

Location, Dislocation, Relocation: Positioning Programs in Professional and Technical Communication for the 21st Century

Sam Dragga

Texas Tech University

Laura Gurak

University of Minnesota

Carolyn Miller

North Carolina State
University

James P. Zappen

Rensselaer Polytechnic
Institute

Programs in technical and professional communication must continuously evaluate academic propriety and administrative efficacy of their location within colleges and universities: as separate departments, as (more or less autonomous) divisions within departments, allied with English, allied with Communication, allied with science and engineering disciplines. The history of programs in technical and professional communication has been filled with discussions of location, dislocation, and relocation.

This panel presentation will bring together stories and insights representatives of four programs that have been newly negotiating/navigating issues of location:

Sam Dragga, Texas Tech University: A proposal to separate composition and rhetoric and technical communication from the Department of English and join the writing program to the Department of Communication Studies, thereby integrating oral and written communication and

creating synergies and efficiencies in teaching and research, has been supported by the writing and communication faculty but opposed by the English faculty, especially regarding issues of resources, power, and the administration of the first-year composition program.

Laura Gurak, University of Minnesota: The Department of Rhetoric, originally established in 1908 in the College of Agriculture, will be newly integrated in 2007 with the first-year composition program of the Department of English and all writing instruction across the university in one central academic unit to be located inside the College of Liberal Arts. The new administrative unit is the result of months of intensive study and wide consultation and is intended to be “a national model for the study and teaching of writing across disciplines.”

Carolyn Miller, North Carolina State University: While undergraduate and master’s programs in technical communication are housed in the Department of English, a new doctoral program (titled Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media) is located separately in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, with faculty from the departments of Communication and English. An interdisciplinary institutional arrangement offered exceptional potential in terms of faculty capability, student interest, market for graduates, and intellectual synergy across multiple fields on issues related to new communication technologies. This arrangement seemed the best way to get the program started; whether it remains so is still to be determined.

James P. Zappen, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute: RPI’s Department of Language, Literature, and Communication supports a broad curriculum of language studies, with emphasis upon technologically mediated communication. Recent developments include a BS in Electronic Media, Arts, and Communication, an MS in Human-Computer Interaction, and PhD emphases in HCI; Rhetoric, Culture, and Technology; and Media Studies. Our location within a technological university presents both opportunities and continuously changing administrative challenges, including coordination with other departments (Arts, Cognitive Psychology, and Computer Science) and recruitment and support of graduate students.