Making English Students Marketable: A Case for a Professional Writing Major

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

Christina N. Guthrie

Elizabeth Dalton
Thesis Advisor

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

April 2001

Graduation: May 2001
Abstract

For this project, I have used my internship experience at the E.B. and Bertha C. Ball Center as a case study for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the English department at Ball State University in preparing students to enter the world of publishing and professional writing. The first section is a narrative of my internship experience. Following the narrative is an analysis of Professional Writing majors from Purdue University, Southwest Missouri State University, and Columbia University. Finally, using the information from my own experiences and from my analysis of other Professional Writing programs, I have created a hypothetical curriculum that might be adopted by Ball State University's English department in the future.
Acknowledgments

Thanks to my husband Troy Guthrie for giving me the encouragement I need when I think my writing is terrible and for being willing and eager to read every draft.

Thanks also to Dr. Mat Fisher, Director of Undergraduate Programs in English, who provided me with essential knowledge and information regarding curriculum changes in the English department.

Finally, many, many thanks go to Mrs. Elizabeth Dalton, my thesis advisor, for her role in this entire process. Her advice inspired me with this idea in the first place. Her comments on my drafts were always supportive yet challenging, and her editorial expertise was much appreciated. Thank you Beth Dalton for giving me the courage and support to take on such a task.
Making English Students Marketable: A Case for a Professional Writing Major

When I first came to Ball State University, I chose to be an English major because I loved language and literature and writing. Because I wanted to pursue a career after college instead of head off immediately to graduate school, my freshman advisor suggested that I enroll in the Preprofessional English program and select the Professional Writing option. This sounded like a wonderful idea, and the courses in the catalog seemed like they would be beneficial to me and my desire to enter publishing and writing, so I selected this course of study.

Over the past four years I have tried to take the best classes offered within this option to suit my career goal and have tried to seize any opportunities for practical experience. One of these opportunities was an internship at the E.B. and Bertha C. Ball Center, which I did from September 1-December 12, 2000. Some of my duties for this internship included researching and interviewing various mystery authors for *Magna cum Murder*, compiling bibliographies, writing articles for the *Magna cum Murder* newsletter, writing press releases, and editing other articles submitted to the newsletter.

While I was relatively prepared for most of these tasks, there were some skills that I simply had to learn as I went. For example, when I was to write author profiles for the *Magna cum Murder* program book and the newsletter, I had no problem critiquing an author’s writing. However, I was not at all good at interviewing. I had had little practice in this, so I was not able to ask questions in a manner that was comfortable and conversational for the interviewee. Often, I
would end up doing an email interview with a telephone follow-up. Because these profiles were not in-depth pieces, this method worked, but if I were to ever write a profile that was more in-depth, I am not sure I would be very good at obtaining my information.

In addition to my lack of interviewing skills, I also did not really know how to edit the articles that were submitted to the newsletter. I was able to proofread and fix grammatical mistakes, but I was not good at tightening the copy or checking facts. Because I had never done any literary editing and very little journalistic editing, I did not know what to look for or what to eliminate. I have gotten better at this practice, thanks to the instruction of my internship supervisor, but it would have been nice to have had some editing experience prior to the internship.

Finally, layout and writing for limited space were two areas in which I had no experience whatsoever. My ignorance of page layout was not so detrimental because the E.B. Ball Center already has an employee who works on that area of the newsletter's production. However, I could have been more helpful if I at least knew how to use software such as Page Maker. What was really a problem was my lengthy writing. I have never been punished for going over a length requirement for a paper in English, but when one does it for a publication, it is unacceptable. The fact of the matter is that space is limited, and one must write a quality piece within those limitations. It was extremely difficult for me to be concise. I was always struggling to tighten my copy before submitting it to my supervisor, who would have to edit it for me otherwise.
This experience was not altogether bad, because internships are supposed to be learning experiences, but it forced me to reconsider the educational path I had chosen. I realized that if I had not followed the advice given to me by a professor in the department to take some journalism courses, I would have been almost completely unprepared for this internship. My major in English had prepared me to be a critical reader, writer, and thinker. However, the journalism courses introduced me to AP style and copyediting, and even though it is still a struggle, I was taught the importance of writing succinctly. The only real interviewing practice I had, which was minimal, came from article assignments in my journalism classes. I had to go outside my major to get any of the practical skills that a professional writer needs, and that concerned me.

Because journalism classes provided me with necessary practical knowledge, one might argue that I should have simply majored in journalism instead of English. However, while journalism did provide me with some practical knowledge and skills, it would never have prepared me to go into any literary profession, which is what I would ultimately like to do. I needed the knowledge of literature and creative writing that my English major was able to give me. During my internship, I was able to read various crime fiction novels and discuss them because I have a background in reading literature. In the articles I wrote about authors and their books, I was also able to address point-of-view, characterization, plot, tension, and language because of my experience in creative writing workshops. These skills will be useful again if and when I work in publishing or become an author myself.
Another reason that journalism was not the right fit is the fact that courses in that department are taught, obviously, from a journalistic perspective instead of a literary or professional writing perspective. The journalism major is broken into sequences that consist of news/editorial, magazine, public relations, advertising, journalism graphics, photojournalism, and teacher education (Ball State University 2000 Catalog 150). These are very distinct paths that have little or nothing to do with publishing, business and professional writing, or technical writing.

Because it is obviously not the journalism department's plan to teach skills for these areas mentioned above (nor should it be), the responsibility falls upon the shoulders of the English department to prepare professional writing students to actually be professional writers. Currently, this is a problem because the Professional Writing option within the English major is clearly not doing what it should for its students. Those young men and women who enter this option within the major are not prepared, as I have learned, after graduation to enter the fields of publishing, editing, professional writing, or technical writing, even though they select this major to prepare them for these careers.

With the program set up as it is now, students who enroll in the Professional Writing option within the Preprofessional major take courses in linguistics, composition, literary history, literature, creative writing, with an option to take one course in business writing (Ball State University 2000 Catalog 259). English 489, a practical course in literary editing and publishing, is not even listed as one of the course options. Moreover, no courses exist for advanced business
writing, copyediting or book editing, or technical writing. There is also no course that teaches students about libel and copyright laws, which would be an essential course for nearly all English majors, especially professional writing students. In short, there is one practical course--English 231, Workplace Writing--for students to choose, and it is only an introductory course.

It is clear that the English department at Ball State University is doing a fine job teaching students abstract skills, such as how to be analytical readers and critical thinkers. This is an essential element of any successful English program. However, Ball State's English department is doing virtually nothing to help students build an impressive résumé and portfolio. Until this changes, students who enroll in the English department hoping to learn about professional writing will be robbed of the opportunity to have an education that properly prepares them to enter the workforce as professional writers. No matter how well read a student is and no matter how skillfully he or she writes, if a student cannot put practical knowledge and experience on a résumé, an employer will likely not be interested in him or her. This is especially true if an employer receives résumés from other people with degrees in English who have taken editing, business writing, and technical writing courses.

In order to improve this situation, one must know what skills are actually desired of professional writers, editors, and technical writers. One can also look at what other universities are doing within their own English departments. The use of this information will be helpful in designing a program that will best suit the needs of the students of Ball State University.
Perhaps the best way to begin to improve this program at Ball State is to look at various careers for which this major should prepare students and find out what skills are necessary to obtain and successfully keep jobs. One of the most popular fields professional writing students wish to pursue is within the publishing industry. Whether the publishing house is small or large, with a literary or a technical focus, those I spoke to in this industry agree that the basic skills needed are the same. These include the ability to read critically and write clearly and concisely, to be organized and to possess clerical skills and good judgment.

Beyond these most basic skills that apply to jobs across the entire industry, those who are in editorial positions and those who are agents and publicists need proficiency in certain areas. Sophie Cathro, who works as Associate Publicist at a non-fiction publishing house in Boston called Adams Media Corporation, says that it is essential to know the business and practical aspects of the business to really successfully pursue a job within a publishing house. Applicants should have a basic knowledge of marketing and advertising in addition to editorial skills because many entry-level positions are in the business departments of the publishing house.

According to Cathro, editors in the publishing industry also need to have a working knowledge of the business and marketing aspects of publishing. In addition to that, they should be able to tell if a book is good or not, and be able to explain the concept or plot line of a book clearly and succinctly. Cathro says that the physical process of editing “is a skill that editors develop and refine by actively editing.” Aside from actually learning the proofreader’s marks, which is
an essential first step, editing is something English students should practice as much as they can in order to do well on any possible editing tests they might have to complete when interviewing for a job.

Students who wish to become literary agents must have editing and sales skills. According to independent literary agent Stella Connell, one must be confident in his or her judgment of books because agents must defend the books they choose to represent. She also said that agents must have knowledge of book publishing as a market because an agent has to sell his or her author to a publishing house. In order to do that, an agent must know the demands of the publishing market in order to make the author and his or book attractive to a publisher.

While it is good for students to have developed writing and editing skills and to have a basic knowledge of the publishing market, Sophie Cathro and Stella Connell both said they did not learn most of what they know from their undergraduate studies. Sophie Cathro attended the University of North Carolina, which, like Ball State, did not have a specific program to teach students about the publishing industry. Stella Connell majored in journalism at the University of Alabama, and she received some practical knowledge there, but did not really learn about publishing because the journalism department did not concern itself with that area of study, as most journalism departments do not.

Cathro and Connell both completed the Radcliffe Publishing Course, which has since been moved to Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism and is now called the Columbia Publishing Course. According to the
Columbia Publishing Course's Online Information page, this course is "an intensive six-week program offered in the summer to recent college graduates who wish to enter the publishing industry. It exposes students to all facets of publishing from book to magazine to computer manuals and focuses on production, editing, advertising, and circulation." Cathro and Connell recommend that students who are serious about a career in publishing enroll in this course because it gives those who do a distinct advantage in breaking into the industry. According to Sophie Cathro, it is possible for graduates to enter publishing without completing the Columbia Publishing Course, but the only jobs they will likely be able to obtain are "strictly entry-level positions such as proofreader or personal assistant." It is slow going and difficult to move up in the ranks of the business this way, so it is best to have the credentials that the Columbia Publishing Course can give.

The Columbia Publishing Course unfortunately only admits fifty applicants per year, based on applicants' personal statements, letters of recommendation, college transcripts, and involvement in student or professional publications. For those who are selected, the course costs $5,415 plus a $50 application fee, and financial aid is limited. Thus, many students cannot enroll in this beneficial course. For those students cannot enroll, or those who do not wish to enter publishing at all, a career in professional business or technical writing is a likely step after graduation. According to Southwest Missouri State University, technical writing is one of the fastest growing fields, due to the rapid increase in technology. Companies are constantly looking for good writers to write
advertisements, brochures, manuals, proposals, press releases, memos, reports, and letters to customers. Knowledge of professional writing, particularly technical writing, will help graduates become more marketable and better able to withstand company downsizing ("Undergraduate Program in Technical Writing Online Catalog" n.pg.).

The skills one needs to be a professional writer tend to vary with the kind of work one does, but good writing, editing, researching, and planning are essential no matter what the job. Knowledge in some area other than writing, such as computers or science, is also helpful. Technical writing, by definition, deals with writing about technical terms and technology. Because of this, candidates who already possess a working knowledge of a particular technical field will be more likely to obtain jobs. However, this is not always the case, as it is often easy enough to learn terms and jargon, and a person’s ability to write and analyze will often win out over technical expertise ("Undergraduate Program in Technical Writing Online Catalog" n.pg.).

Trisha Turner, who graduated from Ball State University with a bachelor’s degree in journalism in 1991, has been a professional writer in the Indianapolis area for several years. One of her first jobs in this field was as a media relations writer for Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis. She is currently a technical writer and editor for USA Funds. According to Turner, “You have to be a quick learner to pick up all the jargon of the company, and you have to be able to write about that jargon in a way that regular people can understand.” Turner
says that she was able to obtain these jobs because of her journalism background. She states:

Many companies, when advertising for a position, say they want someone with a degree in journalism or English. However, they expect many of their documents, such as newsletters and press releases, to be written in journalistic AP style. Often, my knowledge of copyediting and of AP style was what got me the job, because they interview a lot of people who can write. What sets someone apart from the rest of the applicants are those types of skills.

While she has been generally pleased with the education she received in journalism, she wishes that she would have taken some classes that better prepared her for professional writing. Coming to the job, she had had little to no experience in writing memos or proposals or other types of business documents. As a student in the magazine sequence, she mainly wrote feature articles and had little experience with public relations writing. Looking back, she regrets not taking a professional writing course. She also believes her writing could have been improved with some English literature and creative writing classes.

Keeping the experiences and recommendations of these professionals in mind, I selected three universities that are on the right track to providing professional writing students a meaningful and valuable education. These universities are Purdue University, Southwest Missouri State University, and Columbia University. Each school has taken a different approach to fulfilling the
needs of professional writing students, but they all share similar visions and have some of the same types of course offerings.

The school that I feel has the best program for professional writers is Purdue University. Purdue has an actual professional writing major in its English department, so students can study in a program especially designed for their needs ("Professional Writing Major Requirements" n.pg.).

In this major, students may choose between Writing and Publishing or Technical Writing. Before choosing a track or option, students must complete three background writing courses. The first of these is Introduction to Research in Professional Writing, which teaches students how to do research that is less academic and more professional. The next course is Introduction to Creative Writing, which covers both prose and poetry and teaches students to write in these genres. Finally, the last preliminary course is Introduction to Professional Writing. This course concentrates learning to analyze “rhetorical situations in the workplace” and emphasizes “practice in planning, writing, evaluating, and revising a variety of documents used in the arts and in industry” ("Spring 2001 Course Brochure" n.pg.).

After completion of these three courses, a student who chooses to enter the Writing and Publishing track will be required to complete various courses that teach computer skills needed in the publishing industry as well as various styles of writing such as review writing. He or she also must complete fifteen option credits that will allow the student to tailor his or her course of study to what is most suitable for his or her career desires. Some specific courses required for
this track are Writing for the Computer Industry, Theories of Rhetoric and Composition, and Business Writing ("Professional Writing Major Requirements" n.pg.). Students are also required to complete at least one internship in professional writing. Some of the choices they have for their fifteen option credits are classes in technical writing, advanced professional and business writing classes, a practicum in professional writing, and various creative writing classes ("Spring 2001 Brochure" n.pg.). Students are also encouraged to take some literature and linguistics classes ("Professional Writing Major Requirements" n.pg.).

Those students who choose to take the Technical Writing track complete many of the same courses as those students in the Writing and Publishing track, such as the computer-aided publishing course and the advanced professional writing course. However, they also have classes they must complete that specifically deal with technical writing, particularly writing for the science and computer industries. For example, these students take a class in magazine journalism and a class entitled Reporting of Science News. Technical Writing students also must complete at least one internship, paid or unpaid, and they too are encouraged to take classes in literature, creative writing and linguistics in order to get the most of their English education ("Professional Writing Major Requirements" n.pg.).

While Purdue allows students in its English program to either major in technical writing or writing and publishing, the English department at Southwest Missouri State University (SMSU) offers a major in Professional Writing and a
minor in Technical Writing ("SMSU Undergraduate Catalog" n.pg.). The technical writing minor allows students from disciplines other than English to learn to be writers within their respective fields of study ("Undergraduate Program in Technical Writing" n.pg.). Students who are Professional Writing majors may also minor in technical writing, though they do not have to because they must take technical writing courses to complete their major ("SMSU Undergraduate Catalog" n.pg.).

Students of professional writing are required to take Scientific and Technical Editing, Advanced Technical Writing, Analysis of Scientific Literature, Advanced Writing: Non-Fiction, and at least one internship in professional or technical writing. Scientific and Technical Editing takes students through the process of creating a new piece of writing by "clarifying, reducing, expanding, and synthesizing materials written by others" ("Undergraduate Program in Technical Writing" n.pg.). There is an emphasis on audience adaptation, organization, style, and mechanics. Advanced Technical Writing gives students practice in proposals, abstracts, visuals, progress reports, and formal reports. The focus of Analysis of Scientific Literature is looking at the history and development of scientific writing with analysis of style. Advanced Writing: Non-Fiction allows students to focus on, and work within, one or two genres, such as personal essay, magazine writing, stylistics, scholarly writing, and technical writing. This course may be taken twice for a total of six credit hours. Finally, when students complete their internship, they must have worked at least 135
hours in a job that uses the skills they have learned in their technical writing classes ("Undergraduate Program in Technical Writing" n.p.g.).

Professional writing students must take classes from other departments such as Communications, Journalism, Management, and Psychology in addition to taking classes from other areas of the English department such as literature and linguistics. Professional writing majors are also required to have a minor of their choice ("SMSU Undergraduate Catalog" n.p.g.).

The minor in technical writing is a scaled-down version of the Professional Writing major. Students who choose this minor must complete the four above-mentioned technical writing classes and internship, and must also complete two courses from Communications, Journalism, Management, and Technology ("SMSU Undergraduate Catalog" n.p.g.). This minor does not require that students take any creative or literary writing, nor does it require students to take any rhetoric, literature, or linguistics classes.

The third exemplary university is Columbia University. Columbia, however, has set up its program much differently than Purdue University and Southwest Missouri State University have; it has developed a Writing Program within the Department of English. According to Columbia's Undergraduate Bulletin Online:

The Writing Program, which traces its roots to 1909, offers workshops in fiction, nonfiction, poetry, playwriting, and filmwriting, as well as courses in literary publishing. Faculty members are drawn from New York's literary community and work with students in small classes and individual
conferences. The Writing Program offers a literature-writing major, a concentration in writing, and a minor in writing. This program is more than an array of courses: various activities and publications enable students to become part of a community of writers. ("Writing" n.pg.)

Students who choose to major in literature-writing are required to take several courses in Literature and Comparative Studies and at least eight Writing Program courses ("Writing" n.pg.). The writing courses vary tremendously, including anything from creative writing workshops to magazine and essay writing to cultural criticism, and literary editing and publishing ("Writing Curriculum Course Descriptions" n.pg.).

Columbia does not offer courses in technical writing, nor are any business writing courses offered. Columbia's emphasis is on literature and literary writing and publishing; internships and practical experiences are not hard to come by since the university is in the midst of the majority of the major publishing houses in the United States.

After careful examination of the professional writing programs offered at Purdue University, Southwest Missouri State University, and Columbia University, it seems that Ball State University students could most benefit from a hybrid of these three programs. Each program has its strengths, but each has its flaws, and by picking and choosing items from each program, Ball State could have an ideal professional writing program.

As I stated earlier, I believe Purdue has the best professional writing program of the three because it encompasses a broad range of studies, but it
does not forsake the teaching of practical skills. Students have a choice of emphasis between more general professional writing and publishing and technical writing, yet they can cross over and take classes from both areas or even double major ("Professional Writing Major Requirements" n.pg.).

The major weakness I find with Purdue's Professional Writing Major is that it doesn't put enough emphasis on literature or creative writing. Students are encouraged to take some of these classes to fulfill their fifteen option classes, but no literature courses are required ("Professional Writing Major Requirements" n.pg.). I believe that students learn essential critical thinking skills when they are required to read and analyze literature. Furthermore, students who read are going to be better writers.

Similar weaknesses can be found in the professional writing program at Southwest Missouri State University. While this program offers extensive training in technical writing, students are even more limited to the practical aspects of professional writing education. Students have fewer electives within the major, and, while they are also encouraged to take some literature courses, they are not required to do so ("SMSU Undergraduate Catalog" n.pg.).

The professional writing program at SMSU does have one particularly important strength: interdisciplinary study. Students are required to take classes that are beneficial to writers from departments other than English. They are also required to have a minor in order to have an area of expertise to make them more marketable to employers ("SMSU Undergraduate Catalog" n.pg.).
As for Columbia University, one obvious weakness in the Writing Program is the lack of business or technical writing classes. However, this program makes up for this by providing extensive instruction in literary writing, editing and publishing. Also, students have access to members of the writing and publishing community and are virtually next door to various publishing houses where they can complete internships. Columbia can bring the real world of literary writing and publishing to the classroom, and that in itself is practical experience. Moreover, the Columbia Publishing Course is available to recent graduates who seriously want to pursue a career in publishing.

Columbia’s greatest strength is the way it has integrated various disciplines into the Writing Program. Students in this program must read, write, analyze, and criticize literature. They must also learn how to write journalistically as well as in different creative genres (“Writing” n.pg.). Columbia has evidently decided to put an emphasis on the literary, and has done that well.

With information about the skills needed for various writing and editing careers and about what other universities have to offer professional writing students, it is possible to begin to develop a solution to the problem plaguing the English department at Ball State University. Dr. Mat Fisher, Director of Undergraduate Programs in the Ball Sate English department, is well aware that the current professional writing option within the preprofessional program is not fulfilling the needs of its students.

Dr. Fisher said that he would like to eventually see an actual Professional Writing major that could fully serve the needs of its students. If this goal could
someday be attained, I would like to make some suggestions for the desired Professional Writing Major. It is my hope in doing this, that the right faculty could be hired, so that the English department could fully address the needs of this rather neglected group of students. The following is a proposed curriculum for this hypothetical major.

**Major in English, Professional Writing**

**Core (12 hours)**
- 210 Introduction to English Studies 3
- 220 Language and Society 3
- 230 Reading and Writing About Literature 3
- 444 Senior Seminar for P. Writing 3

**Required (18 hours)**
- Introduction to Professional Writing 3
- 240 or 250 American Literature 3
- 260 or 280 British Literature 3
- 231 Writing in the Workplace 3
- 286 Introduction to Creative Nonfiction 3
- 369 or 479 Internship (paid or unpaid) 3

**Publishing Emphasis (choose 5 for 15 hours total)**
- Editing Course for Chicago and AP Styles
- BEOA 338 Desktop Publishing
- Advanced Business Writing
- 489 Publishing Practicum
- Law for Writers and Publishers
- Review Writing
- Jour 280 Magazine Writing
- Jour 312 Feature, Column, and Opinion Writing
Technical Writing Emphasis (Choose 5 for 15 hours total)
- Introduction to Technical Writing
- Advanced Business Writing
- BEOA 338 Desktop Publishing
- Science News Reporting
- Writing for the Computer Industry
- Editing Course for Chicago and AP Styles
- Advanced Technical Writing
- Interdisciplinary class in technical area (science, medicine, computer science, business and accounting)

Total Hours 45 hours

*Students are encouraged to opt for electives in the other option's courses, creative writing workshops, and journalism courses to fulfill the required number of university credits for graduation.

***

In this proposed curriculum, I have tried to use as many classes as possible that are already offered at Ball State University. The core classes are all currently offered by the English department. The required courses for the Professional Writing major are also currently offered, with the exception of Introduction to Professional Writing. This course would introduce students to career paths in professional writing, the two options within the major, and it would provide a basis for all other professional writing courses.

Within the two options for the major, there are classes that are already offered, such as Desktop Publishing and the journalism courses. However, many of these courses would require the acquisition of at least one new faculty member who would have expertise in professional writing. He or she should be able to teach an editing course that is specifically designed for students who want to be literary editors, as opposed to newspaper or magazine editors. This course would teach students to use proofreader's marks, and AP or Chicago
style. Perhaps students in this course could collaborate with students in creative writing courses and edit their manuscripts for practical experience.

The curriculum also calls for an advanced business writing course that would further train students in writing business proposals, grant proposals, agent proposals, progress reports, and even concentrate on building company web sites. I took Writing in the Workplace when I was a sophomore, and I have had no practice in those skills since. Another more advanced class would have given me more confidence in my skills as a business writer.

Another class that would be beneficial to professional writers is a law class that deals with libel and copyright laws. There is a currently a law class offered in the journalism department, but it does not address the issues that would concern literary writers or editors. This would be a class that could easily be taught in the summer, even as a shortened seminar, as suggested by Dr. Fisher.

Finally, I would like to see Ball State adopt classes that are similar to those at Purdue University and Southwest Missouri State University that give students actual experience in professional and technical writing. Students need to learn how to read a technical document and put it into clear, concise layman's terms. From what I have learned by talking to a technical writer, this is not an easy task, and it should at least be introduced in the classroom. An introduction to technical writing course could fulfill this need, as well as give students something else to put on their resumes. It might also let students know if they want to pursue this type of career. If students are interested in pursuing
technical writing, an advanced course could further teach them the skills needed for this career.

Students who seriously want to pursue technical writing should also have an understanding of the computer industry and of medical science, for these are two areas that most need technical writers. Students should take classes from these departments and should then take classes that teach them how to write for these fields.

I understand that these desires will not be easy to fulfill, given the monetary restraints in hiring new faculty, and may not even be the vision of the English department at Ball State University. This proposed curriculum is simply what could exist in the best of all possible worlds. Understandably, there is no way to implement a perfect curriculum, but these ideas could be kept in mind for future improvements in the English department.

Because it is impossible at this time to implement a new major within the department, Dr. Mat Fisher has asked the Composition/Rhetoric faculty to formulate an improvement that would be feasible with the current department faculty. The proposal from the Composition/Rhetoric faculty is a Major in English, Composition/Rhetoric. This major would incorporate classes from literature, linguistics, composition, creative writing, as well as some courses from other departments. Students would be required to take Introduction to English Studies, Language and Society, Advanced Composition, and Senior Seminar as their core classes. They would also be required to take English Studies and Technology, Writing in the Workplace, Public Discourse, Discourse Structure and
Strategies, History of Rhetoric, Literary History, and two Special Topics Courses. Finally, students would have to take two courses from Category 1: Practical and Professional Editing, two courses from Category 2: Literature, and one course from Category 3: Writing (Proposal Draft).

After analysis of the curriculum draft, it seems that this proposed major does an excellent job of giving English majors a broad-based education, with many challenging and thought-provoking courses. As I stated earlier, literature and creative writing have been essential components of my English education, and I believe they have made me a better writer. There are also a good variety of required classes because of the way the categories have been arranged.

One of the aspects of this proposed curriculum I was most pleased to see is the incorporation of classes from the Department of Journalism, Art Department, and the School of Business. As of right now, the English department is not equipped to provide instruction in desktop publishing, editorial layout and design, or even science and technical writing. Allowing students to take classes in these areas from other departments for credit toward their major is a big step in improving the program.

While this proposal is indeed an improvement, there are still areas that, based upon my internship and academic experiences, need to be examined further. For instance, under the Practical and Professional Editing Category, there is no course that teaches students how to physically edit a document. If a student wants a job as a copyeditor, or even a book editor, eventually, he or she
must know how to use proofreader's marks, how to tighten copy, and how to uses various styles such as AP and Chicago.

Also in this category is a course entitled Literary Editing and Publishing. This is designed to be a practicum in which students choose a publication to edit and publish. I took this course, and in theory it is good class. However, in practice it falls short. My main job in this course was to select manuscripts for publication in an online creative writing journal for high school students, but this is only a small part of the process in the professional world. I never actually edited the manuscripts, nor did I learn much about how the publishing industry works. This course could be greatly improved by field trips to a publishing company in Indianapolis and guest speakers who work in the business.

Another problem I have with this proposed curriculum is that internships are still optional. I believe that an internship should be required for every student who wishes to pursue professional writing and editing. An internship is the only way that students can be exposed to possible careers and test what they have learned in the classroom to see if they can use the knowledge on a professional level. The experiences I had in my own internship gave me most of what little practical experience I can put on my resume, and the writing I did gave me something to put in my professional portfolio. This is an area where I think the English department could take a lesson from the journalism department because those students must work toward an internship from the beginning of their studies in the major and must complete at least one internship in order to graduate.
They also must have a portfolio put together in order to graduate (*Ball State University Undergraduate Catalog* 150-152).

In addition, I would like to see some improvements made in the Writing category. First of all, most of the classes in this category are introductory courses. Writing in the Workplace, though one of the most practical courses I completed, is only an introduction to business writing. Students who would like to do business writing professionally could use an advanced course in this. The introductory course Media Writing and Editing (JOUR 210) is an essential course because it teaches students AP (Associated Press) style. However, its continuation class, Journalism 211, is equally essential because it is in this class that the editing really begins (*Ball State University Undergraduate Catalog* 153).

Besides the lack of advanced courses within the Writing category, there are some possible problems and setbacks in this curriculum. One such problem deals with the offering of the Science and Tech Writing Course in the journalism department. I have wanted to enroll in this course, but it is never offered because of lack of interest in the journalism department. The university must ensure this class will be offered, at least from time to time. This would be of no use unless students could actually take the course.

Overall, this proposed curriculum is an improvement to the current situation. More changes will need to be made in the future, however. Hopefully, the information provided about other professional writing programs and the analysis of the new program at Ball State has provided some helpful insight into
better ways to educate those English students who wish to become professional writers and editors.

I would like to say, in conclusion, that I am grateful for the education I have received from Ball State. I feel my professors and advisors have done the best they could to assist me. I have learned a great deal in my four years here as a student of English. I also know that the department faculty is continually looking for ways to improve the department because they care about the education that Ball State students receive. However, I would also like to reiterate the need for Professional Writing major at Ball State. Ball State students need and deserve the best education possible from this university in order to successfully pursue their career goals of publishing or professional writing or technical writing and editing. In this analysis and proposal, I have attempted to offer input based upon my experiences and information from other universities, so that the Ball State English department can continue to meet the needs of its students.
Works Cited

*Ball State University Undergraduate Catalog 1998-2000.* Muncie, IN: Ball State University, 1998.

Cathro, Sophie. Email to the author. 11 February 2001 and 20 February 2001.


“SMSU Undergraduate Catalog.” *Southwest Missouri State University Online.* 25 February 2001.


<http://www.sla.purdue.edu/academic/engl/coursebrochure/spring01.html>.

