Department Development Grant Proposal

English Summer 2012

The Department of English is seeking a grant to support its development of a Professional and Technical Writing Certificate program. Such a program will provide key skills in communication and writing, enhance existing majors and minors, and serve students across the university.

Potential Impact

The goal of this proposal is for English Department faculty to work together, and ultimately with other departments, to develop a Professional and Technical Writing Certificate that enhances students’ skills and experience in the field of professional writing and also their employability. We believe that a Professional and Technical Writing Certificate is best-suited for this task because it offers the opportunity for an interdisciplinary approach to writing instruction and experience (as opposed to a specialized minor in English or any other current department or program), and because a certificate will appear on a student’s diploma and also feature more prominently on students’ transcripts, thereby increasing their attractiveness to potential employers.

There is a clear need for education and training in the field of professional writing. A 2006 U.S. Department of Labor Report cites the continued importance of written and communication skills to employers, as well as employers’ perceived lack of these skills among younger workers. What this tells us is that students who are considering a broad range of careers will benefit from increased training in writing and communication, especially through coursework and experiences that are specifically targeted to the professional world. Additionally, the 2010-2011 U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Handbook predicts growing demand in the field of professional writing, particularly for writers and editors with web or multimedia experience. The handbook reports that half of all salaried (non-self-employed) writers work in the professional, scientific, technical, and publishing industries. This tells us that a Professional Writing Certificate would better prepare our students to take advantage of opportunities within this growing career path.

The English Department is well-positioned to take on the task of creating and supporting a Professional Writing Certificate due to the training and experience of its faculty, particularly the team members involved in this project. Three faculty members—Julia Mason, Barclay Barrios, and Wendy Hinshaw—have specialties in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. Julia Mason has significant experience and training in professional and technical writing in particular, and has published within this field. She has developed a course in technical writing and has helped to revise our current course in Writing for Management. Lisa Swanstrom has particular expertise in the field of digital writing and publishing and has experience teaching students to make use of diverse media platforms in their writing. Barclay Barrios has taught web design and business writing and has, additionally, published
scholarly articles in digital textbooks. What’s more, as the Director of Writing Programs here at FAU he regularly works with “institutional prose,” from memos for teachers to reports for upper administration.

Although our department faculty have substantial experience and training relevant to field of professional writing, undergraduate professional writing is currently limited to a single course, ENC 3213 Writing for Management. This course is taken primarily by students in the College of Business, which will assume funding for the course during the coming academic year. It is currently unclear whether the course will be supported beyond that at all. Regardless, there are few existing courses for students who wish to develop broad skills in professional or technical writing, particularly for students outside the College of Business. We believe that a Professional and Technical Writing Certificate provides a way to revise and support existing courses while also developing new courses across the university to meet students professional writing and communication needs.

**Project Objectives**
- **External Research:** We plan to research models of successful programs already in existence at other universities;
- **Departmental and College Partnerships:** We plan to partner with programs in other colleges and incorporate courses from other departments in order to provide an interdisciplinary approach to professional writing;
- **New Course Development:** We plan to develop new writing courses in the English department designed to meet the professional writing needs of FAU students.

**Project Plan**
The Department of English Writing Committee has developed three key objectives (stated above) in order to develop a Professional Writing Certificate program. Programs in Professional Writing exist at peer as well as more prestigious institutions across the country, and we intend to research examples of such programs in order to develop a model for our own. Some examples include the Professional Writing Majors at Michigan State University and Purdue University, the Technical Communication Major at Texas Tech University, the Minor in Professional Writing at Ohio State University, and the minor in Professional Writing at the University of California at Santa Barbara. This research will be key in helping us determine the types of courses most beneficial for a Professional and Technical Writing program.

Interdisciplinarity will be key to the success of the Professional Writing Certificate program, and the committee’s main reason for pursuing a certificate program is to build a curriculum in partnership with other departments across the university. We plan to consult faculty in the College of Business and at FAU’s Adams Center for Entrepreneurship about the communication skills, technologies, and experiences sought by employers looking to hire professional writers who also have disciplinary expertise in other areas. We have also identified potential courses in Journalism
and Communication to include in the Professional Writing Certificate program. After researching program models at other universities we will meet with these departments—and potentially others—with possible courses for inclusion in order to discuss their curriculum in more detail and determine how their courses might meet the needs of students pursuing a Professional Writing Certificate. We also believe that an interdisciplinary professional writing program will ultimately encourage the development of new WAC courses in other departments, as partnering departments also seek to meet the professional writing needs of their students.

Our existing courses in English are ready to support the initiation of this certificate program. We have two WAC courses that will provide a foundation to a Professional Writing Certificate: ENC 3213: Writing for Management, and ENC 2248: Writing for the Technical Professions. Both courses were developed in order to meet the needs of specific programs—Business and Engineering—and are now being revised in order to meet the needs of a broader student audience. Professional Writing and Technical Writing are key courses in this field, and the fact that we have already developed these courses, taught them, and have the faculty to support them positions us well to begin to implement a Professional and Technical Writing Certificate program very quickly. Our internship course (ENG 4940) is also well-supported in our department and is gaining enrollment. We believe this reflects students’ interests in professional writing training and experience. Finally, our recently developed course in Writing for Nonprofits (approved by the department and currently being reviewed by the university committee) will also serve a key role in the Professional Writing Certificate Program. Writing for Nonprofits, first offered in Fall 2011 and scheduled again for Spring 2013, is an approved Academic Service-Learning course that partners students with local nonprofit organizations to develop their knowledge and experience in professional writing for the nonprofit sector. We believe the course provides key community partnerships that will help sustain the Professional and Technical Writing Certificate program by helping to inform our curriculum and ensure that we are accountable to the needs and skills identified by employers in our community.

In addition to our existing courses we are already developing new courses to meet the needs of professional writing students. Writing Across Platforms is a course currently in development by Lisa Swanstrom. This course is designed to familiarize students with writing across a variety of media platforms, including, for example, blogs, wikis, web pages, web forums, list-serves, email, and a variety of social media sites. Because this course will be theme-based or research-based, it can be taught by multiple faculty members who can adapt the course to suit a variety of different focuses, including technical writing, writing for marketing, writing for non-profit organizations, copy writing, writing for advertising, writing press releases, and promotional writing.

We hope to develop additional courses, including WAC courses, to meet the needs of students interested in professional writing. We will accomplish this by soliciting
new course ideas from faculty and also by working with community partners to understand what courses and experiences are most important to potential employers. Key to this will be building on our existing internship program, as internships are an important part of any professional writing program. We believe that connecting our internship to a Professional and Technical Writing Certificate will increase enrollment, and revising our internship program to ensure that students are receiving the experiences they need will add value and accountability to the certificate program.

Team Members
Dr. Wendy Hinshaw, Dr. Barclay Barrios, Dr. Lisa Swanstrom, Dr. Julia Mason

Schedule
During Fall 2012 we will research model professional writing programs at peer universities, and also meet with other departments and programs at FAU to determine existing courses to be included in the Professional Writing Certificate program. At the end of Fall 2012 we will develop the necessary materials to apply for the formal creation of a Professional and Technical Writing Certificate program. During Spring 2013 we will continue to develop new courses for the Professional Writing Certificate, as well as continue to offer existing courses in Professional Writing, Technical Writing, and Writing for Nonprofits that will support the new certificate program.

As an initial step toward supporting existing opportunities for professional writing within the English Department, the project team has already moved to develop a new focus in professional writing in the English Department major. Although this is not interdisciplinary and therefore does not meet the same needs and goals as the Professional and Technical Writing Certificate, we believe that this will help support enrollment in the existing English courses and also help us measure student interest in professional writing as we develop the new certificate program.

Assessment Strategy
As stated above, the proposed focus in professional writing in the English major will help the project team assess potential student interest in the certificate program. After drafting materials such as a program description and course descriptions, we will take the materials to local business and community partners for their feedback about the effectiveness of the program. After revising our materials we hope to have this program approved by the English Department by Fall 2012.

Enrollment and student interest in existing classes that will be offered through the 2012-2013 school year will also help the project team assess the interest and impact of the Professional Writing Certificate program. Fall 2011 enrollment in Writing for Nonprofits was high, particularly among non-English majors, and students demonstrated enthusiastic support for this and similar courses both in class and in their course evaluations. Writing for Nonprofits, Writing for Management, and the English Internship are all scheduled for fall and spring semesters and so will provide
their course evaluations. Writing for Nonprofits, Writing for Management, and the
English Internship are all scheduled for fall and spring semesters and so will provide
key information to the project team. We plan to develop surveys and other
evaluation materials specific to our program that we can distribute to students in
professional writing classes (whether or not they are enrolled in the certificate
program or pursuing an English major) that will help us assess their curriculum
interests and needs. Eventually we plan to develop exit interviews for students who
complete the program as well as ways to stay in communication with graduating
students in order to track their career progress and the usefulness of this program.

Budget
Salary supplement
4 Team Members X 500 $2000.00

Report and Presentation
The team will write a report detailing its development of a Professional Writing
Certificate program and present its first year of assessment results after the
completion of an academic year’s experience with the running program.

Department Signature

Andrew J. [Signature]