citizenship and civic engagement (Agboka & Matveeva, 2018, p. xxv). Scholars also apply the concept of advocacy to technology through “multimodal advocacy” which addresses “personal and collective agency, technological processes and implications, and design-as-social action” (Tham & Jiang, 2023, p. 130). Especially important for E&P programs, “design advocacy” (Jiang & Tham, 2019) emphasizes “multimodality within design-driven efforts [that can] promote social advocacy” (Tham & Jiang, 2023, p. 130), such as through “activating change, understanding needs, challenging status quo, and manifesting tangible and desirable differences” (Tham & Jiang, 2023, p. 131). These concepts apply to TPC through service-learning projects and work for nonprofit organizations through internships.

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For example, a partnership among students, faculty, and the nonprofit organization Authors Inside helps students develop professional communication, editing, and publishing skills while working with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated writers (Gaisie et al., 2024). This program, a community-based advocacy program, is titled Editing for Justice and helps give voice to those who may not be heard otherwise while also facilitating student skill development, including the use of technological tools. This type of collaboration reflects the related social justice emphasis within TPC (Clem & Cheek, 2022; Walwema, Colton, & Holmes, 2022), the idea that “[s]ocial justice is collective and active” and that “we must work collectively and consider collective forces and effects of oppression” (Walton et al., 2019, p. 50), as well as be willing to take action against these forces and effects. Rather than only calling for the need to address social justice within the field, Rebecca Walton and others (2019) emphasize the need to address inequalities by putting specific actions into practice, such as Christopher Andrews and Charles Etheridge’s work with Hispanic students enrolled in a Writing for Non-Profits certificate program (2022); these faculty researchers found a way to listen to and address students’ social justice concerns by conducting semi-structured interviews with certificate students and then acting upon what they learned from them. These writers state that while calling attention to social justice needs is important, much more should be done through practice.

An advocacy orientation is one way to address these inequalities, as marginalized voices, for example, present needs and concerns that are then addressed through nonprofit organizations (Andrews & Etheridge, 2022; Baddour, 2022; Gaisie et al., 2024; Kramer-Simpson & Simpson, 2018), community partnerships (Kramer-Simpson & Simpson, 2018; Rea et al., 2018), government collaborations (Hirst, 2016; Pickering, 2024), and local governing bodies (Endres, 2023). Broadly conceived, the concept of advocacy provides a situating framework for service-learning projects and internships for many different types of organizations and interactions such as these.

The concept of advocacy as part of this theoretical grounding for E&P programs is dynamic and works reciprocally: While students initially might feel that they are contributing their skills to help others (and they are), they are also learning more about the types of documents and communication needed in many different settings for various businesses, organizations, industries, and groups of people with diverse needs. They are also learning that the type of editing and publishing they are doing does not exist in a vacuum: Getting to know others and their needs, advocating on their behalf, and helping them produce

communication that is important to them and represents their voices all are part of the process of working in relationships with others.

Community Connections and Relationships

In addition to building upon the theoretical concept of advocacy to ground their disciplinary identities, E&P programs can also emphasize the importance of community connections and relationships, based on scholarship in relevant fields. While some outside the E&P discipline might view these programs and courses as decidedly skills-based, tying in to broader theoretical concepts and purposes anchors these programs as relevant and needed not only for individuals but also for organizations. From this perspective, scholarship in BC is helpful for emphasizing the importance of developing relationships while navigating communication needs. For example, BC scholarship especially focuses on “soft/essential skills” needed for effective communication in business settings (Anthony & Garner, 2016; Fletcher & Thornton, 2023; Robles, 2012); the use of these skills is often framed within a context of conducting business effectively and maintaining relationships, with special consideration given to audiences’ expectations, needs, and feelings. The use of soft skills extends to communicating interculturally for business purposes (Quintero, 2025; Roshid & Kankaanranta, 2025). Mohammad Moninoor Roshid and Anne Kankaanranta (2025), in discussing research on this topic, state the importance of intercultural audience awareness to facilitate communication: “[E]ffective communication in a lingua franca environment requires adapting to different communication styles and cultural norms and focusing on clear and concise language use” (p. 103); others discuss politeness strategies to mitigate possibly negative feelings associated with communicating within global business settings (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010).

Many international business transactions do contain a relationship component that applies these soft skills in enhanced ways, such as transactions that involve extending pleasantries, addressing cultural norms (such as conversing about family members and other personal interests such as hobbies), hosting business guests at culturally significant events, and making special efforts to ensure that international guests are comfortable. While some of these characterizations of cultivating effective business relationships sound cliché based on potentially reductive cultural stereotypes, their continued and recent emphasis in scholarship, frequency of occurrence within business interactions, and the time devoted to these relationship-building strategies suggest more than just capitalistic motivations (i.e., the need to simply “get business done”). Instead, many communicators and negotiators in the business world understand the importance of

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relationship building as essential to accomplishing joint business and communication goals, networking, and maintaining business alliances with collegiality at their core.

These soft skills, including audience awareness, emotional intelligence, and emotion management/regulation, while accepted as core essentials within BC, have been gaining more emphasis in TPC scholarship recently (Pickering, 2018a, 2019; Sánchez, 2025; Wolfe & Powell, 2022). Because E&P programs also involve relationship-building skills through service-learning projects, internships, and collaborations with community members and stakeholders, focusing on these soft skills and developing relationships provide opportunities to integrate foundational concepts from the related fields of BC and TPC that E&P programs can then build upon to further establish their disciplinary identity. Particularly important here is not just encouraging the development of soft/essential skills at a general level but providing ways that these can actually be applied through service-learning projects and internships in E&P programs.

Sánchez (2025) recommends emphasizing such emotional connections in these projects to generate more student engagement, and Jason Tham and Jialei Jiang (2023) discuss the same idea, that faculty are motivated to invest in projects that resonate with them emotionally and connect with personal feelings, which in turn relate to “perceived agency” (p. 150). This type of emotional investment ensures more authentic connections among students and faculty that remain with them long after these projects and internships end. Specific concepts related to relationship dynamics that can further establish the identity of E&P programs and that require application to specific interactions include:

- Demonstrating empathy and care and
- Developing awareness of and addressing diversity of stories and narratives.

I have chosen these two elements to illustrate developing community connections and relationships based on Paul Dombrowski’s foundational work, *Ethics in Technical Communication* (2000). As part of his chapter titled “The ethics tradition,” Dombrowski discusses an ethic of care, which continues to gain traction within TPC, especially, since it helps interrogate traditional science and technology value systems and encourages care as a value system, as well as the value of “relationship” instead of valuing only expediency. The focus on empathy and care within TPC (particularly the recent focus on users’ needs in information and user design and design thinking [refer to Colby, 2023; Jones, 2016; Keinonen, 2024; Pope-Ruark, Moses, & Tham, 2019; Rose & Turner, 2024; Wible, 2022]) illustrates the continued application and usefulness of these concepts within the field that also extend to E&P programs, including their emphasis on producing documents intended

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for diverse audiences using ever-evolving media. In addition, stories and narratives convey emotions as well as individual and community values that E&P programs can also address.

Demonstrating Empathy and Care

Scholars of rhetoric have documented the importance of emotions, pathos, and connections to technical, scientific, and business communication in ways that tie in to care and meaningful social action (Dolamore, Lovell, Collins, & Kline, 2021; Gogan & Belinsky, 2022; Koponen et al., 2025; Mackiewicz, 2011; Sánchez, 2025; Weedon, 2020). Valuing ethical emotional appeals in this communication process, as well as communicators' and audiences' feelings, stems from the ethic of care orientation and the need to connect compassion and empathy with civic tasks and goals (Dombrowski, 2000). The basis of this care ethic is relationships: “[W]hen relationships develop, human beings start to care about other persons and their needs as care is an essential feature of the human condition” (Antoni & Beer, 2024, p. 280) (refer also to Nel Noddings, 2015, p. 73). These relationships are formed through interdependency, rather than independency (Antoni & Beer, 2024, p. 281). Offering a nonlinear perspective on care and relationships, Annemarie Mol’s (2008) work *The Logic of Care* emphasizes, as well, collective, social action and the indeterminate, process-oriented activities and actions that surround nurturing care, including reciprocal dialogue (refer also to Joan Tronto, 1993). Emotions, such as empathy, occur within the context of these relationships, and then those emotions precede action: “To be motivated to act, we must *feel* something” (Noddings, 2015, p. 75). Such feelings indicate caring *about* those experiencing need, those with whom we interact in relationships, and ideally would translate to caring *for*, according to Noddings, through specific actions addressing needs. While the care process focuses on innovation and improvement, Mol clarifies that the improvement is messy and unpredictable, that the care process involves moving forward even when failures occur. Caring communication involves conversations, rather than confrontation, “marked by an exchange of experiences, knowledge, suggestions, words of comfort” (p. 76).

Technology is an inevitable part of this process, including the rise of AI technologies. An ethic of care framework accounts for the use of technologies to care, as Mol (2008) clarifies when she states that “care...is not opposed to, but includes, technology” (p. 5). While technologies have often been associated with science and rationalism, they do play a vital role in caring for others. An ethic of care orientation allows for technologies to evolve and be modified to meet local needs (Mol 2008); as Irina Zakharova and Juliane Jarke (2022) clarify, “Once designed, digital technologies are not rigid scripts or stable entities, but continue to be the subject of change and transformation” (p. 97). One issue

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complicating the use of digital technologies and an ethic of care is that the technology allows for the possibility that the intended communication will reach much further than the original or localized audience. Jared Colton, Steve Holmes, and Josephine Walwema (2017) address this complexity in their work: “Especially in the age of digital networks, we can [not] assume that the only beings affected by our actions are those to whom are [sic] actions are directed” (p. 64). While scholars emphasize that various technologies can be adapted to address local and evolving needs, the reality is that the needs of those impacted by the technologies will be constantly changing and sometimes difficult to identify, since communicators may not always be aware of who is accessing and using their work.

Many jobs within TPC do involve writing for and about technological processes for industry or nonprofits, such as writing documentation for software programs, video games, and repairing technological devices; nonprofit website content management; drafting technical specifications; and social media management, for example. Connecting with these public audiences involves feeling empathy and demonstrating care: As Laura Patterson writes, “The first step towards an engagement with another audience is empathizing with them to understand their needs” (2019, p. 194). Addressing this need to incorporate empathy and care into communication, particularly within TPC and BC, has ranged from regulating emotions stemming from caring to emphasizing them more openly. For example, some scholars have focused on regulating emotion in order to accomplish goals and maintain a professional ethos while doing so (Fuglsby & Veeramoothoo, 2023; Pickering, 2018a, 2019) and to avoid negative repercussions of gender stereotypes in male dominated fields (Wolfe & Powell, 2022). Others discuss emotions, such as empathy, more openly in connection with professional communication goals (Bowden, Pigg, & Mansfield, 2014; Coffelt, Grauman, & Smith, 2019; Fuller et al., 2021; Fuller et al., 2023) and public welfare (Patterson, 2019, 2020, 2021). Attending to emotions and an ethic of care specifically appears to be a new development as TPC and BC continue to incorporate ethical theories outside “dominant moral philosophies such as Kantianism, consequentialism, liberalism, Rawlesian theory of justice or virtue ethics” (Antoni & Beer, 2024, p. 281), and this new orientation is one that E&P programs can claim through required internships and service-learning projects, for example. Moreover, since an ethic of care requires a response from those cared for (Mol, 2008; Noddings, 2015), internships and service-learning opportunities locate students in contexts that can provide them with a chance to hear back from those they are serving.

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Defined by Patterson (2019), service learning is “an experiential learning technique that combines service to not-for-profit organizations with the academic learning objectives of a course and requires students to reflect upon those experiences” (p. 194) and can include internships as well as projects incorporated into courses (Bouelle, 2012; Carlson, 2022; Matthews & Zimmerman, 1999; Pickering, 2018b, 2019; Sapp & Crabtree, 2002; Scott, 2004). These types of projects incorporated into courses for E&P programs (such as internships completed for course credit and courses such as *Technical Editing* at my university that contain a service-learning component) can also be opportunities to emphasize ways students can cultivate empathy toward others, demonstrate caring about and for others and their needs, and receive feedback from targeted audiences while accomplishing communication and publishing goals. At times, instructors draw upon feelings such as empathy when designing these projects and therefore can emphasize their importance to students (Sánchez, 2025; Tham & Jiang, 2023). Patterson (2019, 2020, 2021) discusses ways she helped engineering students develop empathy through a technical communication course at her university; she documents how empathy can help enhance engineering students’ relationship to public welfare, a need that is also present in E&P programs, which likely all require some type of service learning projects that connect with the public and their needs on some level.

Other examples of internships and course-specific projects that illustrate ways students can demonstrate empathy and care for their audiences include “grassroots knowledge diplomacy” involving collaborations between students and international diplomats (Chaban, 2024, p. 158), working to learn the culture of the Y-12 National Security Complex to understand this government organization’s purposes and goals and then make sure those are represented using plain language for various audiences and technological backgrounds (Hirst, 2016), and connecting to real-world clients through online internships, such as through creating brochures and other documents for nonprofit organizations, including a food bank (Soria & Weiner, 2013). These internships involved making close connections with internship partners as students represented groups they were truly invested in; that enthusiastic investment transferred to students’ helping to meet these organizations’ goals.

As part of practicing empathy and care, students in E&P programs can learn more about their audiences through addressing diversity of community and relationship stories and narratives. In fact, part of the process of addressing others’ needs is attending to others’ responses, including narratives and stories and the values they convey. This process involves listening to stories, empathizing and identifying with them, and then helping

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convey those stories and values to the public through the publishing process, facilitating needed action. Organizations communicate their values through stories, using emotion, as well, and ensuring students understand how to tap into these values helps develop more successful partnerships between E&P programs and the outside partners they serve.

Addressing Diversity of Community and Relationship Stories and Narratives

As students in E&P programs complete service-learning projects and internships, they are becoming parts of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to various degrees, learning what it means to be part of discourse communities, including values embedded in them. These values often reveal themselves in organizational stories and narratives; if students can tune into these early on, they can more easily demonstrate empathy and care, as these stories and narratives often are developed to resonate with broad audiences. Mol (2008) writes when discussing a logic of care: “[P]owerful stories work by evoking people’s imagination, empathy and irritation. While conflicting arguments work against each other, conflicting stories tend to enrich each other” (p. 76). In addition, the values communicated through these various stories become readily apparent as students develop relationships during these “apprenticeship” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) opportunities.

One issue that complicates the process of becoming a part of these communities of practice is the relatively short period of time that students are working within them. Typically, service-learning projects within courses last for part of a semester or the length of a semester only, and internships can have similar time constraints, although some programs allow for the completion of more than one internship for the same organization.¹ Even though time is limited, students still need to advocate for these (oftentimes) nonprofit organizations with unique requirements and demonstrate care and empathy in order to promote organizations’ missions and goals most effectively. Ideally, students would be able to empathize with these missions and goals, based on their individual experiences or experiences of people they know. This empathy can translate to students’ moving from a focus on earning good grades to a heightened sense of responsibility to helping community partners accomplish their missions and goals (Soria & Weiner, 2013). E&P program administrators and course professors need to identify ways to help students adjust to these communities relatively quickly yet authentically. This task can be a real challenge,

¹ For example, students in the Professional and Technical Communication program at Tennessee Technological University have the option to complete up to nine credit hours for their internships, and students can complete these at the same organization.

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since authentic relationships should not be rushed, yet the documents that students are producing during these collaborations (such as letters, proposals, brochures, and social media communication [Bourelle, 2014]; and thank-you letters, handouts, and newsletters [Soria & Weiner, 2013]) need to accurately reflect the organizations they represent and are often high-stakes documents that are requesting funding and other support from stakeholders (Bourelle, 2014). These required, authentic relationships that are a prerequisite for effective communication during service-learning projects and internships require a knowledge of organizational values that students in E&P programs can then help the organization convey. In addition, authentic relationships are at the heart of ethic-of-care practices.

When students learn organizational stories even before beginning their service-learning and internship projects, they can not only empathize more with the organization's goals, in many cases, but they can also more accurately and authentically represent the organization to its stakeholders and public audiences, in essence, advocating on behalf of the organization. These stories and narratives reveal themselves in many different ways. For example, some nonprofit organizations are founded based on a personal experience of a founder or founders who recognized the need for the nonprofit after suffering some type of loss, and learning about this loss through stories allows students to empathize with the organization's cause. For example, the nonprofit organization Visioning Beyond Violence states its belief that those people who have experienced the trauma of violence in some form "hold the keys to break the cycle" of future violence ("Our history"). The organization promotes training and events that include workshops, exhibitions, community dialogues, and systemic change efforts. On the About page where training instructors are listed, each brief biography includes information on why that instructor has been personally motivated to work with this organization, including stories of violence and marginalization. Students partnering with such an organization could read through these bios and grasp a sense of the various personal motivations for the instructor contributions. Even if the students have not experienced the same type of violence or marginalization themselves, they could be encouraged to develop empathy and care for these individuals and those the organization assists; if the students could empathize with these stories, they would be more likely to convey Visioning Beyond Violence's mission "to empower communities to create solutions to gun violence by fostering visionary thinking through the power of art, education and systemic change efforts" ("Our mission").

Other nonprofit organizations might profile stories from individuals they serve in order to communicate their values, and students can learn, empathize, and begin to care about

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these individuals and values based on these stories, as well. For example, the faith-based organization World Vision shares stories of communities and children in need from around the world in order to increase empathy for those living in poverty, with the goal of recruiting various forms of assistance (n.d.). St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital communicates testimonials from pediatric patients and their parents/caregivers in their own words and voices to highlight the Hospital’s mission “to advance cures, and means of prevention, for pediatric catastrophic diseases through research and treatment” (n.d., “Our mission statement”). Based on stories and narratives that these organizations promote, students can identify these organizations’ values early on and learn ways to highlight them in public-facing documents produced during E&P partnerships. While many nonprofit organizations host websites that easily display information on their missions, goals, and communities/populations they serve, not all nonprofits will display such information prominently. In these cases, students may need to research their organizations further, such as how they represent themselves on social media and how they are perceived in communities through online news articles, social media communication, and feedback about the organization posted by the community. Students and faculty can also interview nonprofit organization members to hear their stories, if they don’t appear to be publicly available.

At times, values may be communicated through seemingly negative publicity and stories told by those outside of the organization. Businesses and nonprofit organizations may seek help through service-learning projects and internships because they may be having difficulties gaining needed support and community participation. In some cases, “counterstories” (Delgado, 1989; Dunn, 2019; Martinez, 2020; Rea, 2021) published in the news or by those receiving services have damaged the organization’s or business’s reputation. These stories focus on experiential knowledge (Martinez, 2020, p. 9), and, when conveying alternative perspectives to dominant organizational narratives, can be important motivations for change, in part because the counterstories are so specific and personalized. Counterstories create opportunities for agency for those who are outside dominant narratives (Butts & Jones, 2021, p. 14; Martinez, 2020) and have the potential to change those narratives. Even though these stories counter the images the organizations desire to convey, including the images of nonprofit organizations, students could still learn about organizational values and help determine if any inaccuracies or misrepresentation might be occurring and then address these difficulties through revised organizational documents and communication.

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Learning organizational values through stories and narratives from these different perspectives encourages student *identification* (Burke, 1969) with these organizations, the process of conveying and recognizing similar motives and values among communicators and audiences (Walton, 2013). This identification connects to the ethic of care and empathy needed to develop relationships between students and organizational representatives. These relationships are needed so that students can convey organizational missions and values effectively through their publications in order to successfully advocate for these organizations and meet their needs. Including these types of theoretical concepts in course descriptions, syllabi, and assignments highlights them for students and administrators at a general level and suggests ways to analyze organizational narratives and stories for the benefit of academic and organizational partnerships/relationships in E&P programs.

Summary

This overall theoretical grounding through the concepts of advocacy, community connections, and relationships unites ethical concepts of caring and justice in ways that move civic action forward. As Dombrowski (2000) mentions when referring to the work of Peta Bowden (1997) and Martha Minnow (1987), “the possibility of an alternative ethic of care grounded in citizenship that embraces caring and egalitarian principles should be explored” (p. 64). We have seen evidence of this type of foundational work in the service-learning movement in TPC, and these efforts translate, as well, to E&P programs, since many contain service-learning components at their core. In addition, combining a caring and empathetic approach with addressing community and relationship narratives ensures that communicators are identifying with the values essential to advocating for nonprofit organizations, especially.

Below, I present a case study of an E&P certificate at Tennessee Technological University, a four-year university located in middle Tennessee serving mainly the surrounding region. Not only does this certificate exemplify an application of the theoretical grounding discussed above through serving local and global communities through an advocacy, empathy, and care approach; it also serves as an example of interdisciplinary collaboration that can unite English department faculty while increasing students’ abilities to gain and discuss marketable skills. This type of certificate also has the potential to increase positive emotional investment for students who may be struggling in their identities as English majors and enhance their investment in future writing and communication careers. These benefits, in turn, can be used to justify these programs to university administrators (through assessment data and public-facing documents such as

brochures, websites, and other marketing materials) and emphasize these programs' value to industry and nonprofit organizations, also leading to meaningful partnerships and future career opportunities for students.

Case Study of an Editing and Publishing Certificate: A Partnership Between Creative Writing and Technical and Professional Communication

In 2023, faculty in the CW and TPC² concentrations within the English Department at Tennessee Tech designed an E&P certificate as a cross-disciplinary effort that required courses from these two concentrations. The English department that houses the certificate offers a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with concentrations in Literature, CW, TPC, Rhetoric and Language, and Theatre. The department also offers two minors and a certificate in Technical Writing and Communication. The E&P certificate demonstrates collaboration between the two disciplines of CW and TPC, strengthening investment from within the department and pooling resources. This certificate also serves as an example of ways to tie in to already existing theories within TPC and BC³ to strengthen the identity of the E&P discipline.

Methods

In preparation for conducting this case study, I identified the two core courses in our E&P certificate at Tennessee Tech as ones that most comprehensively demonstrate the values of the program. Two different faculty members teach these core courses, one from the TPC concentration and one from the CW concentration. Because this case study focuses on our program, rather than the faculty working within it, IRB approval was not required. Instead, I drew upon the historical context and general mindset we had when creating the certificate and based the case study and analysis on those, as well as the administrative documents, syllabi, current projects, and activities included in these core courses.

² At Tennessee Tech, the concentration's name is Professional and Technical Communication, but I chose to use "TPC" for consistency throughout the article, since that title seems to be more widely used in the discipline.

³ Creative writing is a different discipline from business communication; however, I intend to show through the case study that theories from business communication also apply to the types of student, community, and university relationships encouraged in the required CW core course included in the E&P certificate.

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In discussing the dynamics of these courses' content, including the various relationships developed within them, I apply the TPC and BC concepts discussed above to analyze ways these courses address those concepts, to illustrate one example of how courses that focus on the practical skills of editing and publishing can also address these broader concepts and the process of relationship development through them. While somewhat overlapping, the disciplines of TPC and BC have generated practical and theoretical discussions that apply to and can be expanded upon within E&P programs, to their benefit, as the case study below illustrates. TPC has provided a useful context for advocacy, including addressing social justice, as well as incorporating technologies to communicate in ways that demonstrate understanding of user needs. BC provides an emphasis on relational awareness, including soft or essential skills and emotional intelligence, needed to maintain relationships, including interpersonal and intercultural communication dynamics required for effective business and organizational functioning. Both TPC and BC address the importance of emotion, emotion regulation, empathy, and care as components of ethical communication. Both fields support the role of stories and narratives in communicating personal, organizational, academic, and community values. These concepts, key to recent theoretical discussions in TPC and BC, serve as useful foundations for E&P programs as they strive to expand beyond the hyper-pragmatist perceptions assigned to them, at times.

The E&P certificate requires two courses in its core: PC 4940/5940 (*Technical Editing*) and ENGL 4460/5460 (*Literary Magazine Editing*). Faculty teaching these courses contextualize the editing, design, and publishing skills students learn through the lenses of advocacy and community relationships. This orientation not only provides a broader framework through which students can anchor these skills, but it also unites faculty and students within these courses in cross-disciplinary efforts that have enhanced the English department and university's goal of encouraging students to develop career-ready skills. Below, I draw upon unique examples from each course to illustrate ways the concepts of advocacy and community relationships apply to pedagogy and practice, as well as serve overarching goals of the certificate program. I also discuss ways these courses have connected to broader university support frameworks to tie in more closely to university-wide outcomes and increase visibility.

PC 4940/5940 and iFixit

Close to the inception of the E&P certificate, changes were made to one of the core courses. PC 4940/5940 (*Technical Editing*) was revised according to the university's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) in compliance with accreditation. This revision

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introduced a focus on a creative inquiry question, “How can addressing diverse audiences’ needs through centralized technical documentation empower readers and viewers to pursue better quality lives?” Several assignments in the course linked to this question, but the main one was a final project students completed for iFixit, “a global community of people helping each other repair things” for free (n.d.). Designed to empower consumers by helping them fix their own devices (many imprisoned by proprietary technology that prohibits them from doing so) and save money, this nonprofit also helps keep “broken” technological devices out of landfills here and overseas, including the Global South.

During the project, students create device component replacement guides for various electronic devices, such as robotic vacuums, game controllers, and laptops. These guides are created on iFixit’s online platform, where students write concise instructions; take, edit, and upload photos; and revise based on input from iFixit’s technical writing team. However, this project involves much more than drafting, editing, revising, and publishing work using iFixit’s interface. As students learn more about iFixit’s mission, they develop a growing awareness of the problem of ewaste, including marginalized communities where this waste is shipped and processed. While the electronic device “junkyards” provide work and income for these populations, people’s health and the environment are suffering, as students can clearly see by viewing videos on iFixit’s website as they begin their projects. Students learn that extending the life of electronic devices through the right-to-repair movement not only reduces ewaste and the problems it causes; their repair efforts also save consumers money on a very practical level by empowering them to repair their own devices. Because all of our students own many electronic devices and have experienced the need to have them repaired or have been forced to buy new ones due to “planned obsolescence,” they readily identify with this problem and iFixit’s mission, although many students at the beginning of the course are not aware of the extent of this environmental and social problem, beyond their personal experiences with it.

Students discover that iFixit’s platform, to which they are contributing their instructional guides throughout the semester, has a global audience; as a result, instructions and graphics must be very clear. In fact, ideally, audiences would be able to perform repairs using just the graphics, if needed, according to the iFixit technical writing team. Students begin to view their work empathetically through the eyes of others in a more global context, at first because they are required to by iFixit. Developing this empathy for international audiences’ needs becomes even more pronounced when international students, particularly graduate students who are conducting their own research, are part of the course.

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At Tennessee Tech, the TPC MA program recently has experienced growth in its international graduate student enrollment, and TPC MA students sometimes take the graduate version of this course alongside students enrolled in the undergraduate version. When both PC 4940 and 5940 are offered, graduate students serve as project managers as students complete their team final projects. When undergraduate students work with an international graduate student project manager, they receive the benefit of direct interaction with someone who can provide feedback, both oral and written, on these electronic component replacement guides, from the perspective of an international audience member. In Spring 2024, for example, a TPC graduate student taught a module on intercultural communication, including perspectives from her native country of Bangladesh. The student told a personal story of how, growing up, she remembered her family having difficulty assembling devices they had purchased because the instruction manuals were not written in their native language; only translations in the “most common” languages were included in the manual. While creating the component replacement guides did not include translation, students in *Technical Editing* learned more about the potential translation and language limitations of their guides, and these conversations led to discussions about greater empathy for audiences’ needs in relying more on visual representations of component replacement.

By considering the question, “How can addressing diverse audiences’ needs through centralized technical documentation empower readers and viewers to pursue better quality lives?”, students have to ask themselves what might possibly be improved about these diverse audiences, their quality of life, and their needs regarding technical documentation. This thought process encourages students to empathize further with these audiences. Even if they are not able to compile these guides and edit their photos from the exact perspective of international audience members, their awareness grows during the course and is emphasized through other assignments students complete throughout the term, such as reflections based on prompts the course instructor creates, addressing outcomes goals developed for the QEP. The course professor also completes a report for Institutional Assessment that documents students’ attaining the outcomes goals using quantitative and qualitative data.

In addition to general, global audience awareness, students also learn about empathy for accessibility concerns while exploring the creative inquiry question through the final project. In Spring 2024, another undergraduate student team was managed by a graduate student who was conducting her own research on disability rhetorics. The student taught a course module that included discussions about accessibility and images, as well as other

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accessibility issues, such as color blindness, the audience's use of screen readers, and mobility concerns, such as having to scroll through large blocks of text and images in order to view the instructions. Based on the knowledge gained, students were then able to apply these concepts to developing their own replacement guides in ways they had not thought of before, such as considering headings, the number of steps included in each guide, and the colors of bullets used in the instructions. In some cases, students divided larger troubleshooting guides into multiple ones, resulting in more manageable guide length.

Students also consider the implications of recommended tool use for various audiences as they repair their devices because some audience members may not have those tools available or may not be able to afford purchasing (or waiting to purchase) them from iFixit's site. Audiences require accessible images, as well, especially if international viewers may be relying only on the images to complete repairs. Going beyond the actual text instructions, students ensure that their photos are accessible regarding lighting, clarity, and point of view so that they can stand alone, if needed. While iFixit provides guidance through its technical writing team, students benefit from the graduate student instruction and perspective, which can lead to greater empathy development as students complete these projects.⁴

One dynamic impacting ways these students develop empathy for the international iFixit audience is that the students' work is developed on iFixit's platform, which means that students never really interact with the "other" to ensure needs are being met. At the beginning of the course, students learn about iFixit's values as an organization (the right to repair, environmental conservation and preservation), and the videos and narratives on the iFixit site support the communication of those values. The ethos and pathos of iFixit's site encourage empathy development in the students; they *care about* the causes as represented by iFixit as well as the people impacted by these issues. *Caring for* the other in this case involves the action of creating the guides. Because the only way that the audience can respond is through comments on iFixit's site after guide publication, the students rely on the feedback from iFixit's technical writing team, in the meantime. The mediating work of the team provides a guiding response to help students improve their guides and build upon what they are doing well, as well as provide feedback on how well the guides will be meeting the audiences' needs, including those of international users.

⁴ While the Spring 2024 *Technical Editing* instructor tailored the global communication and accessibility modules to match the graduate students' interests, the module topics could be adjusted in the future, if different graduate students were participating, or guest speakers might speak on relevant course topics to broaden students' perspectives and understanding.

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Some comments that demonstrate this type of early mediating feedback include the following:

- Try to keep your device in the same orientation throughout your guide. Rotating your device or changing its position from one step to the next can be confusing and disorienting to your readers.
- You did a great job shooting your photos in first-person perspective. This is very helpful for readers, as this orientation shows what they will see when undertaking the repair.
- Remember to give each guide a descriptive introductory paragraph. The introduction should contain any background information a reader would need before they begin. Think about what you would tell a friend before doing this guide.
- Photos and other visuals are a really important aspect of technical communication—particularly on iFixit, where you have a global audience and not everyone reads English equally well. **Ideally, your readers should be able to complete the guide using *only* the photos, or *only* the text**—each independent of the other.
- Thank you for uploading your photos in their full, original resolution. This is especially important in guide photos where having the ability to inspect small details at full resolution can be really important.
- You’ve done a good job of telling the reader what to do, but you should also tell them **how** to do it. A common pitfall in communication is making the assumption that your audience can fill in the gaps. Keep in mind that a good replacement guide will be helpful to both first-time fixers and veteran repairers alike.⁵

Through this mediating feedback from the technical writing team, students learn more about iFixit’s values, including clarity, context, visibility, understandability, and completeness. Empathizing with these values, which are based in iFixit’s communication and videos, leads to meeting others’ needs through the replacement guide platform.

Faculty chose *Technical Editing* to be part of the certificate originally because of the importance of editing skills; however, in discussions with the CW faculty, we learned that technical editing is not taught in the same way for CW students as in our TPC program. In CW, editing might focus on tone, length, or genre, for example, and editing in TPC might focus on editing for completeness, accuracy, audience expertise level, and technical

⁵ These comments were authored by iFixit’s technical writing team and were provided to students taking *Technical Editing* in Spring 2024 and Spring 2025.

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detail. The role of ethics seemed to be stronger in the editing textbook used for the course, as well. The CW faculty felt that students could gain important perspectives from this TPC course, as well as additional career-readiness skills. The course's QEP components also emphasized a broader framework of issues important for both CW and TPC: Students learn to advocate not only for a cause but also for global and local communities while also being a part of the iFixit community. Through an environmental justice perspective (Butts & Jones, 2021; Haas & Eble, 2018; Haas & Frost, 2017; Sackey, 2018; Stephens & Richards, 2020), students empathize and sympathize with the needs of those who are managing e-waste shipped to them from more industrialized nations. This empathy extends to anticipating the needs of diverse users and designing component replacement guides with their needs in mind. While the type of writing and editing completed for this course is more technical, rather than creative, the broader themes and goals of the iFixit project resonate with students from both disciplines, encourage positive emotional engagement through empathetic identification, and carry over to a completely different project students complete for the second core course, *Literary Magazine Editing*.

ENGL 4460/5460 and the *Iris Review*

Similar to ways the *Technical Editing* core course connects to broader university goals through the QEP, ENGL 4460/5460 (*Literary Magazine Editing*) ties itself into university goals and missions by applying a Faculty Academy Grant, offered through the university, to incorporating technological tools into this magazine editing course. In this case, students use Adobe InDesign to publish a literary magazine titled the *Iris Review*. This journal is published in hardcopy form once a year, in addition to its online platform. This publication draws submissions from students, faculty, and writers from the surrounding area, but anyone is encouraged to submit work. Within *Literary Magazine Editing*, students review entries, recommend revisions, and then upload the resulting works into InDesign. The course has a strong collaborative ethos, since students are invested in accomplishing the same goals for the magazine throughout the term, and many students already know each other from other CW courses they have taken for the CW major or E&P certificate.

Before the Faculty Academy Grant that also enabled the journal to be published online for the first time, the course instructor was frustrated, because some students had Creative Cloud on their computers, but some did not; they did not have access to the same publishing platforms. Some used the free online platform Canva, even though the instructor said not to. Students in the course did not have access to the same media; some students could not afford the same software for their personal laptops that others had purchased using their own funds. The grant enabled the publishing lab to more closely

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mimic a professional environment in class so that students could receive training and experience, using the same current, technological resources standard in the field. Creating a course that more closely resembled a professional environment was important for this instructor, who learned the editing and publishing process by working in the field: Working at a literary journal and then becoming the editor provided industry experience that she introduces students to in the course. Through this industry experience, she built transferrable skills that she now passes along to students, in spite of the lack of texts on these skills from a CW and design perspective. Students will be applying similar skills in a required internship for the certificate.

While the course obviously focuses on teaching students skills in editing and publishing for a literary journal, the course also contributes a community and university partnership approach: Students are helping to publish works by authors outside the university as well as within it. Through their connections to the university and journal community, students demonstrate empathy and care by interacting in diplomatic and professional ways with authors. For example, not all work is accepted for publication in the journal. Students write rejection letters and also send responses to authors about ways to revise their work for future consideration. Under the guidance of the course instructor, students learn more about the investment writers have in their work and the sensitivity that naturally goes along with it; these students are writers themselves and have been practicing giving each other feedback in workshop courses during their program. In addition, some of the topics of the narrative essays authors submit can be very personal, such as trauma experiences or difficult family relationships. Topics can also include unique cultural experiences that require empathy and understanding, even if reviewers are not from the same region. Students are encouraged to apply an empathetic, *caring about* perspective when responding to these personal essays. This process can be somewhat difficult, since students are not interacting with the authors personally, at this point; they are physically distant from the authors when reading the submissions and providing feedback. The instructor's encouragement for students to identify with the authors as fellow writers and to empathize with their personal topics and cultural experiences motivates the students to *care for* these authors through providing feedback. In some cases, the students receive responses from the authors through revision submission letters, and students can see if their revision suggestions were incorporated or were helpful. After revision, the journal can then represent diversity of narratives and stories through publication. Relationships also develop during this process: Students develop relationships with other students as they work on this collaborative effort, they develop connections with authors (many of whom are alumni), and they facilitate relationships with community members and administrators

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who also have a vested interest in the success of this locally produced journal and the public events associated with it.

This core course includes many different ways to promote the work completed for the literary journal to various stakeholders. One event involves organizing and hosting a launch party that university and community members attend and listen to authors read their work. This event and the publication efforts themselves represent multiple modalities for publishing, including online, print, and these public readings, providing opportunities for diverse voices to be heard. Even though administrators have attended some of these events and readings, though, not all see the benefits of this collaboration. To help increase visibility and provide students with the opportunity to showcase their work, students present professional portfolios to faculty and other students as they near completion of their certificates. Multi-disciplinary faculty and students attend these presentations, gaining knowledge about not only skills these students have developed but also opportunities they have to engage with broader issues such as advocacy and community relationships. Many students apply the skills learned in this course to their internships, further expanding the reach and application of their work.

Through these core courses of *Technical Editing* and *Literary Magazine Editing*, students from TPC and CW benefit from scholarly foundations in advocacy and community from the disciplines of TPC and BC; these focuses enhance scholarship in the field by connecting to conversations in responsible technology use and environmental preservation, for example, as well as increased technological skills development when serving local communities and empathetically attending to writers' needs when revising their work. Students also learn the importance of audience response to ensure that needs are actually being met through the communication process. Instructors and students work together to attend to relationship dynamics, as well, through scenarios that position empathy and emotion as prerequisites and motivations for caring, social action (Noddings, 2015, p. 75).

This pairing within the E&P certificate also answers Susan Lang and Laura Palmer's (2017) call to "consider not only one course in editing but potentially a sequence of courses that incorporates the fundamentals and new digital competencies required for editing" (p. 308); the pairing of *Technical Editing* with *Literary Magazine Editing* introduces students to multiple technologies, contexts, audiences, networking opportunities, and relationships. In addition, this E&P certificate, which joins the disciplines of CW and TPC, helps unify department faculty and create various types of community and relationships: Within student teams in these core courses, within the region surrounding the university through recruitment of local writers, within the university itself as it sponsors events surrounding

publication of the literary journal, and even within global contexts as students within the *Technical Editing* course learn to share technical information with multi-lingual audiences.

Discussion and Challenges

When viewed from a holistic perspective, the E&P certificate at Tennessee Tech ties into established theoretical grounding within the related fields of TPC and BC to strengthen the program's foundation and provide a context for the advocacy and relationships approach that the program promotes. Instructors apply these concepts differently to the core courses within the program: *Technical Editing* accomplishes this task a bit more overtly with its creative inquiry focus on service learning for the university's QEP, and *Literary Magazine Editing* extends this application to a more local community. While *Technical Editing* promotes a more global focus through the iFixit platform that has an international audience, *Literary Magazine Editing* has a more personalized and local focus. The complementary pairing of these core courses emphasizes both global and local applications for advocacy and relationships, providing experiences for these students that extend clearly to transferrable skills opportunities, since these students are writing for "real world" audiences and connecting to broader, over-arching concepts. Rather than emphasizing hyper-pragmatism through this skills development, though, the E&P certificate I discuss contextualizes these skills within broader concepts and contexts, including university missions and goals.

Connecting E&P programs with university missions and goals, as well as individual program learning outcomes goals, further solidifies developing E&P disciplinary identities in overall institutional efforts. Doing this will further establish the relevance and need of such programs. For example, similar to how the MLA recommends that English programs promote "career-ready skills" to continue to emphasize relevance, Tennessee Tech includes a similar goal in its strategic plan: "Tennessee Tech innovates in all we do, embracing and deploying our technological foundation in our education, research, service, and stewardship" (Tech Tomorrow Strategic Plan, Goal 2, 2025). The discussion of this strategic plan goal goes on to emphasize "career-ready graduates," which is "a priority action in the strategic plan." Our E&P certificate at Tennessee Tech connects to career readiness in its outcomes goals. Outcome three of the E&P certificate states, "Students will investigate existing professional opportunities through hands-on work in print and digital editing and publishing fields and use their observations to assess potential entrepreneurial job paths" (Hoover, 2025). This outcome connects work done in the classroom, internships, and service-learning class projects to potential job opportunities. In addition, another goal in the strategic plan at Tennessee Tech is "Engagement for

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Impact”; the description mentions partnerships with nonprofit organizations as part of the goal (Tech Tomorrow Strategic Plan, Goal 4, 2025). The continued partnerships through service-learning course projects and internships in the E&P certificate emphasize the connections our certificate courses have with nonprofit organizations, directly connecting to the university’s strategic plan. This type of outcomes goals alignment stresses to administrators how these programs tie in to overall university goals, highlighting their positive impact.

Another way to connect with institutional missions and goals is through accreditation and other valued efforts, such as incorporating technological advances into the classroom. At Tennessee Tech, the *Technical Editing* course benefitted from a QEP grant to enhance creative inquiry efforts, such as partnering with the nonprofit organization iFixit and further demonstrating ways that the course aligns with QEP outcomes goals, in addition to more program-specific outcomes goals. And the *Literary Magazine Editing* course took advantage of another university program, a grant that focused on integrating technology into the course in ways that enhanced accomplishing program outcomes goals. Through this Faculty Academy Grant, the *Literary Magazine Editing* instructor acquired Adobe Creative Cloud for her class to use when creating and publishing the literary journal, and she was able to establish a consistent, online presence for the journal for the first time. Connecting to university accreditation goals and technological efforts in these ways further grounds E&P programs within institutional efforts, draws positive attention to them, and provides support that these programs need to establish themselves at the ground level. In addition, these cross-disciplinary collaborations benefit more than just one program (in this case both TPC and CW programs) and can draw attention to innovative program development from different types of stakeholders.

Developing these cross-disciplinary connections through such a certificate does present challenges. For example, in our E&P program, the certificate requires an internship, but, if program growth occurs too quickly, faculty may have difficulty finding enough internships for students in the rural area where the university is located. Because our TPC concentration and certificate also require internships, competition for internships is growing, and, although the TPC and CW programs currently share internships, tension may develop in the future if students in one program are not able to obtain their desired internship because a student in the other program has already been assigned to it. Similarly, faculty may not want to duplicate service-learning projects from the same nonprofit organizations into these core courses, so making additional connections with

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other nonprofit organizations and communities may be necessary. These types of collaborations take time to build.

Another concern is that faculty do not currently receive release time for supervising student internships or integrating service-learning projects into courses, and the time investment required to maintain these industry and nonprofit connections could result in unseen and unpaid labor as the E&P certificate grows. Another challenge is student recruitment and scheduling: The certificate requires 18 credit hours, and some students are limited in the number of elective hours needed to complete the certificate, due to financial aid and program-of-study restrictions. If students can fit the certificate into their programs of study, they usually have to add it as freshmen in order to ensure they can complete all of the required courses using elective hours before graduation. These restrictions can prevent transfer students from enrolling in the certificate. In Tennessee, students have the opportunity to complete two years of community college tuition free if they meet eligibility requirements, so students who choose this option may not be able to enroll in the certificate, due to a lack of available elective hours, once they transfer to our four-year institution.

Yet another issue is ensuring that students in core courses for E&P programs have access to current technology, preferably technology used in industry. While students can gain some technological expertise through internships and other projects, ideally, resources would be available at the institutional level to assist these programs, although that support can often be absent. In addition, as Lang and Palmer (2017) caution, “Digital technologies and emerging media courses are hotly contested commodities in higher education. Programs in communication studies, new media, instructional design, and more all lay claim to the digital domain and argue vigorously against other programs or departments adopting technology-focused classes” (p. 307). Lang and Palmer encourage advocates of editing courses to frame them “carefully” (p. 307) so that they can survive the committee review process. This caution seems especially fitting for those advocating for E&P programs, since both editing and publishing processes require technological applications and multiple forms of media.

While some of these concerns relate to program growth and academic restrictions, others are related to disciplinary issues closely connected to the field of E&P. For example, TPC has already been experiencing these problems, such as the need to justify the legitimacy of paid labor for coordinating internships and service-learning projects, as well as advising and administering programs, including assessment efforts for accreditation and ongoing review purposes. Connecting theories and concepts from TPC, for example, to E&P in an

effort to further establish its identity as a discipline could also associate E&P programs with professionalization, production/labor, and compensation challenges TPC and other related disciplines have already been seeing.

Recommendations and Conclusion

This certificate program encourages positive affective experiences related to students' disciplines in English, which can result in improved recruitment and retention efforts. Referring to his study of students and why they chose English as a major, Sánchez (2025) writes,

However, that participants' positive emotive language was immediately directed at specific people or experiences when discussing their English major, suggesting that if PTW instructors want to show students that PTW is more than just a means to an end, we need to do more to build in positive emotional experiences for these students. These experiences could include discussing how stories play an important role in TPC as they do in literature or creative writing, focusing on the good that develops from their writing via client-based projects.... In short, building positive emotional associations may help students bridge the connection between past experiences and future goals in English. (p. 257)

The type of positive emotional associations that Sánchez recommends encouraging for our students could be key to helping students recognize the value of the English major, rather than their growing concern that the English major alone doesn't yield skills they can apply in the workplace upon graduation (2025).

The advocacy and community relationships framework that this E&P certificate program supports includes the potential for student growth, also. As Lawrence et al. (2023) mention when discussing their accountability model for Professional and Technical Writing curricula, "Students become responsive and responsible to one another as a collective" (p. 61), ideally, in successful programs. Despite their diverse identities so far, emerging E&P programs have the potential to teach students career-ready skills and unite departments, increasing faculty and students' investment in this discipline. While establishing a unique, disciplinary identity for E&P programs may not be completely feasible at this time, due to the lack of a core curriculum (Baker et al., 2024), tying in to established theories and concepts (recommended by Baker et al., 2024) recognized and respected by multiple disciplines is one way to increase the field's visibility, indicate its relevance in recognizable ways, and avoid encouraging hyper-pragmatist views of the field by stressing the importance of relationships at all levels.

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This article encourages an E&P theoretical grounding similar to the fields of TPC and BC, although the E&P discipline could extend this grounding in areas such as demonstrating care and empathy more explicitly and identifying core organizational values through narratives and stories, then publicizing them to academic and professional audiences more widely. Students and E&P program administrators can then apply that knowledge to establish purposeful relationships resulting in advocacy and publications that reflect authentic collaboration. In addition, the results of these efforts could be documented in assessment reports and other institutional and public-facing documents for broader, administrative audiences and could emphasize the benefits of such programs in a time when related disciplines are trying to justify their existence and build enrollments. Drawing upon common theoretical concepts, such as the ones discussed here, might be a way to establish a more common identity for these programs. While core courses might be different in their theoretical grounding and resulting applications, these programs could share a common theoretical orientation that could lead to more unity within the field. In addition, following Sánchez's (2025) recommendations, this theoretical orientation could help students develop more positive emotional investments in E&P, which could apply also to increasing positive views about the relevance of degrees within English.

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Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Erin Hoover and Mari Ramler for their foundational work in creating and administering the E&P Certificate Program at Tennessee Technological University.

The author also wishes to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback on the initial draft of this article.