CHAPTER	6
TITLE	The Administrator as Technorhetorician: Sustainable Technological Ecologies in Writing Programs
AUTHOR	Michael Day
OVERVIEW	This chapter considers the role of the technologically knowledgeable administrator as a decision-maker at the intersection of complex systems of relationships among stakeholders in a university setting. These systems include the technological infrastructure and the faculty development support system, and issues such as governance, assessment, and pedagogy. I argue that technorhetorician administrators need to be able to draw upon existing knowledge and experience in at least three ways. First, technorhetorician administrators should be reading the scholarly work of peers, not only in rhetoric and composition, but in computers and writing studies. Second, technorhetorician administrators should be involved in and help maintain the national and international conversations about rhetoric, technology, and composition. Third, technorhetorician administrators must learn the history, relationships, and concerns of stakeholders in the local university context. Practically speaking, technorhetorician administrators must be able to listen to and act upon theoretical and anecdotal knowledge at both the local and global levels. Drawing upon examples and case studies, I discuss the evolution of an administrative philosophy that fosters the development of sustainable uses of technology in writing programs, including guiding principles for program administrators interested in such questions as: • Who are, and how do I learn about, the stakeholders in the intersecting technological ecologies within and outside the university? • On what information do I base my decisions about using technology in the program? To whom do I listen, when, and how? • How do I decide between national recommendations and local exigencies when they conflict?
TAGS	academic program, assessment, bottom-up, Colorado State University, community of practice, consensus, CSU, early adopter*, ecology, global, infrastructure, living database, local, Michael Day, stakeholder*, sustain*, technolog*, technorhetorician, top-down, WPA, writing program administrator
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Technological Ecologies & Sustainability

The Administrator as Technorhetorician: Sustainable Technological Ecologies in Writing Programs

Michael Day

In this chapter, I consider the role of the technologically knowledgeable administrator as a decision-maker at the intersection of complex systems of relationships among stakeholders in a university setting. These complex systems include the technological infrastructure, such as machines, software, networks, and lab spaces; the faculty-development support system, including program-specific and university-wide efforts; governance issues such as planning, policy, procedure development, and administrative decision-making; assessment issues such as electronic portfolio scoring, placement, and programmatic feedback; and pedagogical issues, such as computer classroom concerns and the relationship between online and offline activities.

As Shirley Rose and Irwin Weiser reminded us in *The Writing Program Administrator as Researcher* (1999) and *The Writing Program Administrator as Theorist* (2002), research, theory, and everyday decision-making must be integrated at every level of the complicated work of directing a writing program. Thus, in negotiating a sustainable pathway for a program that will meet the needs of as many stakeholders in the intersecting ecologies of a university, the administrator needs to be able to draw upon existing knowledge and experience in at least three ways. First, to whatever extent they can, technorhetorician administrators should be reading the scholarly work of peers, not only in rhetoric and composition, but in computers and writing studies. Second, technorhetorician administrators should be involved in and help maintain the national and international conversations about rhetoric, technology, and composition, through online discussions and face-to-face conferences. Third, technorhetorician administrators must learn the history, relationships, and concerns of the stakeholders in the local university context. Practically speaking, technorhetorician administrators must be able to listen to and act upon theoretical and anecdotal knowledge at both local and global levels.

Using my experiences as technorhetorician for over 17 years, university faculty development chair for 5 years, and writing program administrator (WPA) for 6 years, in this chapter I discuss the evolution of an administrative philosophy that fosters the development of sustainable uses of technology in writing programs. Through examples and case studies, I provide some guiding principles for program administrators interested in answering the following questions:

- Who are the stakeholders in the intersecting technological ecologies within and outside the university? How do I learn about these stakeholders, and how do I gauge the impact of my decisions upon them?
- On what information do I base my decisions about using technology in the program? To whom do I listen, when, and how?
- How do I decide between national recommendations and local exigencies when they conflict?
- How do I ensure that everyone teaching in the program has access to hardware, software, and network services essential to those who use computer technologies in the classroom?

- How do I plan and implement faculty development (including professional development for graduate students) in a technology-integrated program?
- How do I plan and implement an assessment program using best practices in rhetoric, technology, and composition?
- How do I document, report on, and publicize my program's achievements in technology, assessment, and student writing?
- How do I ensure that our uses of technology are focused on meeting the needs of students, not the needs of educational, software, hardware, and publishing companies?

Ultimately, I do not make a case for detailed and specific approaches to sustainable technological ecologies in an academic program, but instead I illustrate and recommend a process of listening to global conversations about technorhetoric, processing and adapting technorhetorical theories and suggestions to local circumstances, then acting with the best interests of key stakeholders in mind.

WHY TECHNOLOGY MATTERS TO WRITING PROGRAMS

In response to external forces as well as internal needs, programs and departments at every level of higher education are under pressure to incorporate computer and networked technologies into the curriculum. From outside the institution, big business in the form of computer companies and course-management system vendors, network providers, and trade and textbook publishers vie for the attention of educators who have a say in adopting technology. Government sources at the local, state, and national levels are also pushing for technology adoption through new standards (e.g., the National Educational Technology Standards), mandates, and grant competitions. Parents and community members—often having heard about the wonders of technology in education through media and advertising hype—have come to expect minimum levels of computer and Internet integration in education. Inside educational institutions, many administrators, themselves susceptible to the hype, clamor for new and better technological innovations, despite the associated costs and the burden posed to faculty. Most teachers, having used computers and the Internet for many years, will say that they want to use technology in their classrooms, but often have difficulty finding the time to learn to use it effectively. Many students in the United States, having grown up communicating, socializing, and playing on computers, consider access to digital technology a requirement in educational environments, especially in higher education settings.

On the other hand, both external and internal forces work against effective technology integration. Externally, public school budgets have to come from appropriations and taxes, and public schools and colleges are getting less and less funding from states and municipalities. In many areas, the sad truth is that public universities are moving from "state-supported" to "state-assisted" as the percentage of overall budget provided by states has waned in recent years (see also Porter, this volume). Thus, funding for equipment is often scarce, as is support for faculty development activities in the area of technology. Internally, beyond budget constraints, one of the biggest factors working against technology adoption is the lack of time—teachers are overworked and simply too busy to learn to use new tools. And, although faculty at colleges and universities are usually not as constrained by laws, use policies, and network-blocking programs as teachers at secondary schools, they do encounter policy-based roadblocks to using computers and the Internet with their classes. Finally, at some schools, a combination of technophobia and mid-to-late career stagnation has led some

faculty to resist technology and even label it as a threat to a humanities-based liberal arts education.

Amid such competing internal and external pressures, because of their role as managers, mentors, mediators, and innovators, academic program administrators need to develop a flexible philosophy that will allow them to negotiate an effective and sustainable role for technology in the curriculum they support. One way of thinking about administrative philosophies in negotiating technology decisions is to consider the administrator as a *technorhetorician*—that is, as an administrator who understands and has experience in technology, including the rhetoric of technology, and uses that knowledge for the benefit of as many of the program's stakeholders as possible. In using technorhetorician here, I am borrowing a term that has been widely used in computers and writing discussions to refer to computer and Internet-using teachers of composition and rhetoric.

Eric Crump defined a technorhetorician as "someone who is aware that for rhetoric, technology is a universal problem (or at least a force to be reckoned with)" (qtd. in Bridgeford, 2006) and noted that it is a term of convenience, so that those involved in discussions don't have to say "rhetor-who-happens-to-study-the-rhetorical-features-of-technological-environments" (Crump, qtd. in Doherty, 2001). In this context, I would argue that any administrator of a technology-rich program must be aware of, if not deeply understand, the rhetorical features of technological environments, for, as scholars from Nancy Kaplan (1991) to Amy Kimme Hea (2005) remind us, no technology is neutral, and all technological uses have an effect on what and how we learn and communicate. To demonstrate principles of technorhetorical administration, I draw upon scenarios and observations from my experience as a writing program administrator who has been involved in online discussions of using computers and the web to teach writing for 17 years.

National Educational Technology Standards

BALANCING TOP-DOWN, BOTTOM-UP, LOCAL, AND GLOBAL CONCERNS

All administrators and faculty members have encountered at one time or another the pressure to integrate networked computers and the Internet to provide a learning, writing, or social-networking space for students, either because our institutions decided it was time to embrace computer technology, or because we ourselves had seen the promise of these technologies. When supervisors impose technological environments on us, we may struggle to make them useful and relevant to our teaching, and when we are the instigators, we may struggle to find support among our colleagues and supervisors. With digital technologies here to stay in many programs, but the various implementations and configurations of those technologies hotly contested by the various stakeholders, the problem administrators face is how to create and maintain an environment of trust and communication in which the computer, digital networks, software, and hardware are used productively by faculty and students, are supported by the institution, and are the focus of strong faculty development efforts. Ideally, the process of supporting and sustaining such a computer-based ecology is one of identifying stakeholders, listening to global conversations on digital technology use within educational environments, adapting the principles found in those conversations to local circumstances through discussions and consensus building with local stakeholders, then acting in the best interests of those stakeholders.

Tech Forced from the Top-down

We have all likely experienced or heard some version of the following scenario: An enthusiastic administrator attends a workshop on technology and thinks that a certain course-management system (or software suite or networking technology) is the best thing since sliced bread. Before you know it, contracts are signed, large amounts of money change hands, and every course now has a new online environment. Faculty and students were likely not consulted. Training, replacement costs, and support are likely not built into the contract. Since the early 1980s, stories have been circulating about computers that became expensive doorstops (Shreve, 2002), largely because they were purchased or donated without the necessary pieces of infrastructure that would make them usable: software appropriate to the purpose, networking connections, physical space, furniture to put them on, chairs that allow ease of movement and facilitate collaboration, and, above all, training and faculty development. Recently, the media has latched onto a story about how required laptop initiatives at many schools have failed to change or improve learning (e.g., Hu, 2007). What most of the reports miss is that without faculty buy-in (along with proper hardware, software, and faculty development support), any technology initiative is doomed to failure. The following case studies illustrate some of the problems that can occur when key stakeholders do not have an active role in making technology decisions.

For a few years, I sat on my university's technology committee. When decisions about major enterprise, course-management systems, and productivity software adoptions were mentioned, I questioned whether we might look at open-source alternatives to spending millions of dollars on licenses for these products. In each case, I was summarily dismissed by others on the committee with comments that made it clear that the decisions had already been made, based on considerations such as pre-existing agreements, industry standards, and what students would be using in the "real world." Even though I was on a faculty advisory committee, I do not recall ever being asked about the really big decisions.

Stories of similar occurrences have come in from all over the country. Bradley Bleck of Spokane Falls Community College reported that in their annual technology request, his department's request for a cart of laptops was listed as the division's number one priority. Without input from those who would be teaching with the laptops, the dean decided to upscale the machines, but only two-thirds of them. The results of two-thirds of the machines being fully functional and one-third left with limited systems and software included unimagined class planning and on-their-feet pedagogical tweaking on the part of teachers, and also resulted in scheduling complexities. In addition, the class sections being made smaller to accommodate the laptops were fine from the standpoint of limiting composition class sizes, but resulted in competition for the sections, and animosity toward those who were assigned to them.

CJ Jeney (2008) remembers several years in which her student evaluation scores and comments suffered greatly when she was forced to use Microsoft Front Page in teaching web page design in her technical writing classes: "For three years I took massive hits on those end-of-semester evaluation sheets, as students fumed and spewed about the software (which, unbeknownst to them, was numerically slapping me and my teaching in the face)" (n.d.). Finally, in her fourth year, funding for alternate course technologies became available, and Jeney's evaluations shot up after she was able to bring in more appropriate and industry-standard software programs. These examples demonstrate the complicated repercussions—in such areas as budget, student evaluations, faculty morale, class size, and productivity—when key stakeholders are not consulted in technological decision-making.

The Early Adopter: From the Bottom-up

Another common story in technology integration concerns the early adopter: A graduate student or early-career faculty member who has, for instance, been strongly influenced by participating in a technology workshop or having a conversation about a new innovation with an online discussion group, works extremely hard in his or her institution to adopt new technologies in classes. But other faculty—and even some students—are suspicious, because the class and its approaches look very different from "business as usual" pedagogical approaches in the department or program. Eventually, administrators hear reports from faculty or see student evaluation forms, and investigate, often finding that some students aren't happy with the innovative approach. Sometimes the reasons are somewhat simple; for instance, students are upset because they know that previously, the course was taught in a more predictable manner. In other cases, learning and adjusting to the technology is time-consuming and frustrating to the students; to them, the drawbacks outweigh the benefits. The administrators express concern to the early innovator (sometimes with a hint that low student evaluations will cause problems with tenure, promotion, and merit ratings), and may even force her or him to discontinue the technological innovation.

Colleagues across the nation report varying degrees of success with bottom-up technological innovations. Jane Nelson (2008), an early adopter at the University of Wyoming, offered the following:

> Years ago, when we developed our first computer writing classroom, we installed Daedalus [Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment, or DIWE], which was a kind of course management system. Our IT folk were not happy about installing unknown stuff, and a person high up in the administration of IT said something cavalier like "It can't possibly be any good. It was developed by English professors." That was one of the few times I was able to force an official apology. (n.p.)

By choosing software with local stakeholder (i.e., student) needs in mind, and through success at improving writing instruction with DIWE, Nelson was finally able to impress the information technology administrators and win the right to continue using context-specific software. Her success depended on her ability to reach out and connect with stakeholders at several levels. Will Hochman (2008) demonstrated a similar ability at Southern Connecticut State University, where he resisted using the campus-wide course-management system in favor of The Writing Studio, a free online writing environment created by Mike Palmquist at Colorado State University. According to Hochman: "Instead of top down, one-size fits all CMS, we customize our writing spaces easily at the bottom up level of student and teacher. Ironically, when push comes to shove and my school gets wise about e-portfolios, we will already be doing that so fluidly in The Writing Studio. . ." (n.p.). Kathie Gossett (2008) told a similar story based on her experiences at the University of Illinois, where the campus adopted WebCT, which worked well for the sciences, but not for composition. In reaction, considering local needs, faculty in the English Department installed Moodle on their own server, and, recognizing the success of their pilot, the entire college adopted Moodle as its default course-management system. Again, the local needs of writing teachers and students took precedence over campus-wide, "one-size-fits all" technology implementation, and in all the cases above, writing teachers knew how to talk to administrators and back up their claims with evidence. Based on local, national, and published evidence, my current writing program has made a similar choice, preferring the simplicity of WebBoard software to the top-heavy course-management system adopted and supported on my campus. But we are lucky enough to have a full-time technology support staff member and control of our own server; otherwise, choosing alternative software for our program might not have been an option.

I did not have the benefit of such support and cooperation—that is, both top-down and bottom-up—when, as a new faculty member at a state technological university in 1992, pumped up by computers and writing discussions on email lists like MegaByte University (MBU-L), I asked advanced technical communication students to use Internet discussion groups for class discussions and outreach to professionals in their chosen fields.[1] Seasoned veterans of the university in their upper-class years, these students had anticipated the paper-and-speech-based class that had been taught by a very popular faculty member in the past, and they were disgruntled that they did not get the class they expected. Here was an untested new faculty member spouting unsubstantiated claims about the power of the Internet to connect people and to foster new kinds of collaboration and discussion. What's more, the students had to learn how to use their email accounts, learn how to subscribe to discussion groups, learn a bit about netiquette, and put up with countless failures in modem and networking technology. It was a big change for them, so who could blame them for complaining to their major department chairs, the deans, and even the vice president of the institution? One student went so far as to threaten to sue me for breach of contract, because the Internet was not listed in the course description.[2] The engineering department chairs asked me to attend a meeting at which they roundly admonished me for using technologies "that had nothing to do with teaching the students how to write," and—short of demanding that I stop using online discussion—strongly recommended that I tone it down and make Internet activities optional.

Dutifully, I scaled back on the networked discussion requirements, but, in the ensuing years, it became almost painfully obvious that Internet-based writing would become a crucial activity for technical communicators, and the lab-based and online activities were finally accepted into my writing classes when other writing teachers also integrated them. We succeeded in getting support for email lists, class web pages, and rooms with instructor computers, Internet access, and projection screens (so-called "smart classrooms"), but struggled to secure lab space for the writing classes to meet, even once in a while. I had to beg one of our engineering departments to use its lab once every 2 weeks, so that students could practice their writing and use the Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment for prewriting, peer review, and class discussion.[3]

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[1] Described in detail in "Writing in the Matrix," a chapter in Galin and Latchaw's The Dialogic Classroom" (Day, 1998).

[2] This lawsuit magically disappeared when, in the vice president's office, I produced a print copy of an email in which the same student threatened to physically assault me.

[3] I then used the Megabyte University online discussion not only to ask questions about how to make use of one lab, set up in rows, not pod or perimeter seating (the topic of computer classroom setup frequently came up online), and later as a sounding board for planning and proposing a computer classroom to be used by writing classes alone. I was also able to view other schools' proposals and plans, as well as share my rationale and plans with others, thanks to the online network of colleagues more than happy to share and conspire. Then, made optimistic by what I learned of the efforts of colleagues across the country to put in computer classrooms, I secured funding through a curriculum redevelopment grant competition. Then the real fun started; I was ultimately unable to get any campus entity to allocate a space for the classroom, and had to give up the idea. I eventually moved to a university that already had required, allocated lab time built into the curriculum, but before leaving the technological university, I hosted a computers and writing conference there.

Daedalus (Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment, or DIWE)

The Writing Studio

Moodle

WebBoard

MegaByte University (MBU-L)

Local and Global Consensus Building

What do these stories tell us about sustainable ecologies of technology use? They draw our attention to the need for complementarity between local and global consensus-building among stakeholders. It wasn't enough for me to have the general agreement of the entire computers and writing community behind me if I could not gain the trust and support of the local campus community. In retrospect, I should probably have spent my first year at the state technological university learning the culture, teaching a fairly non-controversial syllabus, and meeting as many stakeholders in the teaching of writing as I could. These stakeholders are students (who can be approached through honor societies, clubs, and surveys); other faculty who teach the courses; support staff such as librarians, information technology personnel, and room schedulers; faculty development and curriculum committees; and administrators at all levels who care about student writing and communication skills. Then, depending upon what I learned, I could have introduced online activities into my courses gradually, seeking feedback along the way through frequent formative teaching assessment activities, such as 1-minute response papers and small group instructional diagnoses. I might also have formed a committee that included stakeholders from a variety of campus constituencies to try to make the computer classroom a reality. But the most important lesson to be learned from this experience is that scholars and teachers at every level need to make connections, form collaborations, and build communities with stakeholders across their programs, departments, and universities.

How do teachers and administrators develop and maintain relationships with stakeholders? Although Kimme Hea (2005) looked primarily at relationships between academic and client constituents in service-learning contexts in her article "Developing Stakeholder Relationships: What's at Stake," her research can inform our thinking on how to sustain technological ecologies in educational institutions. Situating participants as stakeholders—as "the many individuals and groups in an organization 'who can affect or [be] affected by the achievement of the organization's objective'" (Freeman, 1984, qtd. in Kimme Hea, p. 56)—Kimme Hea grounded stakeholder theory in Foucauldian and feminist ethics. She also drew from Brian Burton and Craig Dunn, who, in Kimme Hea's words, "suggest that feminist ethics can inform stakeholder theory through a discussion of responsibilities and concrete, lived realities versus rights and abstract principles" (p. 59). Although some of Kimme Hea's suggestions for rethinking corporate systems may sound utopic, her suggested basic principle—creating dialogue where multiple voices emerge and are appreciated, and shared goals and mutual growth are central—can help faculty and program administrators alike develop stakeholder-based approaches to technology-linked educational initiatives.

In short, the problem I encountered at my former institution stemmed from basing my efforts on the advice of outsiders without thoroughly consulting local stakeholders about the possible challenges and consequences of the changes I wanted to make. I was sure that my discussion list colleagues had the right ideas for using computer and network technologies in the writing classroom, but I had not consulted with more than one colleague at my school (who had been instrumental in hiring me and thus was quite familiar with my background and work), about how those ideas would or would not fit the local context. In a recent post to TechRhet, Danielle DeVoss (2008) put her finger on a major concern for early adopter technorhetoricians who keep in touch daily by email.

> Are we talking to each other too much? And making too many assumptions about what "our colleagues" are doing? And by "our colleagues," I don't just mean the—to be honest —handful of us on this list and who go to Computers and Writing and religiously read *Kairos*. I'm talking about the thousands and thousands of others who live and work in places where they have to fight very, very hard to do the sort of stuff we have our "undergrads do all the time. (n.p.)

DeVoss understood the danger of making assumptions about the technologies our local and distant colleagues can use and will be permitted to use in their programs and classes. She reminded us that, to many of our colleagues, “this sort of work IS new and has to be contextualized and historicized and explained and theorized.” And that process of contextualizing, historicizing, explaining, and theorizing must take place in local as well as national and international communities of practice.

Seeking out Stakeholders

When I moved from the small state technological school to a larger state university, I remembered that educators have an opportunity to reinvent themselves when they change institutions. After making the move, I did my best to learn from my failures at my former institution, and I had a 3-year grace period before becoming WPA. At my current institution, the previous WPA had already built strong consensus among stakeholders. Well-aware of national trends in computers and writing, this WPA had worked with the General Education Committee, which needed some guarantee that students would have training in electronic and online tools for writing and communication and that such training would be a core part of the mission statement, goals, and outcomes of the writing program’s first-year courses. Then, working with Information Technology Services and Residence Hall personnel, he arranged an agreement guaranteeing that every first-year writing class would meet in a computer classroom at least once a week. With the former WPA as my model, I was acutely aware of the precedence for listening to as many constituents as possible in the process of making decisions about programmatic initiatives and change. So, although I still continued to read online lists such as TechRhet for ideas, I also paid close attention to what is going on locally in the program, and, as much as possible, let stakeholders have a major say in the directions we take. Our first-year composition program has an assistant director, a technology coordinator, and a committee composed of administrators, supportive professional staff, instructors, teaching assistants, and at least one undergraduate student. If I have ideas for initiatives—gleaned from email discussion lists such as TechRhet or WPA-L—I take them to the committee first, and they decide whether and how to pursue them. This is the process we used over a full year to review the national WPA Outcomes Statement and come up with a version that fit our own program.

A good administrator also has to be open to ideas that come from others, and the members of the committee have been excellent at soliciting suggestions for ways that we could support

each other better. It was the committee's idea to start the successful First-year Comp First Friday Colloquium series, and the committee works with everyone teaching in the program to find speakers and topics, all local and home-grown, for the monthly event. They also liked the idea of hosting an event like the Celebration of Student Writing developed at Eastern Michigan University, and our school held its first annual Showcase of Student Writing in spring 2008. Under the coordination of my assistant director, the committee oversees articulation and calibration sessions every semester, and also attends to such areas as working conditions, publisher relations, our custom handbook (including an online classroom environment), our program web site, and recommended textbook lists.

Aggressively seeking out stakeholders across campus, I regularly consult with my chair, along with the dean and associate deans of my college, to be sure that our technological efforts are coordinated. As a member of the steering committee of our pioneering developmental program for students from disadvantaged area high schools, I work to insure that we have the best instructors and technology in place. Because we have so many ESL students, including graduate students who must take a version of our composition sequence, I coordinate our efforts with the department's ESL director and the international programs office. And because about a third of my program's classes meet in residence hall classrooms and labs, I have developed a very close working relationship with the Residential Technology Coordinator, who, in the last 3 years, formed a task force of diverse stakeholders to upgrade and improve technology and learning environments for first-year composition students and instructors. Working with input from administrators, instructors, teaching assistants, and students, the task force completely remodeled and "smartened" our residence hall composition classrooms, and upgraded the residence hall labs used heavily by first-year composition classes. Our library education coordinator also works hand-in-hand with the writing program to help insure that the research process in our classes goes smoothly and students learn strategies for accessing both print-based and online sources for their research projects. A few years ago she introduced an innovative electronic tutorial and scavenger hunt for students, and now all library orientation sessions are held in a state-of-the-art computer lab.

WPA Outcomes Statement

English Composition Outcomes

Eastern Michigan University Celebration of Student Writing

Technorhetorician WPAs Addressing Assessment

All innovative initiatives require regular phases and processes of assessment, especially technology initiatives, which, in some senses, are a moving target due to regular changes in the technology itself. Thus, although the characteristics we value in good writing may remain the same, the tools with which students craft, compose, and deliver their writing change shape, and taking this into consideration must be part of assessment processes. Because assessment tends to be the "elephant in the room" at most colleges and universities, with a great deal of external and internal top-down pressure, the technorhetorician administrator needs to pay special attention to this key component of academic program success. Following

Ed White's (2005) rule of assessodynamics, "assess thyself or assessment will be done unto thee," we decided to take no chances, and we proactively developed a first-year composition program assessment, based on the Council of Writing Program Administrators' Outcomes Statement, but including technology outcomes, with input from all teachers in the program. Then, with help from the Inter/National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio Research and our campus assessment office, we piloted an electronic portfolio assessment project that included our new teaching assistants, who coach students on creating reflective electronic portfolios and themselves create reflective electronic teaching portfolios. Each year, two portfolios are selected at random from each section of first-year composition, and scored by our program's core competency assessment team. We use this data to chart our progress on a number of axes, as well as to determine where we need more faculty development efforts.

The campus assessment office supports our efforts, but we have not been as successful as we would like in two areas. First, because we have not mandated electronic portfolios for all instructors and all teaching assistants in the program, about two-thirds of the first-year composition sections are not involved in the assessment (although they do collect paper portfolios). Second, we had great hopes for making the first-year composition electronic portfolio the starting point for a longitudinal electronic portfolio that would follow students through their years at the university. In 2005, my institution hosted a portfolio conference that brought together various stakeholders across the university, and we thought we had reached the critical mass to be able to coordinate longitudinal electronic portfolio efforts with others on campus. Yet, no follow-up meetings were called to keep the ball rolling, and stakeholders—uncertain of higher administration buy-in and wide-spread campus support—went back to their local, program-specific efforts.

Currently, our university is in the midst of a strategic planning initiative, and, in consultation with stakeholders such as the General Education Committee, Writing Across the Curriculum, Faculty Development, and the Office of Assessment, we have proposed a longitudinal electronic portfolio pilot to increase student self-evaluative skills and investment in learning. Time will tell whether the idea will catch on, but two important concepts are at work here: First, the technorhetorician administrator must not be discouraged when initiatives seem to go nowhere; she or he must regroup, reassess stakeholder needs and values, then reformulate rhetorical appeals and approaches based on those needs and values. Second, current wisdom in program assessment suggests that locally developed, context-specific efforts may be more authentic and effective than campus-wide or externally developed assessments, which may ignore or subordinate the program's goals and outcomes for the sake of comparability (Broad, 2003; Camp, 1990; Wiggins, 1990). In sum—in terms of assessment, and, indeed, most of the situations described here—the technorhetorician administrator should be able to stay focused on local stakeholders while keeping concentric circles of stakeholders at the department, college, university, national, and global level in mind.

English Composition Technology Outcomes

Inter/National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio Research

ePortfoliating the Writing Program: Assessing Realities, Measuring Change, Spreading Reflective Practice

LISTENING TO GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS

As scholars and teachers, it is a given that we do our best to listen in on and contribute to the scholarly conversations that inform our field, and scholars like Rose and Weiser (1999, 2002) remind us that administrators, too, need to participate in scholarly discussions, so that theory and everyday decision-making are integrated at every level of the administrator's position. Frankly, the everyday decision-making and seemingly mundane aspects of our administrative lives are often invisible—at our institutions and in our journals. A good way to keep up to date with knowledge in any field—and to find everyday practice often scaffolded by theory and research—is to subscribe to an online discussion group (Day, 1998). Where print and online journals and book-length work provide the field with milestones every few months or years, online discussions reflect the day-to-day thinking within a discipline, and through question and answer can tap into the knowledge of what Howard Rheingold (1993) called a *living database*, which connects thousands of professionals working on similar problems within similar institutional constraints. Thus, where journal articles and scholarly monographs report on research and pull the field ahead in large steps, online discussion provides situated knowledge, suggestions, and advice in smaller increments, on a day-to-day basis, at the point of need. All scholarly research is iterative, in that researchers respond to each other in the pages of their books and articles, and both books and articles sometimes go into subsequent revisions and editions. Yet online discussion is iterative on an accelerated time scale, with some discussions drawing hundreds of replies within a few days.

Within this framework, because of a pressing, immediate need to make programmatic decisions, the busy administrator must often look to others for advice on what to do and how to provide a rationale for decisions. Of course, one of the first places to turn for advice is to colleagues and supervisors in one's home institution, but chances are that no one at the institution will have encountered the same problem, or, perhaps, the problem is so deeply institutionalized that it is not recognized as a problem. In this situation, tapping the living database may be very helpful, in that professionals who have faced similar issues, problems, and decisions will be able to provide personal advice, share rationales for actions taken, and even help the busy questioner with references to particular journal articles and books that may be of assistance. Like the major professional organizations and conferences—such as the Modern Language Association, Conference on College Composition and Communication, Council of Writing Program Administrators, and Computers and Writing—these discussion groups form communities of theory and practice, themselves ecological systems that expand and contract, merge, morph, and sometimes even die off.

Tapping the Living Database

In this regard, my experience as a technorhetorician who has actively tapped the living database of rhetoric and composition scholars may offer an instructive example of an individual administrator's relationship to larger external systems that influence the ways we learn, change, and grow in and with technology. In contrast to some of my colleagues, who consider online discussion a bothersome mix of spam and storytelling, I have reached stride as a faculty member, professional, and administrator largely due to the support of a larger community of online colleagues, a group of technorhetoricians dedicated to helping each other teach and do research in the fast-changing world of digital writing technologies. I was about to abandon graduate study when I first discovered and subscribed to online communities such as MegaByte University, Purtopoi, and Wcenter, and received so much encouragement that I stayed and completed a PhD program. Once a faculty member, faced with the opposition to my use of Internet communications, which I describe above, I depended on the advice and support of my distributed colleagues so as not to be overwhelmed, even in the face of the aforementioned threat by the disgruntled student who felt that requiring Internet use in such a

class constituted a breach of contract. In subsequent years, when there seemed to be no hope for getting research done on top of a 4/4 teaching load with heavy service requirements, my online peers kept me informed, included, and involved in scholarly publication and presentation opportunities. Having joined the virtual community of technorhetoricians, it was harder *not* to participate in collaborative scholarly endeavors than it was to participate. The focus was less on the difficulty of publishing or of traveling and delivering conference presentations, and more on the engagement and excitement of doing so. In short, the living systems of various external communities of practice, both online and off, caught me up in a flow of ideas and innovation that led me to believe that I could make a difference both locally and globally.

Using the Wheel, Not Reinventing It

To tap the global living database and feed advice into a local context, I consult with my online colleagues at least every week or month on topics such as faculty development and policy decisions. Administrators have no reason to reinvent the wheel when it comes to important programmatic functions. For the past 9 years, I have co-taught our pedagogy seminar for new teaching assistants; to find out what's new and get students practical advice from others in the field, I reach out to members of discussion lists for advice. When I first took on the class, I asked members of WPA-L "What one piece of advice or information do you wish that you had been given just before you jumped from the frying pan into the fire of your first first-year composition class?" and received an incredibly diverse and helpful collection of responses from 21 colleagues at diverse institutions across the U.S. and in Egypt. Students not only appreciated and discussed the advice, but were drawn into the conversation as participants. Later that same academic year, four of the students from that same class participated in creating a module and leading a discussion on technology and writing instruction on the Teaching Composition web site and email list, beginning their trajectories as technorhetoricians. The graduate students were caught up in the flow of ideas, sustaining their interest and involvement in local and global computers and composition ecologies.

WPA-L

Teaching Composition

Local Issues, Global Support

Like many other administrators, when I encounter troublesome policies, I often compare notes with colleagues in similar positions at other institutions. In the wake of the Virginia Tech shooting incident of 2007, for example, our student services coordinators instituted a policy that all "disturbing writing" needed to be reported to the judicial office. To get a sense of how other institutions, and specifically writing programs, were responding to similar concerns and pressures, I asked for help on the WPA-L list and received 18 thoughtful replies that I used to balance my understanding of local needs against more global concerns and to craft an informed response to student services. In turn, the online and local exchanges informed a faculty development event on responding to disturbing student writing.

Then, on February 14, 2008, a similar shooting occurred at my own institution, and although initially stunned, I quickly made use of the lifeline of online community for support and advice

as our university struggled to get back on its feet. In the days and weeks following the shooting, I received hundreds of emails of sympathy and encouragement, many with suggestions in response to the following questions:

1. How do we balance the needs of some students to acknowledge and express emotions about what has happened against the needs of other students to just move on?
2. How could or should we help students use writing in our classes to process their emotions?
3. Could or should writing about the recent events become a topic (optional seems best) for formal writing assignments in first-year composition classes, or is students' emotional closeness to the events just going to cause them problems writing analytically or argumentatively (most classes have a research project coming up)?
4. What important questions relating to our writing teachers' readiness to meet the needs of their students am I forgetting? (Day, 2008)

Predictably, the most on-target suggestions came from colleagues at Virginia Tech, where they were still healing from their own tragedy 10 months earlier and knew precisely what we were feeling and facing. But, overall, like an emergency response team, the online community rallied to help us, and within 24 hours of asking the questions above, I had put together a plan for four afternoon workshops for the 90 faculty in my program. Each workshop, limited to 25 participants, involved work with a professional counselor, feedback, small-group discussion, and planning what to do when classes resumed the following week. Making use of our own local technological ecology, we kept each other updated by email and created a webboard for sharing strategies for dealing with our own emotions and those of our students, as well as appropriate poems, artwork, and songs to help us cope.

SUSTAINING ONLINE COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Recognizing Work

Like local technological ecologies, the global online communities that support our practice are also vulnerable to the winds of change; they cannot survive unless technorhetoricians can support them. Over the years, my connections to various communities have changed as organizations sprang up, merged, morphed, and some, like the Alliance for Computers and Writing (ACW), expired. In my early technorhetorician years, I was part of the MBU-L discussion group, but by 1995 ACW-L, an offshoot of the newly formed ACW, had outgrown MBU and took its place. ACW was a coalition of teaching and business partners dedicated to supporting the work of technorhetoricians, and the fact that it did not survive provides a good example of a composition ecology that was unsustainable. Although almost all computers and writing professionals vocally supported its existence, ultimately institutions such as universities and publishing corporations were unable to provide support to an individual or group that could update the resources it collected, as well as coordinate its activities. Those most interested and involved were faculty and support staff at colleges and universities, dependent upon the reward systems of tenure, promotion, and merit pay, and those systems did not provide adequate reward for those involved in distributed collaborative communities.

Despite resolutions, position statements, and guidelines from professional organizations—including the Conference on College Composition and Communication the National Council of Teachers of English, and the Modern Language Association—tenure, promotion, and merit

evaluation procedures have been slow to change at most universities. Personnel committees often discount or underestimate online collaborative activities because they do not understand or value them, cannot find appropriate categories in protocol documents, and may be suspicious of evidence (such as email posts, which are often short, provisional, and unpolished) or web pages (which may unwittingly take on the appearance of commerce or self-promotion). Thus, volunteers who have come forward to work on initiatives like ACW ultimately have had to put those efforts second to the business of institutionally based service work and traditional refereed scholarly publication, and, with links becoming outdated every week or so, once-flourishing public clearinghouses quickly go out of date. Technorhetoricians need to find better ways to take part in and be rewarded for the care and feeding of their online communities by making their contributions (as well as the impact of these communities on their practice) visible in annual reviews, tenure and promotion documents, and media releases.

Technorhetorician administrators also need to take part in national and local conversations on the value of online communities in the major academic categories: teaching, scholarship, and service. They need to advocate for ways to make online scholarly engagement count for more than just idle chat among so many geeks at the electronic water cooler. The CCCC Promotion and Tenure Guidelines for Work with Technology and The MLA Guidelines for Evaluating Work with Digital Media in the Modern Languages represent a step in the right direction, but much more work needs to be done. Because we must find ways to justify the work we do in and with online communities, technorhetoricians will need to take key leadership and committee positions at local and national levels to effect the kind of systematic change needed to sustain online communities of practice.

CCCC Promotion and Tenure Guidelines for Work with Technology

MLA Guidelines for Evaluating Work with Digital Media in the Modern Languages

Sustainable, Small-scale Ecologies

In some ways, the ACW was just too large and amorphous an organism to be sustained at the intersection of academic reward systems, publishing, and grass-roots collaborative efforts in computers and writing. As an ecological system, the computers and writing community has more recently put its energies into smaller, more sustainable journals and collaboratives. Some larger-scale sites, such as computersandwriting.org,

Computers and Composition Online, and *Kairos* have taken over some of the functions of ACW, but one notable model of a sustainable small-scale educational ecology is Interversity, a collective that survives to a large degree because of its rejection of the administratively top-heavy, place-based educational institution. Outside the limits of institutional policy and reward systems, Interversity can respond to the more immediate needs of online communities and movements, providing web hosting, clearinghouse storage, blogs, wikis, and threaded discussions to those who need these services. According to Eric Crump, Interversity's founder and chief technorhetorician,

> Interversity is a place where people can teach what they know and learn what they don't (to swipe a phrase that once graced the old dejanews website). We like to think of Interversity as a bureaucracy-free zone, a place that exists outside the world of institutional education, outside the influence and constraints of curricula, accrediting agencies, administrators, legislators, and all the other folks who tell us what to learn and how. And if not outside, then at least comfortably on the margins, off the institutional radar screen. When it comes to learning, we decide. (n.d.)

In an educational setting currently dominated by the 500-pound gorilla of No Child Left Behind (which many of us prefer to call No *Test* Left Behind) and the specter of machine grading of writing further widening digital divides, online educational co-ops such as Interversity offer an online space where, regardless of institutional affiliation or lack thereof, teachers can focus on setting up resources and providing discussion spaces to learners and other groups who need them. And they can set up these spaces on the fly, without waiting for institutional approval or risking censorship.

Further, even if it isn't a matter of free speech, sometimes the frustration of top-heavy bureaucracy—with its forms in triplicate, fees, and months of waiting—can lead technorhetorician educators to look for other solutions. After the NCTE web and discussion group server crashed in 2004, a system to replace it was slow to come online. When it did finally reappear, the email discussion groups had been replaced by web-based bulletin board areas for each group, such as the NCTE-Talk discussion group and all the affiliates of NCTE and CCCC. But the constituents, including the NCTE "talkies," were not comfortable with this solution, and voted with their feet by not using the new spaces. Although I begged the members of the CCCC committee I chaired to join the discussion in the official web space, nobody showed up. Committee business was at a standstill, so as a responsive technorhetorician committee chair, I had to act quickly. I contacted Eric Crump at Interversity, and within a few hours I had two email discussion lists—one for internal committee business and one for the committee's informal task force—up and running. By choice, the committee uses these lists to this day.

A year or so later, the same committee and its volunteer task force decided it needed a consistent web page so that colleagues looking for information about the annual Computers and Writing Conference could always find the call for proposals and the conference site, despite the fact that a different institution hosts the conference every year. With the help of Interversity, in collaboration with a publisher (who covers web hosting fees) and techno-gurus in the field, computersandwriting.org (a drupal site), was born. Now the computers and writing community has a central clearinghouse site for information related to its main conference, hosted on Interversity and maintained by task force volunteers.

Even more recently, ad hoc computers and writing-related groups have sprung up on social networking sites like Facebook, but these groups have little control over the design and functionality of the online sites and must follow the host organization's commodity-driven template for what constitutes community. Reacting in part to the co-opting of online communities by big business, Anne Wysocki (2008) suggested that teachers could look for ways "to respond or be contrary to" the commercial templates for engagement designed by publishers and online services for us to inhabit by imagining and creating new venues for writing, community, and action. "If these spaces are created so that our imaginations become the property of others," Wysocki asked, "Where is the space for small groups, modest, generous, gentle, deliberate, and freely political, to engage?" Like Wysocki, I believe that as educators, tehnorhetoricians can and should respond to or resist large-scale, commercial community-building by forming and maintaining smaller-scale intentional communities of practice that fit with local contexts of value and belief. Interversity may be one such online

space for community, but even this innovative site, now in its tenth year, is in danger of failing if the community cannot continue to sustain it with donations to keep the server going and the chief technorhetorician's family fed.

As demonstrated in these examples, Technorhetoricians were able to provide information and support to meet community members' changing demands. Sometimes called "nimbleness" or "strategic agility," this responsiveness allows groups to avoid the top-heavy and complex organizational structures of the sort that plagued the Alliance for Computers and Writing and seem to be much less a concern for Interversity. Nimble, responsive groups that form, migrate, and reform online can often resist central control and top-down bureaucracy, and, instead, provide fluid and timely advice and resources for stakeholders around the world. Technorhetoricians must continue to be the caretakers of these important resources, advocating locally and nationally for their survival.

Computersandwriting.org

Computers and Composition Online

Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy

Interversity

Committee on Computers in Composition and Communication

THE TECHNORHETORICIAN WPA

As I hope the examples in this chapter have demonstrated, sustaining technological innovation and integration requires administrators to be flexible and balanced not only in listening to external colleagues, but also in identifying and considering the needs of as many internal stakeholders as possible. In 2004, in response to a query on the WPA-L list, I began outlining an administrative philosophy for WPAs, which became the topic for a roundtable at the 2005 WPA conference. Because it may be a helpful starting place for administrators and teachers involved in sustaining technological ecologies at their institutions, I present a modified version here. The technorhetorician administrator:

- identifies, seeks out, and listens to stakeholders including students, colleagues, supportive staff, and higher administrators;
- learns as much as possible about available technologies for teaching, but always considers technologies in terms of the program's goals and outcomes, as well as its limitations;
- shares governance and decision making in technology choices;
- balances the technology needs of teaching staff with the needs of the upper administration;

- keeps abreast of global conversations on technology, but balances external advice about technology against local constraints, concerns, and opportunities;
- advocates for and helps maintain online communities tailored to the needs of local and global stakeholders;
- advocates for ethical treatment of colleagues and employees who teach, publish, and collaborate in digital and online environments in matters of hiring, tenure, promotion, and merit;
- advocates for the program to upper administration, the rest of the university, and the public;
- advocates and promotes faculty development in using technology for program teaching staff;
- advocates and promotes authentic program assessment using appropriate technologies;
- advocates for students, to be sure the program treats them fairly and that they have access to computers and online resources;
- provides adequate technological training for graduate students, including a pedagogy class, mentoring, and workshops;
- publicizes good writing and good teaching whenever possible, online and offline (awards, press releases, etc.); and
- advocates for best practices in teaching with technology, but does not lockstep everyone in the program to the same book, software, and syllabus.

As an ancillary to this chapter, to help teachers and administrators make informed technology decisions, I have created the web site the WPA as Technorhetorician. The site outlines a series of practical questions and strategies that will guide teachers and administrators through the process of identifying stakeholders, learning about their needs and limitations, gathering field-specific information for technology decisions, balancing local and global concerns, providing access to resources, fostering faculty development, paying attention to assessment, documenting and publicizing program achievements, and balancing the concerns of publishers and software providers with student needs and program goals. In the spirit of technorhetorical collaboration, cooperation, and community building, I invite readers to contribute to this web site by emailing me at **mday@niu.edu**.

The WPA as Technorhetorician

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