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Service-Learning in Technical and Professional Communication.
Melody Bowdon and J. Blare Scott. New York: Longman, 2003.

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In spite of the growing embeddedness of service-learning programs
in American higher education and the increasing publication of
scholarship and professional resources on the subject, there remains a
dearth of textbooks for students enrolled in service-learning courses
and experiences. This lack of published instructional material owes
historically to the localized and curriculum-specific nature of service
learning programs, which did not lend themselves to the generalized
advice offered in nationally marketed textbooks. Instead, early
proponents created their own guides and course packets, or placed on
reserve those readings most closely aligned with the goals and nature
of their service-learning efforts.

Against this history, *Service-Learning in Technical and Professional
Communication* stands with a handful of books designed to provide
students with information about service learning in general as well as
perspectives and strategies for working in specific kinds of service-
learning programs--in this case, programs where students will use and
continue to develop their skills as technical or professional writers. As
such, it represents an interesting blend of stock rhetorical pedagogy
(including information about typical professional genres such as the
letter of inquiry and résumé) and strategic, process-oriented material

focusing on the varied sorts of projects students might encounter working in businesses and organizations.

The book begins with a brief chapter describing service learning and distinguishing it from other kinds of experiential learning. This gives way to a more specific chapter on service learning in technical and professional communication, with examples of three sites that could be considered appropriate for service-learning work (nonprofits, businesses, and campus organizations). The third chapter offers generalized rhetorical background, most of it classically oriented (invention, appeals, the five rhetorical canons, etc.). The remaining seven chapters are structured linearly to match the process of finding and choosing a project; refining the project's scope; working collaboratively; carrying out the project; formatively assessing and summatively evaluating it; and presenting the results to a class or community, orally and/or in writing.

The chapters contain many real or realistic examples of texts of all kinds, and are broken up by student-directed guidelines and activities that could be easily integrated into a class schedule or syllabus. The authors have also been mindful of what students typically experience, sequentially, in setting up and carrying out a service-learning project. An extensive appendix includes the materials from three entire service-learning projects in which small teams of students provided assistance in technical and professional communication, one involving the Alachua County [Florida] Humane Society, another involving the Alachua County Habitat for Humanity, and a third focusing on a college dance marathon. Material throughout the text is also supported by brief "resource" outtakes that include lists of references to both print and electronic materials. This feature is echoed more discursively in the form of frequent references to scholarly literature that supports various suggestions and advice. For example, the recommendation that key information be repeated in different parts of a report or proposal (for emphasis or clarity) finds scholarly support in a reference to Keith Grant-Davie's "The Strategic

Use of Redundancy in Document Design." This incorporation of insights and research findings from the professional and technical writing literature not only bolsters the credibility of the book's pedagogy but provides background for teachers who may not be fully acquainted with the scholarship in this area.

Because service-learning programs take many forms (even within the type of program this book addresses, where students write *in* and *for* an organization), some potential adopters of may find the focus or coverage of *Service Learning in Technical and Professional Communication* somewhat too narrow for their own needs. For this reason, adopters of the book may have to make their course fit the book or the book fit the course. For example, the authors assume that students in a service-learning course in professional writing will be soliciting interest from companies and organizations, sending a letter and resume, and "selling" themselves to locate an appropriate site. In courses in which site matches are made in advance, large parts of Chapter 4 ("Choosing your Position") may seem irrelevant. However, students might still profit from reading this chapter, which puts their site and project into the context of other opportunities for service work and writing.

Philosophically, the highly task-oriented nature of the book, thoroughly supported by work in organizational communication, defines its relatively pragmatic approach to service learning. At points, the book would work almost as well in a professional internship program (where students work and write in--and often under the "tutelage" of--a business or nonprofit) as in a service-learning program. Although these two kinds of experiential learning have many points of intersection, *Service Learning in Technical and Professional Communication* does not provide much advice for students who are caught in the sometimes challenging conflicts of volunteering "expertise" as providers of a service while simultaneously being learners or novices within specific, highly organized and often hierarchical contexts. One common feature

service-learning programs incorporate to help students understand and mediate such internal conflict—written and discussion-based *reflection*—is also underrepresented in the book, requiring those in highly reflective programs to supplement the material with their own orientations to this genre of communication and self-exploration. Some readers may also find that the public or civic goals of service-learning programs are overshadowed by the strong focus on organizational communication, the exception being the connections between rhetorical analysis and deliberative nature of discourse discussed at various points in the text

Teachers of service-learning courses in which students write professionally within an organization, however, will find a wealth of useful supporting material in *Service Learning in Technical and Professional Communication.* With a little work, the book can be woven into the fabric of such a course, and its plentiful advice, strategic material, and examples can be easily incorporated into class sessions and into students' ongoing work.