

WRA 841 Final Design Portfolio

Em Kayden, SP 21

Introduction

Over the course of the semester, we have worked diligently to explore the relationship between a grounding in Professional Writing Theory and Research and its practical application. One of our focuses as a class was situating what we do as Technical Professional Communicators (TPCs) in social justice work. Through the close examination of texts such as *Race After Technology*, *Technical Communication After the Social Justice Turn*, and more, I have been able to situate my design projects in social justice work while effectively conveying information through documentation, designs, and visualizations.

Deliverable 1: The Project Charter

[Project Charter for Jira Curriculum](#)

Process

The Project Charter was particularly interesting to me because I was able to incorporate the document plan I had completed for my internship and reconfigure it into a project charter. This document plan gave me a strong starting point as most of the information that the project charter requested was contained in the initial document. As a result, the only additional information that I had to collect was in regard to the budget. The most

complicated part of this process was reflecting on the content in the document plan and the information that I had available to me and how to reconfigure this content to better suit the format of the project charter. This is something that I struggled with because at times, I felt like there was overlap or some redundancy between categories of information, for example, the reason for the project and the project goal(s) and purpose segments. I also had difficulty creating the criteria for evaluating authorship as I am still growing accustomed to Interoperability Institute's politics and climate. Overall, these office politics are definitely something important to consider in future documentation. For example, in this project, my manager Sue had almost nothing to do with the deliverables, she did not see them until the meetings where we presented them to the higher-ups. That said, all the IOI internal communications had to name Sue as the primary project manager and me as the backup, even though I was at the forefront of the project. Overall, the experience of creating a document plan and transforming it into a project charter was very beneficial for me to learn two styles of documentation for a new project.

Throughlines

In a way, these company politics exemplify some of our course understandings of exploitation and power differentials. As I understand it, "People are exploited when they do not benefit fairly from their own work, which, instead, maintains the authority and wealth of those in power" (Young, 1990 as cited in Walton et al., 2019, p. 26). In this case, my supervisors, with a status of higher power, are given credit for my work that helps them maintain their statuses, especially given that these documents in particular are labeled "business transformation." I do understand that as an intern, I do not yet

have the established credibility of my superiors. I also know and acknowledge that others classified as interns have it much worse than I do. That said, the commitment of TPCs to justice has implications for the political work climate and beyond. It may be a stretch, but in a way, this represents Walton et al.'s discussion and push for distributive justice which is concerned with people getting their fair share (2019, p. 34). Its importance comes from "...the realization that misuse of human resources depresses profits as well as people" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 128). This not only emphasizes the monetary cost associated with exploitation in the long run, but also the cost of decreased employee investment.

Deliverable 2: The Journey Map

[WRAC Annual Review Journey Map](#)

Process

The Journey Map design project gave me the experience of designing for a client, in a way. To begin, I spoke with Imari about her experience with WRAC's annual review process for graduate students. Because we are both graduate students in WRAC, I had to set my personal feelings and experience aside to really hone in on Imari's experience. In this case, I found that the best way to collect information was to ask Imari to walk me through her experience and what she felt along the way in order for me to accurately map it. I felt that if I prompted her too much, or allowed myself to start making the connections, then the information would become diluted or biased in some way. Once I collected this information, I put it all as plain text/paragraphs in the Canva

file I created. Because it is an experience map, I initially chose to group the content by how she was feeling at a particular stage. I then noticed that these feelings occurred in different stages that followed a chronological flow. From there, I chose to represent the data as not only a 4-step process but to also address that these steps account for the larger overall process of the annual review. I wanted to include every piece of information included from the “client” which resulted in some difficult design decisions in terms of how I would represent these details. For example, the arrows point to related but unnecessary details. I think if I were to revise this experience map, I would remove this additional information.

Throughlines

This project, in particular, was important to consider and approach from the perspective of Human-Centered Design (HCD). Because it was designed for a client, it is crucial that the deliverable not only effectively conveys what it was designed to, but that it also advocates for the user (in this case) in terms of their overall experience with the client’s product. In this manner, it was important for this specific piece of HCD to offer a critique of the client’s larger, structural issues (Rose, 2016, p. 428). This example emphasizes how the user felt at each stage of the process and is therefore representative of the user experience and structural issues within the client’s product. In addition, this focus on a deeper understanding of problems and concerns within the process may help inform the client to revise this system to be more efficient and more human-centered (Rose, 2016, p. 442). Although Rose’s research focused on vulnerable populations, the connection between Human-Centered Design and understanding processes is still abundantly clear.

Deliverable 3: COVID Response Guide

[MMCM COVID Response Guide](#)

Process

The COVID Response Guide was a great opportunity for me to work on a design project collaboratively and “for” a client. Even though Imari and I have worked together many times, it was still helpful to produce this guide together.

During my undergrad, I had an (unpaid) internship with MMCM. Although this internship taught me that I don’t want to go into digital marketing, this background knowledge was very beneficial in constructing this guide. For instance, we were able to start with an intimate knowledge of their branding, style, and tone guides. As a result, we were able to design with these in mind right from the start. Because of the CDC’s guidelines for employers, we were able to adapt this information to be relevant to the client. Again, my knowledge of the space and the client itself were extremely helpful in this content development phase. As we worked towards creating this deliverable, we focused on what content we wanted to include before we considered where it should be placed. Ultimately, we had the most freedom for content design—used loosely here as I’m referring to text—in our procedures for violating the COVID guidelines. In this segment, we chose to embody the tone of the museum through our statements like “working with friends is much more fun” and “don’t be a rule breaker” because this is a children’s museum and this tone and language embodies the overall style of MMCM. Finally, we visited their Facebook and website to collect information, such as public reopening dates, to include in this guide as it is relevant to include even for employees.

Throughlines

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted more people than I ever could have imagined. People and organizations have had to adapt and learn to exist in these extremely uncertain times. As a result, we had to approach this organizational client empathetically. Imari and I understood, through Porter et al., that awareness of the audience and conducting corresponding research are important (2000, p. 611). This understanding helped inform our approach to the writing and design of this guide for employees. For example, we were able to see that employees responded well to the brand's overall tone and less assertive manner. That said, because of the severity of the pandemic, we understood that we did need to be assertive at times. For this circumstance, we coincided with Bolman and Deal's notion that "By giving a team clear authority and then staying out of the way, management releases collective energy and creativity" (2017, p. 105). We felt that this approach would be appropriate given our understanding of the client and their team. In this manner, we were able to sensitively create a deliverable with the client in mind that successfully navigated any possible concerns around the politics surrounding COVID-19.

Deliverable 4: Quantitative and Qualitative Data Visualizations

[Qualitative Data Visualization](#)

[Quantitative Data Visualization](#)

Process

As a TPC, I know that I will be expected to visualize data in my documentation and therefore this design project was very beneficial for me. I've created data visualizations

for quantitative data before, but I cannot think of a time where I have had to create a visualization of qualitative data. As a result, this was something I struggled with because of the open-endedness of it all.

My initial approach to these visualizations was to reevaluate my data from my undergraduate honors thesis. I didn't include any in the thesis, for some reason, but I thought it would be interesting to view the data beyond the numbers on my screen. Therefore, I chose to represent the impact of increased cell phone usage on young adult romantic relationships' levels of commitment, satisfaction, and quality of alternatives. In the end, this graphic was surprising to me because of my own assumptions about cell phone usage with my peers. The visualization created a new perspective for me to understand my data as in my thesis, commitment, satisfaction, and quality of alternatives contributed to a variable considered overall satisfaction, which this graphic represents without the extra calculations.

As far as I remember, I don't think I've ever had to create a visualization for qualitative data. Reflecting on my previous course readings, I can definitely think of qualitative data visualizations that I've seen or interpreted. That said, I had it in my mind that I wanted to again represent data from my thesis. This was something I really struggled with as I tried to figure out how I could represent qualitative data using my Likert-scale questions. Ultimately, I was unable to accomplish this as my data was purely quantitative, and my conversations with Ben were very helpful in helping me understand what qualitative data would look like. For some reason, one of my initial ideas was to search Pinterest for qualitative data sets as the platform itself seemed conducive for this type of information. I settled on a data set of kindergarteners

describing popcorn using their 5 senses. The data, and the context surrounding it, was minimal and flawed, but for the purpose of this activity, it did the trick. It was also interesting to see the overlap between senses. For example, warm, buttery, and salty were all represented by more than one sense. To represent this, I chose a pie chart because I felt that it would effectively represent the frequency of a response in comparison to the others.

Throughlines

According to editors, Whitney Battle-Baptiste and Britt Rusert (2018), the overall goal of data visualization represents:

“The cross-fertilization of visual art and social science here marks an important transitional moment in the history of the disciplines while offering alternative visions of how social scientific data might be made more accessible to the populations and people from whom such data is collected” (p. 13).

Thus, when we consider why it is important to create visualizations of data, we must consider the ways in which our data is accessible or inaccessible and how it can be interpreted. For example, for the kindergarten class’s data set I used, it is important to consider how they may interpret my pie chart differently than I intended them to. Part of this is a result of the original set having more variables, but it is important to recognize the role of the designer in representing the data.

Data visualization connects to a client’s needs, whether cultural or other. This is best represented by the Walton, Zraly, and Mugengana (2014) study that through cultural understanding and negotiation, found that data was best presented in a song

rather than a visual, for that specific culture (p. 61). Therefore, it is our job as TPCs to negotiate these understandings and work to create accessible data.

Deliverable 5: Content Inventory

Content Inventory

Process

In regard to my current work, the Content Inventory was another activity that was very useful to me. To graduate as a COM major from my undergraduate institution, I had to create a communication perspective portfolio. When I came to MSU, I knew that I would want to revisit this skeleton to develop an industry-focused web portfolio. In fall 2020, I was part of the Digital Fellows program through the Digital Humanities department. Through this program, I began to migrate relevant information from that portfolio to my new, more industry-specific portfolio. This year has been nothing short of chaotic, so I have not dedicated enough time to developing this new site. That said, the content inventory was extremely useful as it allowed me to catch mistakes from the migration that I hadn't considered. It also helped me realize that my portfolio was lacking in the areas that made me seem human.

Earlier this semester, in WRA 420, I had completed a much more fleshed-out content inventory as part of a team. Though these projects are a little more mundane and tedious, they are still crucial steps of the web development and maintenance processes. Not only was I able to find mistakes and points for improvement on my personal site, but I was also able to find them on the CDC's COVID-19 site—a website with much higher stakes involved.

Throughlines

This project had a deeper personal connection to me as it is my professional portfolio that represents me as a person, scholar, worker, etc., to potential employers. That said, I have to be extremely careful with how I present myself there. Especially given that “Difference is monetized...” (Benjamin, 2020, p. 146) and in a (historically) predominantly masculine field, it can be beneficial OR detrimental to my career to appear overly feminine. For example, I have gone back and forth between including a page of personal information, details, and pictures for fear of it negatively affecting an employer’s viewpoint. That said, my mom’s experience with Dow Chemical is one where they are actively seeking women and other minoritized groups to improve their DEI profiles. In a way, this is representative of Benjamin’s notion that “...we must demand that tech designers and decision-makers become accountable stewards of technology...” (2020, p. 183). In this specific instance, the corporation is making intentional decisions to hire those typically overlooked by marginalization. Although it is a chemical company and not a tech giant, it is an important step (also, one of their very higher-ups is openly LGBTQ+ and they fly pride flags for pride month at their headquarters (and maybe other locations?)). Either way, in general, it is of utmost importance that we, as designers and people, acknowledge the implications our work may have and make design decisions accordingly.

Conclusion

As technical and professional communicators, we have to not only think of the best way to present data and information, but we must also consider its cultural and historical implications. Within our line of work, we have seen the push for inclusivity through pronoun usage, for example, but we must also acknowledge the implications of resisting such changes. We have to not only be conscious of the ways in which our design and our writing can further oppress others. Ultimately, as TPCs, it is both our mission and our goal to create documentation and designs that are inclusive, accessible, and effective for all people and stakeholders.

References

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