



# Selling Technical Communication Programs: Content Analysis of a Decade of Program Identity and Addressivity in Print Advertisements

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## Research Goals

- To identify technical communication program advertisement practices and gaps.
- To analyze how programs characterize themselves and their audience.

## Research Questions

- What kind of program identity do we project in our advertisements?
- Who are the advertisements addressing? Do the advertisements address people who may not know who we are or what we do?
- What are the emerging trends in print advertisement recruitment strategies?

## Content Analysis

- 58 print advertisements (ads) from the Council of Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication conference programs (2006-2016); 39 were posted from the same university in different years
- 33 universities were represented
- Framework: Bakhtin (1992); Thayer, Evans, McBride, Queen, and Spyridakis (2007)

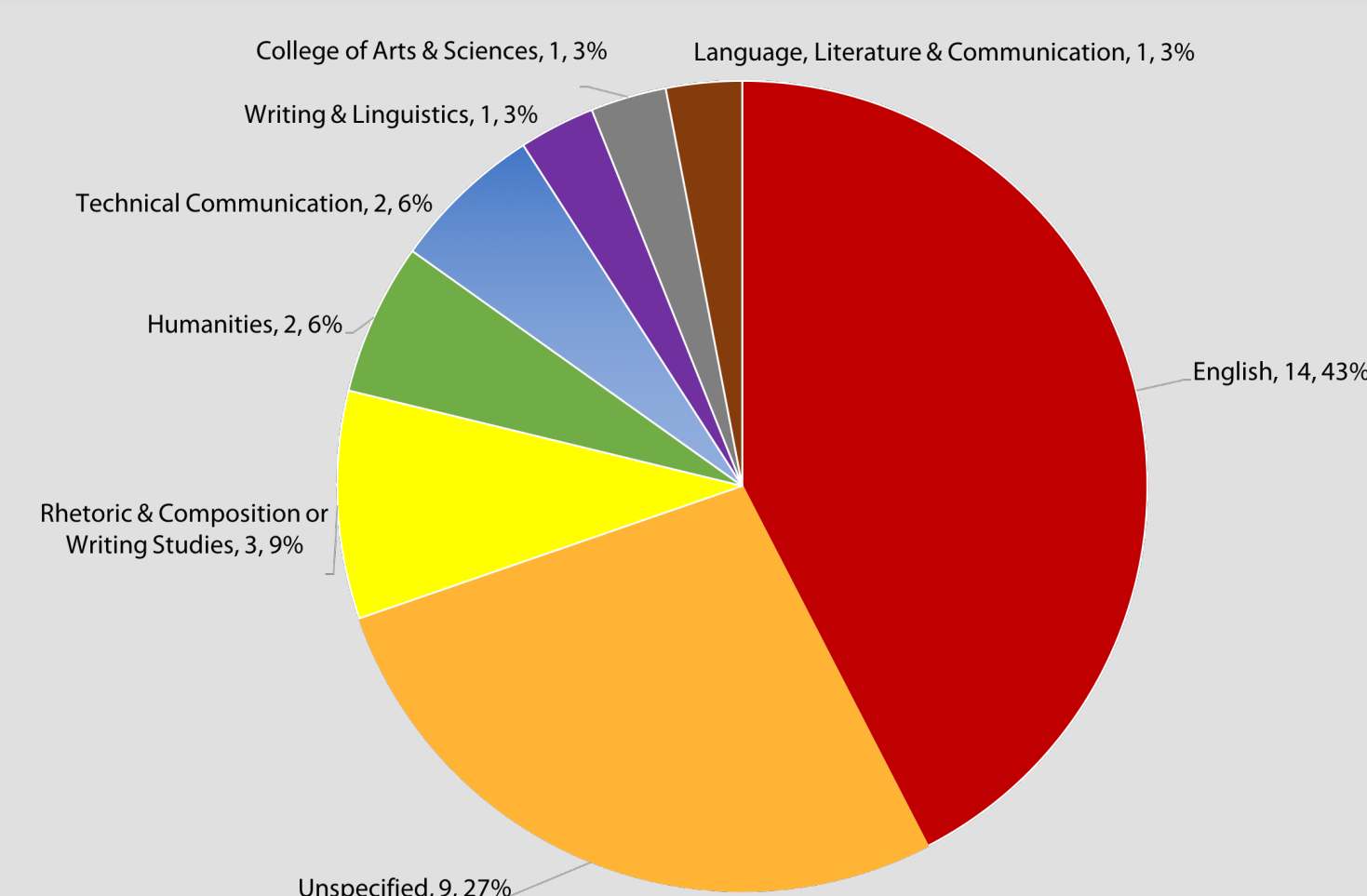


Figure 1. Sponsoring departments or programs based on 33 universities

Table 1

### Fifteen Most Frequent Themes

Theme	Example	Total
Research	"Study at a research intensive doctorate-granting university..."	38
Faculty	"Our faculty are enthusiastic and caring, with rich workplace and academic experience, outstanding teaching and publishing credentials, and international reputations."	33
Job Market	"Internships with local companies, including FedEx and AutoZone..."	28
Program Status	"Collaborate with faculty with excellent professional and research credentials, having generated over \$10 million in federal, state and corporate research grants..."	26
Practice	"Ph.D. exploring theory and practical applications of writing in diverse contexts, genres & media..."	23
Program Characteristics	"Enjoy small classes that are offered day, evening, and online..."	22
Customization	"Join our distinguished faculty for individualized, interdisciplinary study..."	22
Interdisciplinary	"We offer a unique interdisciplinary focus on theory and practice, drawing on areas..."	17
Return on Investment	"Our graduates have a 100% placement rate in academia and industry..."	17
International/Global	"Earn a quality, globally relevant degree at the undergraduate or graduate level..."	16
Theory	"Students learn how theory and practice inform and enrich each other."	15
Fellowships, Assistantships	"Students...are eligible to apply for other funding including research grants, endowed fellowships, summer teaching, and other funding activities."	15
Future teachers	"We provide future scholar-teachers with diverse, well-supported research..."	15
Future business professionals	"For students who want to advance their careers in government, business, and industry..."	14
Journals, Professional Orgs	"We house the SAGE journal, Written Communication..."	12



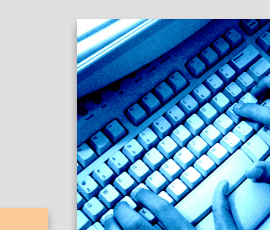
#### Job Market

- 28 ads included the job titles, industries, and companies where their graduates might find or had found employment.
- 17 demonstrated students' potential return on investment by mentioning success rates and statistics such as placement rates and percentages of their students accepted into graduate school.



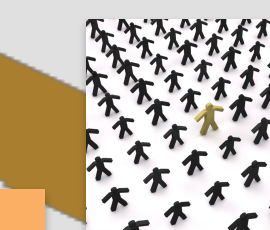
#### Financial Aid

- About 1/3 of the ads mentioned financial aid (n=21) offered to students such as fellowships and assistantships (n=15); scholarships, stipends or affordability (n=5) or health benefits (n=1).



#### Visuals

- The ads were more likely to show pictures of technology (n=11) or groups (n=9) than pictures of minorities (n=7).



#### Target Audience

- When the ads explicitly specified their target audience, they mentioned future teachers (n=15) and future business people (n=14) more so than students in other disciplines (n=9).

## Implications

- Program ads emphasize faculty and program reputation in terms of awards won, professional affiliations, and journals sponsored, as well as potential jobs in industry. In this way, they implicitly address prospective students for whom program status and professional opportunities matter.
- Ads made much fewer explicit addresses to prospective students from other disciplines. While technical communication programs might benefit new populations of prospective students, such as entry-level professional scientists, engineers, and other currently employed practitioners looking for continuing education and training to prepare them for management, ads might set a framework that presumes knowledge of the discipline and deemphasizes lateral or horizontal career advancement as a motivation for applying.
- Fewer than expected ads mentioned practical lures for prospective students such as financial aid and job placement rates.
- Future teachers and business professionals were explicitly addressed in the ads, but minorities were underrepresented in visuals, probably in effort to represent the current composition of technical communication programs as opposed to prospective or aspiring versions of the face of the discipline.