

SUMMARY

- ◆ Reports on the current state of curriculum in 84 Master's programs
- ◆ Answers questions about program location, degree names, course requirements, internships, and cumulative experiences
- ◆ Suggests additional research areas to provide more information on how well academic programs are meeting the needs of students and other stakeholders

Master's Programs in Technical Communication: A Current Overview

LISA MELONCON

INTRODUCTION

Technical communication graduate students are difficult to categorize. Most students enter graduate programs to gain additional technical skills (for example, in new technologies or software), to gain credentials to advance their careers, to broaden their theoretical understandings of the field, to gain entry to a PhD program, or a combination of these reasons. Moreover, students may enter a program directly from an undergraduate program, after a few years of work in a variety of other fields, or after a few or many years of practice as a technical communicator. More so than other types of graduate degrees, technical communication graduate programs attract a diverse set of students with an equally diverse set of reasons for pursuing the degree. All of which makes planning and sustaining graduate programs a serious challenge.

In 1997, Michael L. Keene looked at “academic programs that work,” a study that provided an overview of academic programs in technical communication at the undergraduate, Master, and PhD levels. (For ease of reading, I use the term technical communication as the default name for degrees, programs, and the field.) More recently, scholars have begun to provide valuable insights into undergraduate curriculums in technical communication (Allen and Benninghoff 2004; Harner and Rich 2005; Rainey and colleagues 2005; Whiteside 2003) but have left the issue of graduate degrees, particularly Master's programs in technical communication, largely unexamined.

Two recent studies—Wilson and Dyke Ford (2003) and Kim and Tolley (2004)—offer some insights into graduate education. Wilson and Ford and Kim and Tolley interviewed a small number of graduate students to determine how well their graduate education prepared them for their current careers. However, other than these two limited studies, research on Master's programs, particularly a detailed analysis of degrees and curriculums, is notably absent.

Specific questions that guided the data collection are What are the names of degrees? Are the degrees in English with concentrations, tracks, and so on? Or, are degrees awarded in technical communication? How many hours are needed for the degree and how many hours are specified as required courses? What types of courses do programs require? Are there common courses across the curriculum? What concentration and/or elective courses are being offered? Are there substantial differences between the MA and MS degree?

In what follows, I provide an informational report of the current state of Master's programs across the United States that includes information about degree names and curriculum. Having this data in one place can open up conversations within the field about developing and sustaining Master's programs that meet the needs of students and other stakeholders.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF SCHOOLS INCLUDED

To obtain a comprehensive list was a two-part process. First, a working list was created by combining the schools listed on the Association of Teacher's of Technical Writing's (ATTW) Web site, the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication's (CPTSC) Web site, and the Society for Technical Communication (STC) database into a working list; searching online using phrases such as “graduate degrees in technical writing,” “Master's degree in professional communication” (and various combinations of names and order) and then scrolling through the first 10 pages, or so, of listings to catch additional programs; cross-checking online portals of graduate programs, such as <http://www.gradschools.com>, to ensure the completeness of the listing.

Manuscript received 16 April 2007; revised 12 November 2008; accepted 4 December 2008.

Second, the working list was validated by visiting every school's Web site to gather data. (Information was verified in November 2008.) Following the same primary criterion as the editors of *Education in Technical and Scientific Communication* (1997), I only included schools that offer a graduate degree [Master of Science (MS) or a Master of Arts (MA)] in technical communication (or some variation) or offer a degree with an emphasis, track, concentration, option, specialization, and so on, in technical communication (with two notable exceptions—see below in Overview of Degree Names). The names of the degrees and courses in the curriculum were copied exactly as they appear on department/program Web sites or, in many cases, directly from graduate catalogs.

Schools that did not offer an officially recognized degree or a degree with a concentration, track, or emphasis were omitted. For example, Winthrop University was listed in the STC's academic database, but the information on the Web site did not make clear what program, concentration, or emphasis they offered in technical communication. Also, some programs self-listed under the MA program even though they offer only an undergraduate degree in technical communication, while offering a traditional English literature MA degree (for example, Farleigh Dickinson). Wayne State was originally included in the preliminary list, but ultimately deleted, because the Technical/Professional Writing track of the English degree is on a moratorium according to the department's Web site and graduate catalog.

Schools that offer general writings studies programs were also excluded. For example, several schools (for example, Oregon State) have Master's degrees in writing and rhetoric that they advertise as preparing students for careers in technical writing, but a look at their curriculum shows the degree is in, as its name implies, writing and rhetoric, not technical communication. In addition, I did not include schools that offer specialized writing degrees that fall within the larger category of technical communication. For instance, Johns Hopkins offers a degree in science and medical writing, whereas the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia offers an MS degree in biomedical writing. Although this kind of writing is clearly technical communication, my emphasis here, as with the Keene study from 1997, is on technical communication degree programs in the broadest sense. I also did not include schools that offer only a graduate certificate in technical communication.

OVERVIEW OF DEGREE NAMES

The final list included 80 schools (see Appendix A for the list) offering 84 MA/MS degrees. Four schools—James Madison University, University of Minnesota, University of Baltimore and Portland State University—offer both the MA

and MS degree. In 1997, the editors of *Education in Technical and Scientific Communication* found 64 Master's programs. Ten years later, I found 84, a growth rate of 31%. More specifically, in 1997, there were 24 MS and 40 MA degrees. Ten years later, I found 30 MS and 54 MA degrees, a growth rate of 25% and 35%, respectively.

As I noted above, there are two exceptions to the primary criterion: Penn State and Purdue. Penn State and Purdue historically produce graduates in technical communication, but neither Penn State nor Purdue offer a MA/MS degree or concentration specifically in technical communication (or any variety of the name). I included these two schools and their curriculums because, even though the degree awarded would be in something other than Technical Communication, the coursework a student could complete at these schools would make their degrees comparable to those students from "named" programs.

One question that Harner and Rich (2005) asked about undergraduate curriculum was what department awarded the degree. Similar to their findings, I found that English departments award 61% of Master's degrees (Figure 1). Of the schools offering only MA degrees, five degrees are not housed in an English department.

Figure 2 shows degree names including degrees awarded in Technical Communication and degrees awarded in English with an emphasis, concentration, and so on, in Technical Communication. In some cases, a program name could have been classified in two ways. For example, MI Technological University offers a degree in Rhetoric and Technical Communication. I coded this degree as a "Technical Communication +" because my primary goal was to determine the variation of names, particularly technical communication and related, that schools are using. As Figure 2 indicates, degree names are clustered around some form of "professional" and "technical."

Sullivan and Porter (1993) ask an important question concerning the relationship between professional writing and technical communication: "Are these simply two names for the same thing—or do the two names signify an important difference in emphasis?" (412). Sullivan and Porter saw "professional writing as more closely allied with English as a field, focusing more on writing and promoting a more general humanistic perspective", whereas technical communication "emphasizes gaining knowledge in a technical area and employs a number of media in the service of communicating the knowledge of a technical field to others in that field or the public" (413). The distinction they make between the two is important. However, the distinction does not necessarily hold in terms of degree names, and, as the curriculum discussion that follows indicates, it is not one reflected in curricula.

Table 1 shows the breakdown of degrees using "technical" and "professional" in their names as they relate to the

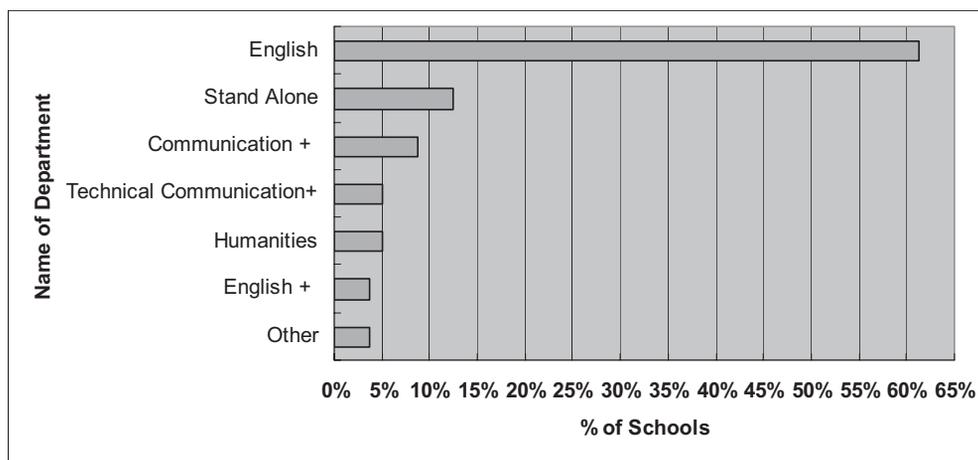


Figure 1. Breakdown of Master's degrees by department ($N = 80$). Note: The plus sign (+) indicates the addition of another term in the name of the department, for example, English, Language, and Literature.

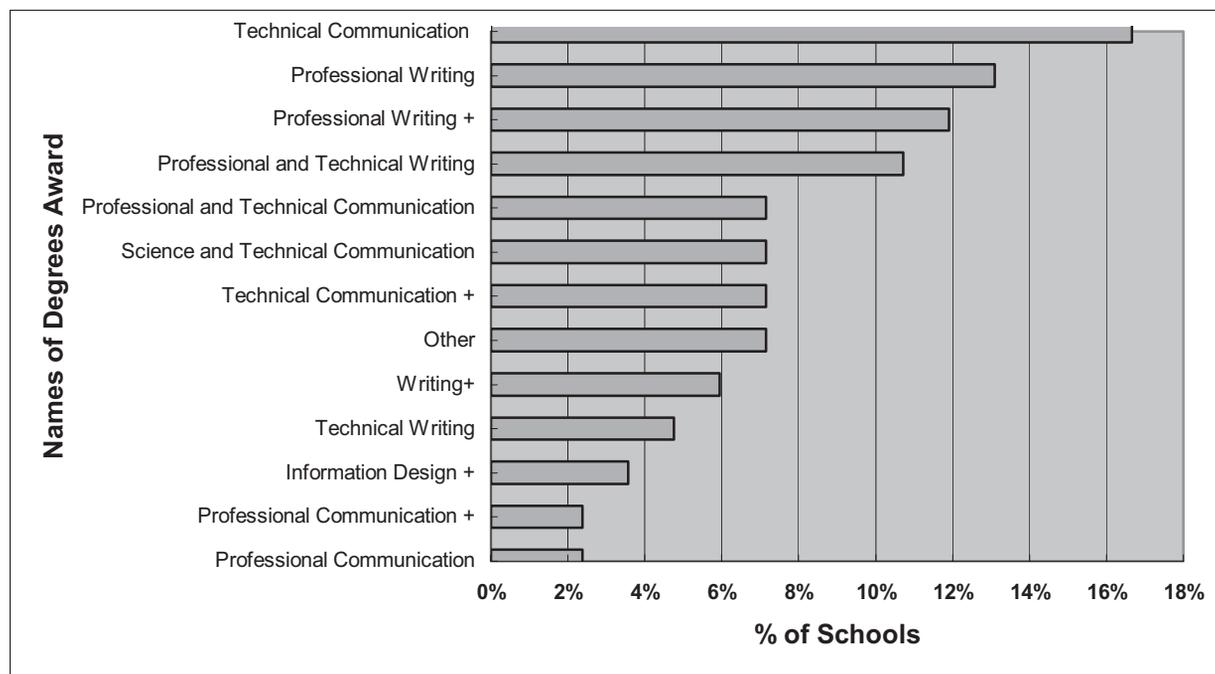


Figure 2. Names of degrees awarded ($N = 80$). Note: The plus sign (+) indicates the addition of another term in the degree name, for example, Professional Writing. +, could mean Professional Writing and Editing.

MA and MS degree. This information shows empirical support for Sullivan and Porter's assertion that "professional" is more allied with English studies because English departments most often award the MA degree. Schools that offer an MS degree tend to name their degree programs as "technical."

Figure 3 answers the question: "Are degrees being awarded in English with concentrations, emphases, or tracks in technical communication or are degrees being awarded in Technical Communication?" One criterion for a distinct discipline is a coherent and specific body of knowledge. With 52% of degrees being awarded in Technical

TABLE 1: PERCENT OF DEGREE PROGRAMS USING TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL IN THEIR DEGREE NAMES (N = 84)

	MA	MS
Technical in the degree name	15%	20%
Professional in the degree name	27%	2%
Both technical and professional in the degree name	12%	7%

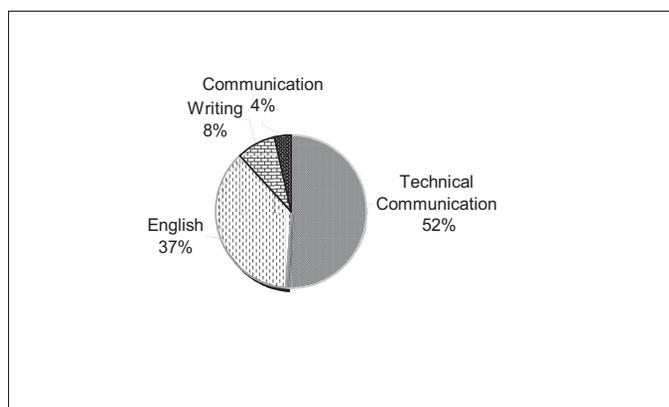


Figure 3. Name of degrees awarded.

Communication, the field can lay claim to a specific body of knowledge. The number of degrees in Technical Communication rather than degrees in English would seem to mark an important step toward disciplinarity.

Over 15 years ago, I started my career as a technical writer, but I now consider myself a technical communicator. The STC has recently begun “The Case for Technical Communicator” (2007) to compel the Bureau of Labor Statistics to update the entry in the U.S. Occupational Outlook Handbook from technical writer to technical communicator to better reflect what practitioners do. An example of an academic program’s awareness of this shift in the profession is the University of Central Florida, which changed the name of their BA and MA programs from technical writing to technical communication effective for the 2008–2009 academic catalog (Murray 2007). Presently, 47% of degrees use “writing” in their degree names, whereas 43% use “communication.” Of the 41% of schools that use “communication” in their degree names, 59% offer an MS degree.

One aspect of the data that needs to be highlighted for analysis is that 19% of schools include rhetoric in the

degree name. In their article, “Why we chose rhetoric,” Spigelman and Grobman (2006) discussed the local issues involved with creating and naming an undergraduate program in professional writing. Spigelman and Grobman explained “even the program’s title became a source of contention. . . many of us wanted to call the program Writing and Rhetoric. . . Others argued that the title Professional Writing would elicit greater name recognition to prospective applicants. . .” (54). These same types of debates and tensions underlie the naming of new graduate programs. In this case, Spigelman and Grobman’s institution decided to name their degree professional writing, but the program has a rhetorical foundation. Although degrees with rhetoric in their names account for a little less than one fifth of the overall programs, the number is large enough to warrant conversations about what rhetoric means to the future of technical communication. Rhetoric plays an even greater role in the curriculum discussion below.

OVERVIEW OF CURRICULUM DATA

The following is a list of the data gathered and an explanation of how the coding was done:

- Required, concentration, and elective courses
- Courses required outside of the department
- Internship requirements
- Cumulative experience
- Required courses mean the courses were listed as required by the schools to complete a degree, and this data is comprehensive in that all required courses were gathered and coded. Concentration courses are usually also required courses, but generally, a student will pick a certain number of courses from a specified list to fulfill the concentration requirement. I use concentration as a catchall term, but other terms commonly used are “specialization,” “cognate,” “competency,” and “specialty major.” To gather the data for this particular category, I used lists provided on course Web sites or information from graduate catalogs. The data for concentration courses is also comprehensive. For elective courses, I found the list either on the Web site or from the graduate catalog where they were available. Some schools did not have a distinct list of elective courses on their Web sites, and unfortunately, graduate catalogs were also not helpful. In the case of schools where concentration courses and electives overlapped (that is, if students are required to choose four courses from a list of seven), the courses students did not take to fulfill their concentration requirement can be used as electives. I included the same course under concentration courses and under electives. Because of these factors, the elective course data is representative and not comprehensive.

If the curriculum explicitly states that students must take courses outside of the department or explicitly states that students may take courses outside of the department,

I included these schools in the category, "courses outside of the department." "Internship requirements" were gathered to provide existing standards in degree programs.

"Cumulative experience" means that there is a requirement that culminates the coursework of the graduate degree, for example, thesis or capstone. In addition to the cumulative experience, I also looked at whether a traditional comprehensive exam was required or if the cumulative experience was orally defended in some manner.

Required, concentration, and elective courses

Most Master's degrees are awarded after the completion of 30–36 credit hours, with only 7% of schools falling either below or above that range. The most common number of hours is 36, which is required by 32% of schools. Of the total credit hours for a degree, students are required to take 9–18 credit hours in specific courses at 63% of schools. Required courses over 18 credit hours are found at 18% of schools, whereas required courses <9 credit hours are found at 19% of schools.

Table 2 shows the coded categories for required, concentration, and elective courses. Because the number of required courses varies, the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Because the number of required credit hours is substantial, I wanted to determine the most commonly required courses for a Master's degree. From the data, a distinct set of six courses emerged: Introduction to the Field of Technical Communication, Research Methods, Rhetoric, Document Design/Information Design, Editing, and Theory.

Introduction to the Field of Technical Communication courses are representative of what Johnson-Eilola and Selber (2001) called the leveling course "because it serves as a filter through which students come to understand the field" (426). Far and away the most required course, and 62% of schools require an introduction course. Although a majority of the schools agree on its importance, the introductory course comes under a variety of names. Three examples of the names for this course are "Principles of Technical and Professional Communication," "Foundations of Technical Communication," and "Introduction to Technical and Professional Communication." Through a series of spot-checks of course descriptions, the descriptions usually contain phrases such as "introduction to the field," "examines definitions and histories of the field," "exposure to theoretical foundations," and "theoretical and practical introduction to the study of writing." Although the approach and content may vary to a degree, the introductory course is clearly meant to help "students come to understand the field."

The Research Methods course and Editing courses

were the least troublesome of the required courses to code. The names and requirements of these courses are fairly straightforward. The Research Methods course introduces students to a variety of research methodologies, although the methods covered typically vary. Editing courses had the most consistent course descriptions and tended to approach editing holistically from content and organizational issues to issues of grammar.

Document and Information Design is a course that seems to offer a combination of theory and practice. Theory in this sense means focusing on how to design documents to help the reader access and use the information; practice means using a variety of tools to produce professionally designed documents. Several of the course descriptions I spot-checked used the name information design to mean the same thing as a document design course. One aspect not made clear in many course descriptions is how much emphasis is being placed on online delivery.

The Theory and Rhetoric categories were the most difficult to code. Theory courses list theory in the title. However, some courses could have been coded in two different ways. For example, a Theory of Visual Communication course was coded as a visual course instead of a theory course because I opted to put the emphasis in coding on the course content (that is, visual communication). Some programs simply specify that a Theory course had to be taken. Rhetoric courses were coded as rhetoric if they had rhetoric in the title. However, of the 38% of schools that require a Rhetoric course, 28% require a Rhetorical Theory course and another 16% require a Modern Rhetorical Theory course, which makes the categories of theory and rhetoric blurry and overlapping. Rhetoric courses were also listed as concentration courses (23%) and as electives (17%), whereas theory courses were listed as concentration courses (11%) and as electives (10%).

However, all six courses (Introduction to the Field of Technical Communication, Research Methods, Rhetoric, Document Design/Information Design, Editing, and Theory) are required by at least 25% of schools, which seems to indicate some level of agreement that these particular courses are necessary to an education in technical communication. Another factor that suggests agreement for these six courses is that they are separated by 10 percentage points from the next highest percentage (15%) for required courses. Course titles that reference one of the primary genres of technical communication (that is, reports, instructions, and proposals) were coded as a genre course. Examples of course titles are "Proposal Writing," "Reports and Proposals," and "Manuals and Instructions." Genre courses seem to be a mainstay of the MA degree as 85% of specific genre courses are offered in those degree programs. There were no discernible patterns in one genre being offered more than another. A concentration on genres in technical

TABLE 2: REQUIRED, CONCENTRATION, AND ELECTIVE COURSES

Generalized Course Topic	Schools in Which Course is Required	Schools in Which Course is a Concentration	Schools in Which Course is an Elective
Communication	15%	13%	14%
Composition	17%	5%	2%
Document Design/Information Design	27%	21%	18%
Editing	26%	17%	14%
Ethics	5%	8%	5%
Genre (i.e., proposals, reports, instructions)	6%	33%	24%
History	0%	0%	13%
Intercultural/Global	5%	11%	4%
Introduction to Graduate Studies	15%	1%	0%
Introduction to the Field of Technical Communication	62%	7%	1%
Journalism	0%	8%	6%
Linguistics	17%	7%	14%
Management	11%	15%	14%
Presentations/Oral Communication	2%	4%	2%
Research Methods	48%	6%	7%
Rhetoric	40%	23%	17%
Specialized Other (e.g., business, government, promotional)	1%	14%	15%
Specialized Technical (e.g., medical, environmental)	0%	17%	27%
Style	7%	2%	0%
Teaching	2%	14%	8%
Technology/Tools	10%	13%	14%

TABLE 2: REQUIRED, CONCENTRATION, AND ELECTIVE COURSES CONTINUED

Generalized Course Topic	Schools in Which Course is Required	Schools in Which Course is a Concentration	Schools in Which Course is an Elective
Theory	26%	11%	10%
Topics	14%	24%	29%
Usability	8%	11%	6%
Visual Rhetoric	14%	12%	11%
Web/Hypermedia/Multimedia	12%	23%	18%
Writing	15%	24%	5%
Other	13%	14%	24%

communication shows awareness of providing students with an understanding of the types of writing they will be doing.

“Web/hypermedia/multimedia” is the category for courses that contain one of these words in the title of the course. The emphasis in these courses seems to be on the front-end design and usability of Web sites. The “topics” and “other” courses in both the concentration and elective offerings provide graduate programs the opportunity to concentrate in a particular area of strength or specialty. Programs show a broad approach in the sense that many offer topics or special studies courses. It was difficult to determine the types of topics covered in “topics courses,” making it impossible for me to determine any relevant commonalities beyond the title of the course. The number of courses coded as “other” at both the concentration (14%) and elective (24%) level also reflect diversity of curricula. Courses were coded as “other” when they did not fit any other category. Examples of such courses are “language, culture, and society,” “collaborative writing,” and “literacy studies.”

Even though technical communicators are now expected to be more than writers, writing is still central to their jobs. When the topic “Rewriting the Teaching of Writing” was started on the ATTW listserv, Elizabeth Tebeaux (2007) wrote, “observations on teaching writing miss a major point. Many students cannot write clearly, concisely, and effectively.” Programs have responded with 15% requiring a general course in writing, 24% offering a concentration course in writing, and 5% offering an elective course in writing. Related to the general writing category

are the categories “specialized other” and “specialized technical.” In both cases, the course titles and descriptions describe courses focused on a specialized type of writing. “Specialized other” refers to business writing, government communication and promotional writing, whereas “specialized technical” refers to specialized writing of technical content such as environmental or medical with course titles such as “health communication,” “medical writing,” and “communicating science and technology.” Of concentration and elective courses that were coded as “specialized technical,” medical, health, and science are the most popular course offerings, and MS programs have a greater percentage of these courses.

When Wilson and Ford (2003) interviewed graduates of their programs, one of the deficiencies cited was a poor understanding of larger business goals and the need for return on investment. Schools understand the need for courses related to management with 11% requiring a general course in management; 15% offering a concentration course in management; and 14% offering an elective course in management. Examples of courses coded as “management” are “managing writing in organizations” and “managing people and projects.” However, additional courses are needed in management, organizational communication, business, and economics to provide students the skills to see larger business goals, to “envision their value in new ways” (Hughes 2002, 284), and to gain a better understanding of the political maneuvering involved in the workplace (Moore and Kreth 2005). Moreover, courses like “project management” and “publications management” prepare students for involvement in the entire project instead of limiting their role to “writer.”

Two additional points of interest need to be singled out from the data. First, only 2% of schools require instruction in teaching technical communication, with 15% and 8% listing it as a concentration course or as an elective, respectively. Of the schools that list a teaching course as part of their program, 12% offer a course with a title that includes technical communication, whereas the rest list a composition pedagogy course. Second, intercultural/global courses are poorly represented in curriculums. Only 5% of schools require the course and 11% of schools offer it as a concentration requirement. Although intercultural/global communication can be covered as a unit in the introductory course, design, or rhetoric/theory course, or as a topics course, it was surprising not to see more courses specifically named intercultural or global.

Courses outside the department

Only a small percentage of schools, 7% for MS programs and 2% for MA programs, require courses to be taken outside of the home department. Few programs even offer the option of taking courses outside of the home department with only 24% of MS programs and 22% of MA programs making it a clear option within the curriculum. Without explicitly stating it in the degree requirements, many departments probably give their students the option to take courses outside the department, but the degree requirements data from MS programs does not suggest an emphasis on science. According to a manager respondent from Aimee Whiteside's survey (2003), "Tech Comm undergrads need more experience working with scientific or technical subject matter (engineers, software developers, scientists)" (312), and the same probably holds true for graduate students. However, no significant differences exist between an MS and MA degree in the curriculum. The only noticeable difference is the slight increase in the number of schools that required courses outside of the department. It could be that there is an implicit understanding that students who come to MS programs have some sort of science or technical background, but additional research is necessary to confirm this conclusion. Departments need to be careful when offering an MS or MA degree because outside of the university, there is an implicit understanding that an MS degree implies a background in a scientific discipline, such as hard sciences, engineering, and the like.

Internships

Internships are required by 29% of schools. Without additional information, such as student profiles, this data may reflect the large numbers of working technical communicators in Master's programs. For those students, an internship may not be as beneficial. However, for students without documented working experience or students who want to change industries, internships can be a vital course

requirement because they match the theory to practice, while providing valuable work experience.

Cumulative experience

A cumulative experience is a thesis, project, portfolio, or practicum; 68% of schools require a cumulative experience. Only 11% of schools require a traditional research based thesis, whereas most (70%) offer the thesis as an option. The most common option for a cumulative experience is to complete a portfolio or project (often called a capstone project). Written examinations are required in 14% of the degree programs, whereas 4% (all MA) require both written and oral exams. Presently, only 18% require oral examinations in conjunction with a cumulative experience, which could be a cause for concern since the ability to orally defend your work and your knowledge is paramount in the workplace.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH AND REFLECTION

The information presented thus far reports the current state of curriculums of Master's programs across the United States. Now, I point to areas for additional research and reflection.

More research is needed to fully understand the "Introduction to the Field of Technical Communication" course. Although degree programs place an emphasis on this course, research that shows the content (that is, the objectives, readings, assignments) will give the field a clearer picture of how universities define and view Technical Communication. Additional research opportunities also exist on courses coded as "topics" and "other." Student interests and instructor specialty are factors that drive the creation of these courses. Knowing the content of these courses gives the field the opportunity to understand more of the areas that make up technical communication. This type of in depth profile could help in sustaining and marketing programs, and these types of course can also provide an opportunity for collaboration (through guest lectures or team teaching) with practitioners.

One surprising aspect that revealed itself in coding was the low number of courses that specifically address online documentation. Rainey and colleagues (2005) surveyed managers of technical communication departments. Those managers reported the types of information products they produced. Four of the top six highest responses are specifically about online delivery of information: pdf documentation (93%), online help (83%), online reference material (70%), and HTML documents (64%) (326). With the increasing importance and pervasiveness of online communication, it is surprising to see that only 41% of schools had this type of course as a concentration and/or elective course. For not even half of the schools to require or offer as an elective a course

specifically geared toward an online environments warrants additional research and reflection.

Although some students pursue a Master's degree to further their careers, many others pursue an advanced degree so they can teach in their local college or university (because the minimum requirement to teach is usually a Master's degree). Many departments staff introductory (or service) courses with adjunct and part-time faculty who have Master's degrees. The absence of courses on teaching technical communication does not bode well for having qualified instructors in classrooms. Is there an assumption that graduate students, many of whom are housed in English departments, are taking a composition pedagogy course because they hold teaching assistantships in the English department? And if that is true, then are we assuming that a composition pedagogy course automatically qualifies someone to teach technical communication? Or, is there an assumption that working professionals would not be interested in teaching, making a pedagogy course unnecessary? If one of the reasons to create graduate programs is to have a pool of qualified candidates for teaching introductory courses, what minimal qualifications are expected for teachers of technical communication?

If a practitioner is considering obtaining an advanced degree, this overview provides insights into the schools offering degrees as well as the type of curriculum. The diversity of curricula provides potential students many choices in finding the program that meets their needs. In their discussion of undergraduate programs, Allen and Benninghoff (2004) argue for the need to clearly state the goals for educational outcomes and to publicize this information on Web sites and marketing materials (107). The same holds true for Master's degrees, and in some ways, it is even more imperative. Students' investments in a graduate degree are greater than those in an undergraduate degree. Often, students must rearrange their lives, make allowances for the demands of family and jobs, and find ways to pay for additional schooling when they may be still paying off loans from their undergraduate degrees. What would help students make better informed choices is to clearly articulate program goals, missions, and specializations, as Allen and Benninghoff suggest. After visiting all the schools' departmental Web sites and graduate school Web sites, this is one area where much improvement can be made. Not only will this overview provide potential students a better view of the field, it may be useful for those who hire graduates of programs because they can have a sense of what the graduate degree entails.

Regularly, professional listservs will lament the state of academic degrees and curriculum, consistently criticizing curriculums for failing to prepare students for the actual work they will do. Practitioners often forget that they have a stake in local colleges and universities, and this overview

gives working technical communicators insights into degree requirements so they can work with their local programs to enhance the curriculum. Practitioners should work to build or improve relationships with their local colleges and universities. For example, working professionals can contact the program director and offer to provide a workshop or guest lecture. Most schools would welcome input from local constituencies on how to improve or expand course offerings. Several successful models exist (for example, University of Central Florida and Northern Illinois University) proving that a local STC chapter and local academic programs can have a fruitful and productive working relationship.

The 10-year growth rate for schools offering Master's degrees should encourage practitioners and academics to reflect on whether such monumental growth is sustainable and desirable. Although some slowing may indeed happen because of market factors, such as student demand, additional research on programs (that is, enrollment numbers) would give a richer view of the field and allow better questions on how to grow and sustain programs.

The most important next step in research regarding our programs and the curriculum, however, is to do more work like that of Wilson and Ford (2003), Kim and Tolley (2004), Rainey and colleagues (2005), and Whiteside (2003). All of these studies were concerned with broadly assessing how well academic programs were meeting the needs of students and local stakeholders, that is, those people who hire graduates. Additional studies like these that focus on graduate programs can begin to answer questions including: What do our graduates think of their graduate training as they move and/or continue in business and industry? Do our graduates have to explain the name of their degree to potential employers? Do graduates feel that they are prepared for their jobs? Do graduates feel that they received sufficient return on their investment? What do business and industry members of those communities we serve think about our programs? What skills support the work of practitioners? What courses, based on local factors, should be added (or eliminated or expanded) to the curriculum? Are hiring managers satisfied that program requirements match their advertised skills requirement? These types of questions should spur necessary reflection on program curriculum and will help guide changes in existing programs and help develop a set of helpful heuristics for building new programs.

FOR THE FUTURE

A comprehensive look at degrees and curriculum gives us a much-needed state of the field view of Master's degree programs in technical communication. This overview has shown that technical communication is thriving on its diversity and its hybrid nature, but it also provides the field

an opportunity for reflection. We owe it to our students and the communities we serve to practice this sort of self-reflection as we continue to develop a rich profile of degree programs and curricula that is poised to evolve with the changing demands of the workplace. **TC**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Menno de Jong, George Hayhoe, Tom Gorski, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and continued support that enabled this article to finally see print. I also need to thank Scott and Cathy Mack, who provided the perfect place for me to originally collect, code, and analyze this data; I will forever be grateful.

REFERENCES

- Allen, N., and S. Benninghoff. 2004. TPC program snapshots: Developing curricula and addressing challenges. *Technical communication quarterly* 13:157–185.
- Harner, S., and A. Rich. 2005. Trends in undergraduate curriculum in scientific and technical communication programs. *Technical communication* 52:209–220.
- Hughes, M. 2002. Moving from information transfer to knowledge creation: A new value proposition for technical communicators. *Technical communication* 49:275–285.
- Johnson-Eilola, J., and S. A. Selber. 2001. Sketching a framework for graduate education in technical communication. *Technical communication quarterly* 10:403–436.
- Keene, M. L., ed. 1997. *Education in scientific and technical communication: Academic programs that work*. Arlington, VA: Society for Technical Communication Press.
- Kim, L., and C. Tolley. 2004. Fitting academic programs to workplace marketability: Career paths of five technical communicators. *Technical communication* 51:376–386.
- Moore, P., and M. Kreth. 2005. From wordsmith to communication strategist: heresthetic and political maneuvering. *Technical communication* 52:302–322.
- Murray, M. 2007. From writer to communicator: University of Central Florida changes its program name. News and Notes: The Society for Technical Communication Newsletter. <http://www.stc-cdx.org/newsnotes/2007/03/a21>.
- Rainey, K., R. Turner, and D. Dayton. 2005. Do curricula correspond to managerial expectations? Core competencies for technical communicators. *Technical communication* 52:323–352.
- Spigelman, C., and L. Grobman. 2006. Why we chose rhetoric: Necessity, ethics, and the (re)making of a professional writing program. *Journal of business and technical communication* 20:48–64.
- Sullivan, P., and J. Porter. 1993. Remapping curricular geography: Professional writing in/and English. *Journal of business and technical communication* 7:389–422.
- Tebeaux, E. 2007. E-mail to Association of Teachers of Technical Writing mailing list, 31 March. <http://lyris.acs.ttu.edu/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=attw-l>.
- Whiteside, A. 2003. The skills that technical communicators need: An investigation of technical communication graduates, managers, and curricula. *Journal of technical writing and communication* 33:303–318.
- Wilson, G., and J. D. Ford. 2003. The big chill: A conversation with seven professionals ten years after they graduated with Master's degrees in technical communication. *Technical communication* 50:145–159.

LISA MELONCON is the owner of a technical communication consulting firm, Tek-Ritr Group, and an Assistant Professor of Professional and Technical Communication at the University of Cincinnati. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in business and technical communication.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF SCHOOLS

Auburn University	Northern Illinois University
Boise State University	Oklahoma State University
Bowling Green State University	Old Dominion
Brigham Young University	Penn State University
Carnegie Mellon University	Pittsburgh State University
Clemson University	Polytechnic University
Colorado State University	Portland State University*
DePaul*	Purdue University
Drexel University*	Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
East Carolina University	Rochester Institute of Technology*
Eastern Michigan University	San Diego State University
Eastern Washington University*	Southeastern Louisiana University
Fitchburg State	Southern Polytechnic State University
Florida Institute of Technology	SUNY Institute of Technology
George Mason University	Texas State University
Georgia Institute of Technology	Texas Tech University
Georgia State University	Towson State University
Illinois Institute of Technology	University of Alaska Fairbanks
Illinois State University	University of Arkansas at Little Rock
Indiana State University	University of Baltimore
Iowa State University	University of Central Florida
James Madison University	University of Cincinnati*
Kennesaw State	University of Colorado at Denver
Lawrence Technological University	University of Houston-Downtown
Louisiana Tech University	University of Illinois
Mercer University	University of Louisiana Lafayette

APPENDIX A: LIST OF SCHOOLS

Metropolitan State University	University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth
Miami University	University of Memphis
Michigan State University	University of Minnesota
Michigan Technological University	University of New Mexico
Minnesota State University, Mankato	University of North Carolina-Charlotte
Missouri State University	University of North Texas
Missouri University of Science and Technology	University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
Missouri Western	University of Texas El Paso
Montana Tech of The University of Montana	University of Washington*
New Jersey Institute of Technology	University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
New Mexico State University	Utah State University
North Carolina State University	Virginia Tech
Northeastern University*	West Virginia University
Northern Arizona University	Youngstown State University

* quarter system schools
