



Increasing student access to client  
information in the service learning technical  
communication classroom:  
Comparing three client strategies

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# FRAMEWORK

- Pedagogical perspective, before students become professionals
- Assuming silos exist VS preventing them
- Strategies to help Tech Comm students work with SMEs

## Background:

- Service learning projects: mixed results
- 1 group = going off on own way?  
Client revisions, dissatisfaction

## Kastman Breuch:

Areas where students struggle with critical listening:

1. Overruled requests
2. Unheard requests
3. Need for affirmation

What are ways to address critical listening skills in service learning?

# SERVICE LEARNING CONTEXT

## Service learning:

a form of experiential education where students engage in activities addressing community needs via structured opportunities. Reflection and reciprocity are key. -Jacoby 1996

- Providing experience working with clients
- Writing for workplace vs teacher
- Socializing into the profession, expectations

## RELATION TO SILOS:

Students' pre-existing skills *implied*:

- Ability to access information needed for projects
- Ability to work with information effectively, correctly
- Learning the professional skills involved in information retrieval

# AREAS OF ATTENTION

## RE: WORKING WITH SMEs

Skills lacking coverage in pedagogy:

### i. Research methods

- i. Collecting data, evidence to make claims
- ii. Interviewing, asking the right questions
- iii. Soft/interpersonal communication skills

### ii. Critical listening

- i. Hearing clearly, correctly, in entirety

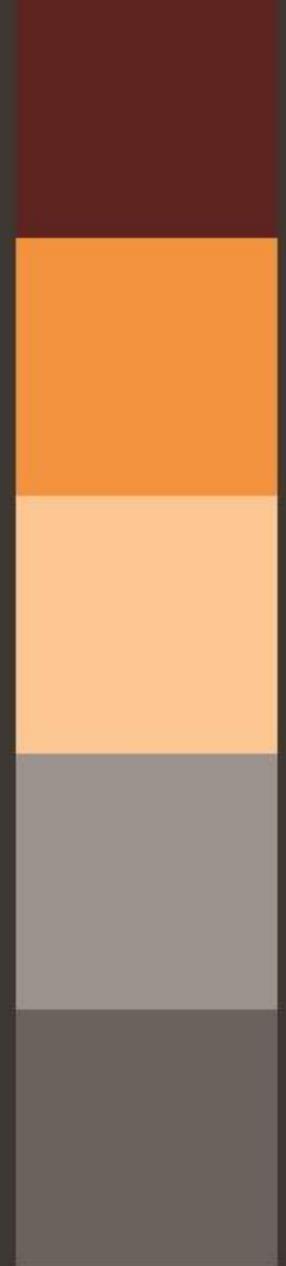
### iii. Debriefing

- i. Critical reflection
- ii. Assessing strategies others used, what to borrow

### iv. Focusing on process over product

- i. Intangible aspects of writing
- ii. Concerns of grades vs soft skills learned

See references



# STRATEGIES

1. Multiple clients, multiple projects
2. Multiple clients, one project
3. One client, one project

Each incorporated team writing/debriefing strategies from Wolfe

- Team charter, communication style assessment & discussion, agenda, Gantt chart, task sheets, minutes, debriefing

Course assignments:

- Grant proposals, web content, social media assessments, template creation, document revision

# POPULATION

- Graduate students in Professional Writing
  - New to profession/career change
  - Still rare to have undergraduate degree in Tech Comm
  - Varying levels of familiarity with the topics
  - Convenience sample
- Classes
  - 3 service learning classes, 15 weeks long
  - Introductory Tech Comm, grant writing courses
  - 11-26 students per class

# 1. Multiple clients, multiple projects

4 teams/projects, 3 different clients

- Debriefing occurred in teams but not whole class
- Teams managed own timeline/call schedule with client

Results

- **Team 1, 2:** Two grant proposals funded (both for client 1)
- **Team 3:** did not finish original plan; had to adjust deliverables **lacked research method skills, overruled requests**
- **Team 4:** Unable to retrieve enough information from client 3, somewhat paralyzed process **lacked research method skills**

Rate of satisfaction:

- Client 1: both client & students very satisfied
- Client 2: both client & students mildly satisfied
- Client 3: Very low (client disappeared), students unsatisfied

## 2. One client, multiple projects

5 teams/projects, 1 client

- Introduced call recording via ZOOM
- Debriefing: via individual teams for detail, in class for general concepts
- Class had a single timeline/call schedule with client

Results

- **Team 1:** deliverable accepted for corporate use/distribution
- **Team 2:** client satisfied with deliverable, may use
- **Team 3, 4:** client requested several updates, revisions **unheard requests**
- **Team 5:** missed target; did not align with client's needs **unheard requests, overruled requests, need for affirmation**

Rate of satisfaction:

- Client satisfaction corresponded to deliverables
- Teams all reported moderate satisfaction with SME contacts; less so within Teams 4 & 5.

# 3. One client, one project

3 teams, 1 client/project (competing for best version)

- Call recording via ZOOM
- Debriefing: as a class, reviewed 2 calls (strong/weak interactions) after meetings to debrief and assess interpersonal strategies
  - Analyzed questions asked, echo strategies, clarity of concepts
  - 50% of time spent on soft skills, 50% on product production

## Results

- **Team 1, 2:** client highly satisfied with deliverable, tied between teams
- **Team 3:** client requested very minor revisions **unheard requests**

## Rate of satisfaction:

- Client satisfaction corresponded to deliverables
- Teams all reported high satisfaction with SME contacts

# #3: MOST PROGRESS IN SILO ACCESS

Areas of improvement in deliverables & student/client relationship

## i. Research methods

- i. Collecting data, evidence to make claims
- ii. Interviewing, asking the right questions
- iii. Soft/interpersonal communication skills ← prioritize

## ii. Critical listening

- i. Hearing clearly, correctly, in entirety

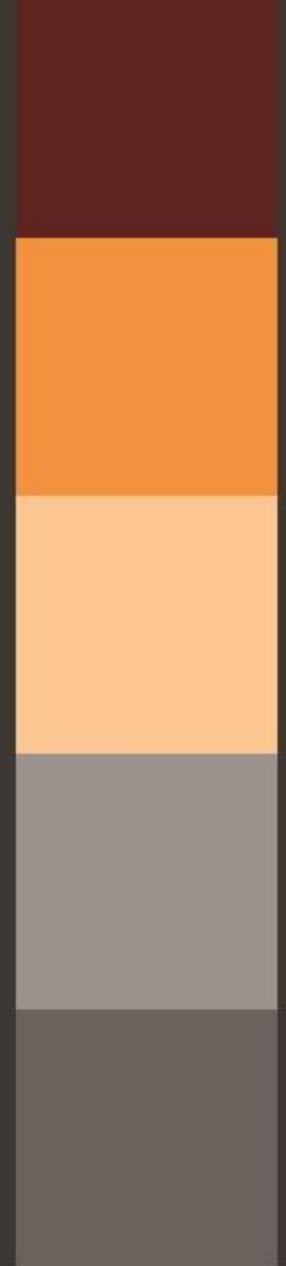
Are there instances of unheard/overruled requests, need for affirmation? How to prevent

## iii. Debriefing

- i. Critical reflection
- ii. Assessing strategies others used, what to borrow

## iv. Focusing on process over product

- i. Intangible aspects of writing ← add a grade?
- ii. Concerns of grades vs soft skills learned



# IMPLICATIONS FOR SILO ACCESS

- Fewer variables, the better in pedagogy
- Promote evaluation: 50% process, 50% product
  - Students still concerned about “grade” -*pseudotransactionality*
- Increase explicitness re: importance of debriefing, critical listening, info seeking process
  - Have students read literature on gaps
  - Identify strategies for echoing/verifying information
  - Discuss repercussions for misinterpretation
    - See Kastman Bruech in particular
  - Connect dots between soft skills and writing skills
- Focus on technical *communication* vs technical writing

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