Pentadic Critique for Assessing and Sustaining Service-Learning Programs

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Early, theoretically informed program assessment can be particularly beneficial for professional and technical writing programs that seek to incorporate and sustain service-learning approaches. This article adapts Burkean pentadic analysis for use as a form of institutional critique and illustrates the power of this method through a case study of its application at one state university. The method helps practitioners to understand and respond to the complex motives that drive service-learning programs within their local scenes as they extend their work beyond the university into the community.

Many practitioner-scholars across the disciplines are concerned about the role and longevity of service-learning in higher education. In one sense, service-learning has a long and rich history, cultivating learning, solving problems, and raising social awareness under many names—experiential and problem-based learning, critical pedagogy, community engagement, and civic and cooperative education. Increasingly, even professional and technical writing programs and instructors have begun using service-learning as a way to "add values" to their curricula. However, despite its strong history, documented successes (Eyler and Giles; Gray et al.), and a current surge of support, many service-learning practitioners still feel their work exists on the margins of the Academy, constantly on the verge

of disappearance. Sharon Rubin, long a contributor to service-learning in higher education, reflects on the marginal status of this field: "Although experiential and service-learning have more legitimacy within higher education, we're a long way from being able to talk about institutionalization. This is still sort of on the fringe" (Stanton, Giles, and Cruz 197).

Several factors combine to create this tenuous position. Applied scholarship is generally not recognized for tenure and other rewards. The coordination of service-learning programs often falls on individuals, instead of centralized offices that maintain community contacts. Given the dominance of the German research model in higher education in this country, service-learning's association with service and teaching rather than with research is often detrimental. Furthermore, service-learning appeals to margin-dwellers of all kinds, thereby always positioning itself a little left or right of center (usually left). A few practitioners even eschew mainstreaming, believing that action happens only in the margins. For instance, Jack Hasegawa claims, "I liked it better when it was more marginal, when there were fewer rewards, when students came to it with a more fiery desire for change in the institution and the world" (Stanton, Giles, and Cruz 171).

> **To better situate and sustain service-learning within professional writing programs, I offer an approach that fuses Burke's modernist rhetorical method with postmodern institutional critique.**

Unlike many of these scholars, I prefer not to think of service-learning as a "movement" or "trend" in higher education because it seems so centrally relevant across the disciplines. I am also not interested in remaining a scrappy margin-dweller when service-learning has the potential to increase educational outcomes beyond individual classes and disciplines. My interest in stabilizing service-learning in higher education generally and in professional and technical writing in particular stems from this potential.

Thus, the question that motivates this article is: How can program motives be explored, discussed, and altered to better situate and sustain service-learning in higher education and specifically within programs such as technical and professional writing? To address this question, I offer an approach that fuses modernist rhetorical method (Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad) with post-

modern methodology (Porter et al.'s institutional critique) to analyze service-learning programs ("Sustaining Service-Learning"). Institutional critique serves as the philosophical and theoretical motivation for using the method of the Pentad; the Pentad offers tools for analysis. The results of this analysis and critique promise to reveal avenues for localized change, as well as to offer strategies for professionals at other institutions and programs who wish to analyze the bureaucratic, physical, and community structuring of their own service-learning initiatives, whether housed in professional and technical writing, WAC, WID, or other programs.

Professional and technical writing programs provide a rich institutional location for a case study, as they have long used internships and cooperative education for experiential learning. In response to the social turn in composition and the ethical malaise in corporate culture exemplified by Enron and Arthur Anderson, these programs increasingly incorporate service-learning, the addition of which requires the reevaluation of goals (purpose), means (agency), location or situation (scene), the roles of involved parties (agents), and actions that are necessary to make the shift effective. Professional and technical writing programs are also especially well suited for working toward institutionalized service-learning because:

- learning about writing requires application or active learning
- nonprofit organizations always need professional documents and rarely have the staff to create well developed texts
- unlike the composition faculty discussed by Nora Bacon, professional and technical writing instructors often have the knowledge base to support students in doing this type of community work
- professional and technical writing programs are increasingly seen as valuable assets to the institutions in which they exist, so practitioners in these programs may have slightly more agency to create programmatic change than do many traditional humanities teacher-scholars
- many professional and technical writing scholars are trained to consider organizational structures and rhetoric, which suggests some might already be receptive and well equipped to conduct effective program assessment.

In the following sections, I consider the role and value of assessment for service-learning programs, review some of the challenges to sustainability faced by such programs, suggest a rationale for implementing a form of institutional critique using Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad as a lens, offer an overview of this new form of institutional critique, and briefly apply the method to North Dakota State University's professional and technical writing program.

Why Assess? And Why Now?

Assessment is always necessary for growth and progress, yet the timing is particularly right for service-learning program assessment, both because service-learning comes and goes in terms of emphasis and because we are now in a moment when individuals and institutions are willing to commit time, energy, and even sometimes money to it. In fact, although the pedagogy has functioned on campuses for years, as most service-learning practitioners are aware, its present impetus is almost unparalleled, except perhaps by the activist movements of the 1960s. A boom in publications, a greater presence at national conferences other than just the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE), an increase in organizations devoted to the support and funding of service-learning, and the heightened public profile of civic responsibility have emerged to boost the momentum of this pedagogy. Advocates now see service-learning as more than a way for students to be socially and politically involved; more emphasis is being placed on the educational value of the practice and more research is committed to revealing the benefits of service-learning as a pedagogy

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and a key curricular element. The subdisciplines of rhetoric, composition, and professional and technical writing in English are contributing to this proliferation of research and teaching. This juncture may prove critical to service-learning's survival since, without critique, this pedagogy can, at best, expect to ebb again.

Service-learning is also worthy of careful assessment because it has the potential to address many central goals of higher education. Such goals historically

have included education for democracy (Dewey, particularly *Democracy and Education*; Barber; Cooper and Julier) or civic literacy (Lisman; Dubinsky), individual improvement and edification (Bowen), the development of problem-solving skills (Peck, Flower, and Higgins), and professional training (Hill and Resnick; Odell and Goswami; Anson and Forsberg; Dubinsky).

Indeed, in *Where's the Learning in Service-learning*, Janet Eyler and Dwight E. Giles, Jr. offer evidence from two national studies that service-learning enhances students' personal and interpersonal development; understanding and application of knowledge; engagement, curiosity, and reflective practice; critical thinking; perspective transformation; and citizenship. Two RAND studies, one published in 1996 and one in 1999, also indicate tentatively that "participation in service has small but significant and fairly widespread positive effects on students' levels of civic responsibility. . . self-rated skills, and involvement in their education" (Gray et al. 6). The mounting evidence of service-learning's pedagogical merits stands to improve service-learning's institutional status. Yet scholarly confirmation that the pedagogy is useful is not enough. For institutionalization, service-learning requires a complex matrix of support from the college and the community, and program critique will help to define where support is missing or misdirected.

Challenges to Sustainability

There are innumerable challenges to developing institutionally-supported service-learning. Institutional support and validation—from campus and community institutions—may be even more essential for this pedagogy than for others because coordination of service-learning courses is generally much more complex than coordination of traditional courses or internships. Adding community contacts to the dynamic and practical concerns of the classroom inevitably complicates teaching. Eventually, when left alone to forge programs, teachers may lose steam and give up. And without committed faculty, Edward Zlotkowski claims, service-learning will never reach solid institutional status.

Some faculty and administrators also view service-learning negatively. The skepticism that surrounds this pedagogy stems largely from beliefs (often but not always unfounded) that it is not sufficiently academically rigorous; that by positioning the "provider" of service in a dominant hierarchical relationship with the "receiver" of service, it can reinforce the social structures it

ostensibly seeks to challenge; and that it detracts from other, more important pedagogical goals.

Furthermore, service-learning is often identified as a "movement" or a "fad." Arthur Levine notes: "The historical reality is that student volunteer movements tend to be a passing phenomenon in higher education, rising and falling on campuses roughly every 30 years" (4). While service-learning is at an all-time high in terms of participation, "the survival of service as an important component of contemporary higher education is by no means assured" (Zlotkowski 22).

Integrating service-learning into professional and technical writing curricula and programs also present specific problems, some of which have already been identified by scholars and some of which will emerge through assessment of the sort I propose here. A concern for some professional and technical communicators is the risk of training "guerrilla students" who radically advocate a singular leftist agenda (Charney qtd. in Sapp and Crabtree 415). This fear suggests questions about balance: to what extent do we help students to know and use the dominant genres, jargon, and other language systems tied to corporate America and to what extent do we ask them to challenge dominant language conventions? Teachers and students will also have to concern themselves with the challenges of working with nonprofit organizations. In his study, "Problems in Service Learning and Technical/Professional Writing," Robert McEachern highlights such issues as the limited resources of nonprofit agencies, overextended staff, and the "atmosphere of instability" that emerges in any organization that relies heavily on volunteers (219). McEachern also calls for more research regarding nonprofit genres (222), arguing that this kind of context-specific genre study will help to prepare teachers better for the kinds of challenges students will encounter as they create documents for community organizations.

At the program level, professional and technical writing programs must concern themselves with the educational goals they wish to emphasize through service-learning. These goals are multiple, and individual courses cannot attain every goal. Analyzing the professional writing curriculum as part of broader departmental and institutional curricula will reveal gaps, inconsistencies and possibilities.

Factors that Sustain

Researchers have also begun to suggest what might be most crucial to sustaining service-learning programs, emphasizing the role of faculty (Kendall et al). Zlotkowski argues, in the spirit of Ernest Boyer's expanded notions of scholarship, that service-learning and its related activities should be more highly rewarded to maintain and encourage faculty involvement. An evaluation of the Learn and Serve America Higher Education Program indicates that, in addition to faculty involvement, central factors sustaining service-learning include service centers, leadership support, and a service tradition (Gray et al. 78). Arthur Levine argues that curricular integration is most important to sustaining a program. He indicates that since more students are involved with community service than ever, the issue

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is not to get more people involved and interested, it is to keep those students already doing the work engaged, and this, he says, will take better curricular integration. In a recent article, Ellen Cushman claims that practitioner research and active involvement with students in the community are key to sustainable programs.

All of these arguments have merit as generalized statements regarding service-learning, yet the factors identified as central to service-learning success are almost entirely based in the higher educational institution, taking community factors only distantly into consideration and attending too little to local program dynamics. Several scholars acknowledge this need for understanding programs contextually (Deans and Holland, among others), and it is on their work that this study builds. In the quest to achieve institutional support, service-learning practitioners need to move beyond generalized statements to localized action that considers all contributors to the program, including students and community members, their locations, goals, and resources. Furthermore, calls for changes in higher education's worldviews—those core beliefs that contribute to establishing hierarchies, reward systems, and other institutional structures—seem to require first many smaller, but just as crucial local, departmental, programmatic, and institutional shifts.

Pentadic critique has the capability to identify the potential problems and successes of programs and institutions, and to offer concrete directions for change that are both sensitive to local needs and broad enough to have significant effect (Porter et al.). Burke's terms are readily understandable even when one is only minimally familiar with his work, and theorists and non-theorists alike can productively use the Pentad.

Institutional Critique

Providing a sense of purpose for the method I propose is institutional critique, a project that analyzes rhetoric and space in institutional settings, identifying locations for change and creating local action plans. This methodology was formulated by James Porter and his colleagues as a highly rhetorical, humanistic approach to studying institutions, thereby distinguishing it from other, more empirical types of examination. It differs from other rhetorical approaches, however, because it proclaims change as the goal of critique. This urge toward change is perhaps institutional critique's most valuable contribution to program assessment.

Institutional critique combines research and action; rather than offering theories that examine action and propose changes to audiences who are largely involved in the issues on an intellectual level, institutional critique steps back from the action only initially to view it clearly. When the analysis is finished, critics examining institutions may create action reports, propose curriculum changes, lobby for space reallocations, or offer new tools for rhetorical engagement in/of the system. To be called institutional critique, then, the rhetorical work must facilitate some change and demonstrate that it does so, according to Porter and his co-authors. Institutional critique's dedication to change and action mirrors that of action-based research. It too values the production of professional, non-academic texts as part of the change process, aligning it nicely with the regular practices of professional and technical writing. As a result, institutional critique may even provide opportunities to involve professional/technical writing students in the critique and writing process.

The artifacts viewed by the institutional critic are either rhetorical or spatial/physical and must be situated in large-scale institutional settings since the ultimate goal of this critique is institutional change at the local level. First, critics should examine facets of large institutions, not just classrooms

and disciplines. According to this methodology, if no one critiques institutions, then it is as though the institutions were infallible and untouchable. Part of what makes institutional critique so potentially effective is its positioning of large institutions as "local and discursive spaces" (Porter et al. 621).

Within institutions, rhetorical and physical spaces are locations of change. In essence, spaces reflect the insitutional dynamics: "as members of educational institutions, we have always been struck by how important space is in the writing of institutional identity" (Porter et al. 620). In spaces, the rhetorician may pinpoint what needs alteration to make organizations run better, more efficiently, and more ethically. Furthermore, physical and rhetorical spaces influence each other. Institutions generate rhetoric, while rhetoric shapes institutions.

The authors claim that institutional critique may be applied through three critical acts:

1. Institutional critique examines structures from a spatial, visual, and organizational perspective.
2. Institutional critique looks for gaps or fissures, places where resistance and change are possible.
3. Institutional critique undermines the binary between theory and empirical research by engaging in situated theorizing and relating that theorizing through stories of change and attempted change. (Porter et al. 630-31)

Porter and his colleagues' introduction to institutional critique offers two primary tactics for attempting criticism: postmodern mapping and boundary interrogation. The authors call postmodern mapping "a tactic for using spatial thinking to explore social, disciplinary, and institutional relationships in composition studies" (623). This technique juxtaposes a map of almost any kind of relationship with other maps of similar relationships to "destabilize and retemporalize the map through a focus on its construction and the partiality of any one map's representation" (623). Boundary interrogation, on the other hand, is a strategy based in cultural geography. David Sibley, a proponent of boundary interrogation, uses this technique to discover "zones of ambiguity" where change can happen.

The following sections will clarify how pentadic analysis may serve as an additional approach to institutional critique. Pentadic critique similarly attends to spaces in productive ways and is also flexible enough to be used to examine programs in widely differing institutions by practitioners with varied amounts of time and energy, possibly even by students involved in the service-learning efforts within their professional and technical writing programs.

Symbolic Action and Dramatism

Kenneth Burke saw language as symbolic action, and symbolic action is that which attempts some sort of change or response through deliberately chosen symbols or acts. To get at the heart of the motives that underlie actions, Burke devised dramatism: "The titular word for our own method is 'dramatism,' since it invites one to consider the matter of motives in a perspective that...treats language and thought primarily as modes of action" (*Grammar* xxii). Burke believed that language is the "critical moment" when motives surface, making studies of language central to understanding the dynamic nature of motivation (*Grammar* 318). For instance, the term "service" reveals a whole host of motives, from selflessness to *noblesse oblige* to civic responsibility, that have been examined in the literature of this field. If I choose, as a teacher, to call the relationship between my students and the community members a "partnership" rather than a "service" relationship, I suggest that my motives include reciprocity, that I resist the whims of charity associated with service. If my class chooses instead to call the community members "clients," we suggest a professional but not entirely reciprocal relationship.

Pentad

But Burke's dramatism also offers a deliberate method or a "grammar" for analysis: the Pentad. The Pentad was originally constituted of five terms—act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose—but Burke later added a sixth term—attitude. To fully get at motives, then, one must utilize the entire "grammar." The Pentad is an expansive heuristic mechanism, useful to literature, rhetoric, and a variety of social-inquiry situations. For instance, in a recent issue of *Technical Communication Quarterly*, Catherine Fox suggested that the Pentad was useful for analyzing instances of workplace communication because it offers researchers "a variety of 'terministic screens'" for seeing the complexity of workplace communication more clearly (366).

Act. The central term of dramatism, the act, is that which is done. An act might be as simple as sharpening a pencil or as complex as starting a grassroots movement since both involve a sense of purpose (to be able to write more legibly in the former and to maintain stability and to facilitate social change in the latter).

Agent. The second pentadic term, also considered one of the "big three" (act, agent, and scene) by Burke, is the person who commits the act. Because individuals often do not work alone, Burke clarifies that the term may be associated with subdivisions such as "co-agents," who are friends or allies, and "counter-agents," who are enemies. Agents may also be collectives, such as "nation" or "group" (*Grammar* 20). In service-learning, the agents include teachers, students, community representatives, administrators, and coordinators.

Scene. Scene is where the act takes place. Burke calls the scene the "container," while all items within are the "things contained" (*Grammar* 3). This metaphorical image also illustrates the way scene helps to shape the acts, agents, agency, and purposes contained within it, just as a jar shapes the water poured into it. Scene also encompasses the ways time and timing influence the other terms. Because scene is amorphous, the breadth of the scene, or its circumference, must be defined by the critic (Bridges 500). For instance, service-learning programs exist in classrooms and offices, on college campuses, within neighborhoods, and within broader communities. Each of these scenes brings with it new influences; the view shifts each time the compass is widened.

Agency. Agency is "how [the agent] did it" or the "means or instruments [the agent] used" (*Grammar* xv). Computers and programs are, for instance, immediate means by which technical and professional writers produce their documents. Funding often provides the means for program expansion. Access to local nonprofit agencies and other community groups and the trust and reciprocal participation of the involved community members are critical to effectively functioning and ethical service-learning projects.

Purpose. Burke associates this term with Aristotle's "'final' cause," which is, according to Burke, "the end, i.e., that for the sake of which a thing is" (*Grammar* 228). Purpose thus signifies the ideal ends of any agent's action. Goals for a technical or professional writing program integrating service-

learning might include professionalizing students, providing opportunities for them to consider their roles as writers in social contexts other than school, and highlighting the ethical dimensions of communicating in those contexts with diverse audiences.

Attitude. Attitude was originally conceived as part of the agent. It is possible to see attitude as part of the agent because the agent completes his or her action in a particular manner, such as "efficiently." This final term also serves to distinguish between and among like acts. For instance, "two men, performing the same *motions* side by side, might be said to be performing different acts, in proportion as they differed in their attitudes toward their work" (276). For instance, they might perform their acts "professionally" or "irresponsibly."

It is not in any *one* of the terms that one discovers motives, however; it is in the interrelationships of the terms. Burke encourages exploration of these interrelationships through the use of ratios, such as scene-act or agent-purpose. Any two terms may be paired for comparison and contrast. When using the ratios to study programs, we can look, for example, at how the placement of service-learning institutionally (in Academic Affairs, in Student Services, in the required curriculum of a major or minor, in the offices of individual professors, or in some combination of these locations) alters the program and its practitioners' status (scene-agent ratio) as well as the accessibility of program resources (scene-agency ratio). If the program has no official "home," can it be considered a program? Is there chance of survival in such an instance? The influence one term has on the other is the manifestation of a ratio, while the inter-influences of all terms constitute motive, sometimes referred to as "situation."

Pentadic Analysis

The practice that has arisen from this portion of Burke's work is typically labeled *pentadic analysis* or *pentadic criticism*. Generally, the artifact viewed by the critic is a single piece of rhetoric—the critic thus views the revealed motives of the rhetor. To analyze the rhetorical object, the critic assigns components of the situation to the pentadic categories, paying close attention to which term seems to dominate the rhetor's presentation of the situation. For instance, in a public address, the university president might emphasize the "Engaged University." This emphasis indicates the dominance of attitude (doing things in an engaged way) in the president's (the rhetor's) view.

To effectively use the Pentad, however, practitioners must be aware of the interrelationships among the terms, as they inevitably overlap and commingle: "When the Pentadic functions are so essentially ambiguous, there is always the possibility that one term may be doing service for another" (*Grammar* 291). This characteristic of the Pentad reveals both its complication and its magic. In the overlaps between and among terms, influence occurs and dynamic relationships emerge (Figure 1).
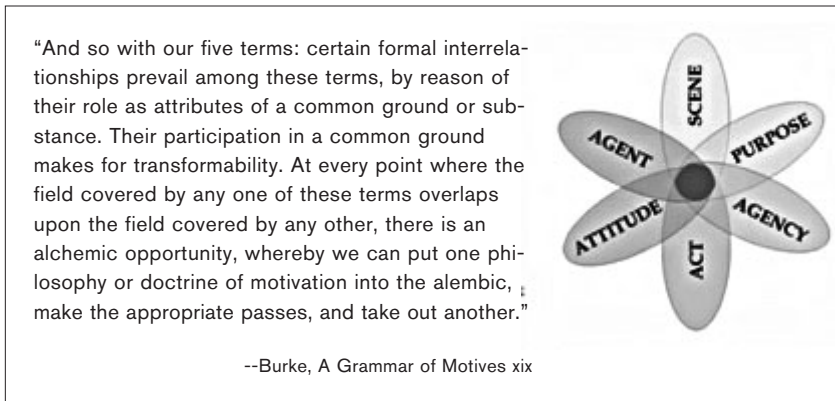

"And so with our five terms: certain formal interrelationships prevail among these terms, by reason of their role as attributes of a common ground or substance. Their participation in a common ground makes for transformability. At every point where the field covered by any one of these terms overlaps upon the field covered by any other, there is an alchemic opportunity, whereby we can put one philosophy or doctrine of motivation into the alembic, make the appropriate passes, and take out another."

--Burke, A Grammar of Motives xix

Figure 1: Alchemic Opportunities in Shared Spaces

The critic should use caution when determining the dominant term since influence among terms is multidirectional. Also, Burke claims in *Philosophy of Literary Form* that "the main ideal of criticism, as I conceive it, is to use all that is there to use" (23). Because of the ambiguity that exists among the terms, Burke's ideal seems useful to pentadic analysis; even when observing the dominant term or a single ratio, the critic should not forget to consider the other terms. Though critics must limit the scope of the object of analysis, they should avoid limiting the scope too much, and thereby missing influential rhetorical components.

Applications

Pentadic analysis may be adapted to serve the goals of institutional critique. For instance, if we view the three primary critical acts of institutional critique listed earlier, we can see that pentadic analysis adheres to the general principle of each critical act, while deviating somewhat in the application of the principle. The first element, "examin[ing] structures from a spatial, visual, and

organizational perspective," emphasizes the role of analysis in institutional critique, as well as the focus on physical organizational spaces—the authors advocate using the types of spatial analysis used in cultural geography (Porter et al. 630). The Pentad serves as a useful alternative to postmodern geography because it, too, attends to spaces, especially in the term *scene*. While postmodern geographers look for "gaps and fissures," the Pentad studies connections and, by extension, their absences.

The second primary component of "examin[ing] structures from a spatial, visual, and organizational perspective" is the importance of viewing something large and complex enough to be considered an organization or an institution (Porter, et al. 630). Service-learning programs are somewhat unorthodox as institutions since they are always a combination of the disciplines, schools, and communities that house them. If service-learning practitioners were to consider only school settings for service-learning, they would miss critical contributors to the dynamic. Each program's institution is much larger than the boundaries of the school. While the Pentad originated as a method for studying literature, the terms adequately encompass the driving forces within programs, as well.

The second critical act Porter and his co-authors advance, the search for "gaps and fissures, places where resistance and change are possible," is perhaps the most provocative element of this triad for service-learning practitioners who seek change (631). Identifying locations for resistance and change is central to many service-learning pedagogies and practices, yet few scholars regularly turn their efforts to locating such spaces within their own programs. In the application of pentadic critique, practitioners will study overlaps and intersections—places of influence instead of "gaps and fissures."

The third principle is also at the heart of program critique as it is conceived here. Situated theorizing and change will help to ensure best practices and secure long-term institutional support. Practitioners know that, as powerful as the statements of best practices are (the Wingspread reports, in particular), they cannot answer all questions at the local level. Methods suited for local assessment are in order. The Pentad is a situated method: it allows practitioners to view their local scenes and widen or tighten the circumference of their studies as they see fit.

Thus, pentadic analysis changes slightly when applied to service-learning programs. First, instead of looking at just one rhetorical act as Burke did, service-learning practitioners should listen to and analyze the rhetoric surrounding entire programs. Given his interest in social problems and rhetorical action, Burke might approve of this adaptation. Second, the Pentad was not originally designed as a tool for change but as a method to analyze literature; the Pentad helped Burke understand motives as they emerged from the language of the text, but he did not presume to alter either the text or the motives he found there. Service-learning practitioners will want to make their manifested motives match their proclaimed purposes. Institutional critique provides the rationale for such ends for analysis.

A caveat: a practitioner using the Pentad for program critique should be careful not to give the program itself too much agency because the program is, like motive, a matrix of influences. It has no life without agents, contexts or scenes, artifacts that function as agency, and so on. To say that the program does or has done something is to miss the real factors that acted. From moment to moment the program changes as it is constituted and reconstituted each time a new agent enters the drama, each time a new act is completed. In a sense, the term *program* is here a synonym for Burke's *motive*.

Once potential critics understand these adaptations and caveats, the Pentad can be used to delve into the motives and interrelations of department, program, discipline, institution, or any other social configuration. Researchers have the opportunity to go much further in their analysis than most busy practitioners will be able to individually, though a group or committee could collaboratively accomplish a substantial analysis.

In sum, to use the Pentad for program assessment, practitioners should identify the acts, agents, scenes, agency, purposes, and attitudes that compose motives in their programs. Then, it is useful to look primarily at a single dominant term and its ratios. A similar principle operates in program assessment: assessing all elements at once is virtually impossible, but over time assessing elements of the program individually leads to a clearer view of the program's successes and failures. From the ratios, practitioners will quickly discover places where influence and connections exist in both positive and negative respects. It is in those interconnections—what the postmodern

geographer might call "gaps and fissures" and what Burke calls the "alchemic opportunities" of interrelationship—that practitioners will begin to recognize the potential for growth, change, and support. This process promises to improve not only the practices and longevity of service-learning in programs such as professional and technical writing, but also the vision and conditions of the overarching program and institutions that house service-learning.

Case Study

Having offered an overview of this method, I will briefly demonstrate its application at my own institution to illustrate its potential usefulness. North Dakota State University's professional writing program is a loosely construct-ed program within the English department, implementing service-learning only in limited ways in individual classrooms. Its program goals are not yet as clearly articulated as, for instance, the first-year writing program's goals. Despite or perhaps because of these limitations, NDSU's program is a pro-ductive example for this examination.

Because it is less structured than other programs, it is generative to look more closely at what kinds of organic motives have arisen to sustain the program. Then, the English department and other interest-ed departments such as Engineering can work constructively to fashion an even more effective program for this type of writing instruction, considering as they do the role service-learning might play in the future. I can't cover all permutations of the six elements of the Pentad here, but I will highlight the most prominent ele-ments and will move quickly to looking at two ratios that are recent locations for change and continuing sources of contention and possibility.

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Agents. To begin at the top of the institutional hierarchy (which is itself both agent-based and something of a scenic construction), the Dean of Engineering and Architecture and the Dean of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (AHSS) have expressed an interest in improving writing instruction for student professionalization. In the English department, three full time fac-ulty members plus about eight lecturers (long-term, benefited adjuncts) teach

four professional writing courses: Writing for Work, Practical Writing, Writing for Engineers, and Grant Writing. Two recently added courses—Electronic Communication and Visual Culture and Language—straddle the line between humanistic study and professional or technical communication. The professional writing program serves a few English and many Engineering students, but students from across the disciplines enroll in all but the Writing for Engineers course. The grant-writing course, in particular, draws a diverse student population, even luring non-degree seeking community members. Involved community members have emerged from various organizations but have not had consistent partnerships with individual teachers or the program. These organizations have included the local chapters of the Girl Scouts and Dress for Success, the Rape and Abuse Crisis Center, Rainbow Bridge, Clay and Cass County Historical Societies, the Center for New Americans, YWCA, Fargo-Moorhead Community Theatre, Fargo-Moorhead Food Pantry, Plains Art Museum, and several local churches and youth groups. Finally, a service-learning coordinator, officially titled Assistant Director for Campus Programs, sometimes helps teachers and students connect with interested organizations.

Scenes. In terms of its institutional scene, NDSU is a land-grant institution known for its strong programs in engineering, architecture, agriculture, and computer sciences; its identity shapes the kind of writing that is prized institutionally. The departments of English and, to a lesser degree, Engineering are the two primary campus centers for the professional writing program at NDSU. The classrooms are located across the campus, and there is relatively ready access to computer clusters, which may be reserved regularly to conduct computer-based workshops. The students who work in the community spend varying amounts of time at the organizations they choose, depending on course requirements and students' interest. These organizations are not in the same neighborhood as NDSU, though they are quickly accessible by car or moderately accessible by bus. The Student Activities office houses the service-learning coordinator.

Acts. Some acts that have made sustaining and potentially growing the professional and technical writing program possible (serving therefore simultaneously as agency) include the hiring of four new composition and rhetoric faculty in a span of about five years (expanding from only one composition and rhetoric specialist), among whom two have experience teaching professional

and technical writing; one is considered a leader in this field, and one specializes in service-learning and community engagement. The Dean of Engineering and Architecture has long approved paying English lecturers and faculty members to teach a course specifically focused on technical writing for engineers (paying more than the English department, in fact). The past year's major acts include pulling the Writing for Engineers course back into the department of English. Other possible future acts already in discussion involve eliminating Writing for Work, which is perceived as overlapping too heavily with Practical Writing, and moving toward a more vertical writing curriculum overall. Otherwise, the courses are being taught as they have for several years. Student acts are typical: taking classes and completing the writing tasks involved. In terms of service-learning, however, the students have largely coordinated community projects on their own. If they are involved in a community organization or have some contact, they may choose in one or two classes to complete what Deans calls writing *for* the community projects; they are not required to do so. Teachers and community partners presently are doing little actively to maintain partnerships that would lead to more regular and sustainable service-learning projects.

Purpose is perhaps the most complex, yet the most important term for any writing program. Without a sense of purpose, curriculum is arbitrary, teachers work somewhat at whim, and students are subject to this whim. Because of NDSU's institutional scene, for most administrators, students, and even teachers, professional and technical writing instruction is valued as academic and professional training. As in many professional writing programs, discussions have begun to emerge informally in the department regarding the role of civic education in the professional writing curriculum. While the twin purposes of academic and professional training dominate, training for citizenship may be increasingly seen as a central purpose for the program and its courses.

Agency. I have already touched upon agency, as I discussed the academic deans' roles in supporting professional and technical writing at NDSU. In higher education, as in most organizations, money facilitates action; money is agency and its absence, limitation. Other forms of agency that play roles in the professional and technical writing program here include the status of the agents. For instance, the new department head is an established scholar in this field; therefore, he may have more agency to bend the ears of local

administrators as he and others involved in the program work for growth and change in the program. Status also exerts negative agency, however. Most of the teachers of these courses are adjuncts who historically have had little say in shaping programs, establishing curriculum, and providing other kinds of vision and coherence to programs. Material agency is provided by the Engineering department in the form of paying teachers' wages for teaching the Writing for Engineers course.

Attitude. Finally, the attitude toward professional writing at NDSU could be characterized at the university level as 'routine' or 'satisfied.' It would be inaccurate to posit an attitude of animosity or even of indifference, but it is also not one of active support. At the English department level, the attitudes are more varied. From those not involved in teaching these courses, there seems to be some disdain at the goals of professionalization as opposed to the goals of liberal training. From those teaching the courses, the attitude seems utilitarian. The teachers know it is useful for them to teach the courses, but in general this program is not the central focus of the agents' professional lives.

There are many ratios to consider here. How, then, to focus the analysis? Even if a program doesn't have the time to consider all of the ratios, focusing in on one or two and moving the lens from year to year, as programs do with other kinds of assessment, will lead to productive ideas for change. The NDSU program seems to be at a moment high in potential for change, intensified by the addition of new rhetoric faculty, the movement of the Writing for Engineers course back into the English department, and the conceptualization of a more vertical writing curriculum overall. Since the curricular goals of the program are ill-defined, purpose is important for this program to consider. And the terms that seem to have the most influence over purpose are the agents and the institutional scene. With that in mind, I will consider the scene-purpose and the agent-purpose ratios and demonstrate how we might work with them to improve our somewhat ill-defined program, considering service-learning's potential for supporting those purposes.

Scene-purpose ratio. NDSU's identity as a land-grant institution known for its strong engineering and other technical programs has influenced the purpose of this program and will likely continue to do so in the future. With relatively little effort, the courses have continued to exist, largely because the

institutional scene demands that students be professionalized in terms of writing. The English department also has shaped the program, however. These professional and technical writing classes are among the few upper division courses taught by adjuncts. It is clear that the dominant view of these courses within the department was that they were low-status courses few wanted to teach. It is likely that many viewed the courses as developing functional professional literacy rather than helping students to develop in humanistic ways.

But being housed in a land-grant university need not dictate that the program have purely instrumental purposes. When combined with the present larger cultural scene, in which corporate ethics have so frequently been called into question, administrators and teachers see developing a sense of ethics as a learning goal, and students are at least aware of the questions of ethics arising in professional settings. Furthermore, since English departments have historically been concerned with developing individuals and with humanistic pursuits, and since the professional and technical writing courses now all have English designations, it seems important to bring the departmental strengths to these courses. What all of this suggests is that now we may be able to attend more fully to civic purposes or should at least consider the implications of doing so. Returning to civic ends for professional writing education might involve increasing the presence of service-learning and community engagement in the program. In this way, the scene seems to facilitate growing service-learning's presence as part of the program.

Agent-purpose ratio. While institutional scene has played an ongoing role in keeping these courses limping along as relatively low-status service courses, it is the intersection of agents and purpose that seems the most important location for change at the moment. The agents are charged with defining program goals. And in this particular program, service-learning and other civic educational efforts have been in the hands of individual agents, rather than in the hands of agents working actively and collaboratively to build a solid program. If this group does not have a clear, shared vision for the program, motives will be even more fully defined by external factors such as scene than when agents take an active role in establishing purpose.

In terms of clarifying goals for the program, then, a promising first step would be to hold a meeting at which all those interested or involved in the

program work from the three major purpose areas—professional, academic, and civic training—to identify subgoals in each area and negotiate their relative priority. Without some agreement that civic goals are, in fact, central to the program and not simply goals individual teachers hold as added value in their classes, service-learning is certain to remain marginal in this program and may even slip away as a pedagogical strategy.

A further agent-purpose conflict makes such a meeting complicated and seems to be the most pressing issue emerging from this ratio. Although there are now tenured and tenure-track faculty members interested and invested enough in the program that these meetings are likely to occur and that curricular goals may be more clearly established, most of the teachers of professional and technical writing at NDSU are still adjuncts. Even if given the opportunity to contribute to curricular discussions, their labor conditions in other ways mitigate against full investment. These are often highly dedicated teachers interested in pedagogy, but their loads are relatively heavy, and they are not paid enough to motivate them to put in much extra time revising courses. Also, they are not trained in professional and technical writing, so contributing to reconceiving the curriculum would be doubly challenging for them. To then consider potentially adding service-learning to their teaching loads would be almost impossible. Although NDSU does have a service-learning director who might be able to support teachers in incorporating service-learning, this director also facilitates volunteerism and campus activities, and supporting service-learning is not her primary job. As it stands, much of the responsibility for creating and maintaining community connections falls on teachers and students.

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Recommendations that Arise from the Case Study

The NDSU program is likely to grow and develop over time; returning to assessment annually will be important. Some initial, potentially productive directions for change emerge out of this preliminary assessment, however. The

possibility of integrating service-learning and other types of community engagement pedagogies in sustainable ways relies first on conceiving their roles within the curriculum. This will require meetings focused first on the outcomes we hope students in these courses will achieve, and second on the extent to which we want to view this more fully as a program than as a collection of courses that exist within the larger English curriculum.

Before and as curricular change begins, the involved faculty and staff should work together to gain professional development funding for all teachers in the program. These efforts might mirror recent work by the First-year English Committee, which involved faculty, adjuncts, and graduate students in reconceiving the first-year curriculum, gaining funding for the professional development of first-year composition teachers, and developing best practices for attaining programmatic goals. NDSU has internal grants for training teachers, particularly when program changes are occurring. This is an immediate way to better train the teachers of these courses so that they can contribute to curricular vision and to attaining the academic, professional, and civic goals of the courses. We will need to foster a more coherent community of practitioners through these professional development opportunities.

Then, as discussions of curriculum occur, we can determine the level of commitment to civic educational goals among the agents responsible for the program. If that commitment is high, we might opt for an undergraduate-level field experience option (we are presently piloting field experience at the graduate level) and/or a course that involves explicit instruction in ethical professional communication and application in a community setting. Neither option would require all teachers to commit, but the curricular integration would be key to sustaining service-learning in the professional/technical curriculum.

For NDSU's professional and technical writing program, curriculum and attention to labor issues seem to be the most viable and critical gaps and fissures, the spaces for change. This brief case study will not immediately transform NDSU's program. However, it has started discussions among the faculty agents of the program that should extend outward. The immediate plan of action, to form a committee to think about both curriculum and funding for professional development, will provide useful impetus to change.

Conclusions

If, as David Sapp and Robbin Crabtree agree, "the application of service learning within technical communication courses" is a "particularly ideal pairing," it will be worthwhile for presently existing and newly developing professional and technical communication programs such as NDSU's to consider how these two pieces fit together best within their institutional contexts and to work to ensure that service-learning is not added on in haste to individual classes (412). Proceeding without reflection would contradict the ethical principles to which most who are interested in service-learning ascribe. Without planning, reflection, and assessment, service-learning might even do some damage in its community and institutional settings. My hope is that this rhetorical method of assessment will prove useful to other programs seeking clarity and progress, and that assessing programs using the Pentad will contribute to sustaining viable service-learning projects within professional and technical writing programs.

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