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ABSTRACT

This article presents a case study of instructor and student perceptions of collaborative learning in multiple sections of an upper-level, online business writing course. Our goals are to understand current attitudes toward collaboration among business writing instructors and students and to examine points of dissonance regarding attitudes, frameworks, and definitions of collaborative writing. Further, we aim to understand how collaboration is valued, how it is framed and valued in terms of either process or product, and various associations between collaboration and community. Our results revealed collaboration to be a shared interest by business writing instructors and students alike but at the same time it is received differently in online versus in-person interactions. In this article, we identify these dissonances and discuss what they mean for collaborative learning.

CCS Concepts

Social and Professional Topics

Keywords

Collaboration, Collaborative learning, Collaboration technologies, Online business writing, Community

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INTRODUCTION

Collaboration is a disciplinary assumption in business and technical communication (Tham et al., 2021; Thompson, 2001). In the technical communication workplace, practitioners work in teams to research about products or services (Hackos, 2015), gather information from subject matter experts (Allen et al., 1987; Burnett et al., 2013), create and edit content (Forman, 1991; Jones, 2005), design and develop prototypes (Tham, 2021), test ideas with users (Simpon, 1991), and manage relationships with stakeholders (Anders, 2016; Lay & Karis, 1991). In terms of pedagogy, technical and professional communication pedagogy has long embraced collaborative learning and team projects to instill co-working values in students as rising professionals (e.g., Behles, 2013; Duin et al., 2017; McKee & Porter, 2017, Moses & Tham, 2019, 2021; Paretti et al., 2007). Yet, ongoing discussions among instructors have revealed mixed results in collaborative learning efforts. For instance, technical communication students do not always prefer group work due to an array of reasons (Cella & Restaino, 2014; Chism, 2006; Wolfe, 2010), while instructors presume that collaborative projects could enhance the learning experience. This disparity is further complicated by the changing nature of communication and co-working technologies in the modern classroom (Baker, 2015; Palumbo & Duin, 2018; Spinuzzi, 2007; Wilson & Daugherty, 2018).

Despite such complications, collaboration is increasingly prevalent and necessary. In their workplace research, Clair Lauer and Eva Brumberger (2019) affirmed that collaborative composing is commonplace in today's work culture. This culture, as Clay Spinuzzi and colleagues (2019) found in existing collaboration studies literature, is described in inconsistent terms and expectations. The perceived value for collaboration is unclear and usually told to students through lore (e.g., "Collaboration is good because two heads are better than one"). But underneath this implicit, broad framing of collaboration as inherently valuable, how do we understand and associate collaboration and related concepts of community, product, and process? When we were charged with the task to co-develop an online business writing course with other

instructors, they considered it an opportune moment to study how instructors and students perceive and frame collaboration and collaborative learning in order to address the evolving landscape of collaboration today and in order to better understand how collaboration is valued and defined in business writing courses.

This article presents data gathered from an IRB-approved case study in which five instructors (inclusive of the authors of this article) reflect on their own and their students' values, definitions, and assumptions related to collaborative writing. The case study responds to a departmental assignment to create an online version of an existing business writing course; this task was undertaken (although not assigned) collaboratively, and instructors who had taught sections of this course with their own focus, readings, assignments, and approaches worked together to both create an online template and to consider how the course, which runs between two and four sections per semester, might be more standardized. The case study analyzes the instructors' approaches and emphasis, which are grounded in collaboration as a key, important, valued part of this course, and examines student understandings of collaboration in online and face-to-face classroom environments.

We gathered data during this two-year case study, which followed the five instructors through the creation of the course for one year and then followed these same—and new—instructor and student experiences when teaching and taking the course across two semesters. From being tasked with creating an online version of this course by department administration and then across a year-long process of creating the course template and then a full year (Fall and Spring semesters) offering the course across two modalities (online and face-to-face; pre-COVID pandemic), we gathered data through a combination of survey and email interview. We present our findings from this study, along with our own reflections of the case situation and work, which focuses primarily on 1) understanding collaboration as an almost unanimously shared value/valued practice among teachers and students, 2) understanding how teachers and students define collaboration, its costs and benefits, and finally 3) understanding the relationship between collaboration and community.

The major assignments for the class include a job application packet, a revision memo, a problem-solving communication, a proposal, and a presentation. Of these assignments, three are collaborative team assignments and the other two require peer review. Various minor assignments throughout the semester also require students to work in their groups, which remain consistent. The class is managed through a CMS called Canvas, utilized throughout the University; students are encouraged to use a variety of collaboration tools through the course Canvas site but also tools such as Google suite, Zoom, email, texting, hangouts, Slack, and Whatsapp. Students could choose their preferred communication and collaboration tools with the guidance of their instructor. Along with these collaboration tools, students used Google Docs, Microsoft Word, Google Slides, and Canvas to create and submit assignments. Most students reported using a variety of tools, depending on the assignment.

Just as Spinuzzi et al. (2019) worked to understand how the broad, messy terms of “collaboration” and “community” are defined in coworking and professional spaces, with this case study we work to uncover why collaboration appears to be an inherently accepted shared value among instructors and students, and what collaboration actually means to these same instructors and students.

Our approach to designing a course unanimously emphasized collaboration as a key skill and value in business communication, and attached collaboration to some concept of community. We reflect on our experience within this time bound, specific task of creating and running an online course and work to articulate an understanding of collaboration and community across instructor and student experiences. Finally, we use our data to highlight some shared values and to complicate definitions; as Spinuzzi et al. (2019) argued, when these terms are overly broad and poorly defined, they can become problematic catch-all's that only appear to unify instructional approaches and learning experiences. We argue, then, that there should be more work that steps back from collaboration and community as assumed goals and works to define, understand, and trouble these concepts across various contexts. We hope our work urges instructors to pause and reflect on their own understandings and operationalizations of such key, valued concepts.

Next, we provide a literature review that focuses on the development of collaboration studies in our field and perception of values. Then, we describe our case study approach and specific means of gathering and treating data. Through our findings, we conclude that, while collaboration is indeed a shared value among teachers and students, the connection between collaboration and building community, which appears as an important factor for instructors, is absent for students. We recommend that collaboration be foregrounded and framed as community building. Recognizing that students do not largely view collaboration in terms of community is an important first step for instructors who wish to emphasize community in their courses, particularly when teaching online where so many other traditional ways of establishing community are absent.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Developments of Collaboration Research: A Brief Sketch

Over the last 40 years, collaboration as a qualitative skill has been studied and taught formally across professional and technical communication settings. Here we offer a brief sketch of the field's scholarship on collaboration, drawing from rhetoric and writing studies, technical communication, and business communication. We would like to note that in the literature collaboration has been examined across various activities, such as interpersonal interactions, team decision making, collaborative writing, collaborative learning, and the use of collaboration technologies. Therefore, when we refer to collaboration in this article, we are cognizant of the associations of meaning it has across contexts. We are interested in all of the activities above as they each can be factored into the practice of collaboration by students (e.g., Students are learning about one another in teams, figuring how to share the work, making decisions based on consensus, co-authoring content, critiquing shared work, resolving conflicts, and managing communication).

We begin this sketch with studies about interpersonal interactions. Thanks to the social turn in writing and rhetorical studies, academics who taught composition and professional communication alike had been invested in understanding the role of social interactions and participatory invention in communicative contexts, most notably between the mid to late 1980s. By the end of the 20th century, a few landmark literature had formed the early foundation for collaboration studies in business and technical communication. A

representative voice amid this formative time was Anne R. Gere (1987). In her examination of writer's interdependency in writing groups, Gere noted the social dimension of writing and documented the histories and theories of collaborative learning. Gere effectively traced the movements in late 19th century educational reform that has contributed to the thinking of contemporary collaboration advocates, including Kenneth Bruffee. Bruffee's (1984) "conversation" metaphor for the writing classroom emerged as a popular reference for many who deployed collaborative learning in the early process-theory era. Framing collaboration through this metaphorical lens frames collaboration as part of community building: a focus on "conversation" and on process positions collaboration as likewise focused on community.

For business and technical communication instructors, the elevated attention to collaboration studies has led to increased pedagogical research in terms of collaborative writing in the classroom. In one of the earliest pedagogical instances for collaboration studies, Morgan and colleagues (1987) from Purdue University outlined three crucial aspects for incorporating collaborative projects in business writing courses: the assignment sequence, development of writing groups, and evaluation of student performance. Over in composition studies, John Trimbur (1989) warned teachers who assign collaborative projects of the political dimension of consensus and difference within group interactions, in addition to technicality and logistics. Trimbur's warning has emphasized the community element of collaboration, even while articulating the potential community pitfalls related to group interactions and team dynamics.

At a time when writing instructors were energized to explore innovative ways to facilitate collaborative learning, Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede synthesized concepts from rhetoric, cultural studies, and small group communication studies to establish a research agenda in collaborative writing that serves the needs of writing pedagogy (Ede & Lunsford, 1983, 1985; Lunsford & Ede, 1984, 1986). Building on their scholarship in audience awareness and feminist theory, Ede and Lunsford's (1990) book, *Singular Texts/Plural Authors*, ushered in renewed motivation for research on collaboration in the 21st century.

The succeeding wave of collaboration studies in business and technical communication took a critical look at the implicit as well as explicit factors that influenced collaboration and collaborative learning (Allen et al., 1987; Belanger & Greer, 1992). James Porter (1990) identified the ideologies and power relations between members of collaborative teams and their effects on the outcomes of collaboration. In "Collaboration in a Pressure Cooker," Terry R. Bacon (1990) revealed how tight timelines, prescribed solutions, and other bureaucratic factors challenged collaborators to make-shift their workflow and recognize the socio-rhetorical dimension of the collaboration process. Through a Burkean perspective, Janis Forman (1991) showed burgeoning interests for collaboration research in business writing. The demand for more structured framework and strategies, rather than lore, has led to dedicated forums on collaboration through special issues of journals like the *Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication* (later *BPCQ*; Beard & Rymer, 1990), *Technical Communication* (Bosley & Morgan, 1991), and *Technical Communication Quarterly* (Burnett & Duin, 1993). Mary Lay (Schuster) and William M. Karis's (1991) edited collection, *Collaborative Writing in Industry*, provided additional perspectives and strategies learned from workplace collaborators.

As collaborative learning projects become commonplace in business and technical communication pedagogy, scholar-teachers in the pre-2000 classrooms have turned their attention to understanding the effects of collaborative projects on student learning. Of note is Ann Martin Scott's (1995) survey of student attitudes and perceptions of collaboration in a technical communication course. Scott's findings revealed that students favored collaboration but would like more guidance in collaborating with peers and providing peer criticisms. The sense of community required in collaboration often contradicts the conventional ideals of authorship and authority, as Kathleen Blake Yancey and Michael Spooner (1996) argued in their *CCC* article, "A Single Good Mind." As networked communication technologies advance and permeate our classrooms, the dissonance between productivity and identity presents new challenges to collaboration.

Needless to say, the digital age took collaboration studies to a new key. Like many technology enthusiasts, scholars like Mark Mabrito (1992) and Elizabeth Sanders Lopez and Edwin Nagelhaut (1995) showed how networked technologies can take business communication collaborations beyond the walls of the classroom. As evident in the landmark books, *Computers and Technical Communication* (Selber, 1997), *Language and the Internet* (Crystal, 2001), and *Technical Communication and the World Wide Web* (Lipson & Day, 2005), research on collaboration and technical communication in the early 2000s was primarily driven by the affordances of the internet and the Web. Scott Jones (2005) observed that writers take on new roles in information coordination with the implementation of networked technologies. Instructors were curious if and how digital technologies could better facilitate collaborations. For instance, Paul Benjamin Lowry, Aaron Curtis, and Michelle René Lowry (2004) studied emergent collaborative writing technologies and stressed that communication software serves as a mediator of successful collaborations. The "My Favorite Assignment" sessions and sponsored graduate student panels at the Association for Business Communication annual convention frequently featured pedagogical innovations that leveraged the evolving functions of communication and collaborative technologies. In a brief teaching demonstration, Scott Buechler (2010) shared that Web 2.0 provides interactive capabilities that could enhance collaboration among students and other stakeholders in business communication. Undoubtedly, the emergence of social technologies such as social networking sites and collaborative authoring tools like Google Docs and wikis have forever changed the landscape of collaboration in technical communication practitioners as well as students.

Such important studies implicitly frame collaboration in terms of community and process, rather than in terms of product. This focus on collaboration and community guided how the teachers in our case study understood and approached collaboration. Further, the vast majority of research on collaboration we cited frames collaboration and collaborative work in terms of benefits and necessity; such research lays the groundwork for understanding collaboration as inherently valuable both for students and in the workplace, and frame collaboration as an increasingly important skill in the workplace. Finally, such research supports the assumptions made by our instructors regarding collaboration as a valuable and necessary way to create community (in the classroom and workplace) and the inherent framing of workplace writing as nearly always collaborative and community focused. In our case study reflections and in the treatment of our data, we note this

assumed framework and conceptualization of collaboration and community. We found that this implicit way of valuing and framing collaboration and its pedagogical benefits 1) is potentially distinct from the way that students view the benefits of collaboration (as product rather than community focused; further 2) exemplifies the problem noted by Spinuzzi et al. (2019) regarding unclear or assumed definitions of the seemingly universally valued concepts of *collaboration* and *community*. In the following section, we look specifically at how the literature has worked to define various key terms in collaboration studies and introduce our goals of examining key concepts and values in our own case study.

Defining Terms and Understanding Values

Within the last 10 years, business and technical communication researchers have continued to examine the importance and logistics of collaboration. Notably, the literature agrees that collaboration in professional settings is all but ubiquitous (Lauer & Brumberger, 2019). Much of the communication and writing and work that professionals engage in, across industries, involves collaboration and rests on building community.

For the purposes of this study, we define community as a sustained network of individuals working together to achieve a common goal. The implications of “community” include supportive relationships and positive interactions among team members. We understand community as cooperative and as relational and link community with one potential goal of the collaborative process: making mutually beneficial and supportive connections among teammates. Community might refer to building supportive connections, similar to what Elbow (1973) described as a “community of writers” or to what Spinuzzi et al. (2019) described as cooperative social collectives. The opposite of “community” might include teams that are fragmented or disconnected. In particular, instructors noted “community building” as an inherent benefit of collaborative student projects in an online asynchronous environment, since these projects provided space for students to build relationships and connections with classmates they might not otherwise interact with in an online classroom. As we discuss below, collaborative work does not necessarily do this work of community building, based on student response.

In terms of pedagogy, there is a return to focusing on how students perceive collaboration as a learning activity. Rebecca Pope-Ruark and colleagues (2014), for example, explored student motivations to collaborate with peer teams and community partners. Similarly, Stephanie Swartz, Belem Barbosa, and Izzy Crawford (2019) identified the challenges with international collaboration through the lens of intercultural competency in virtual teams. Postmillennial scholars are conscious about the effects of technologies for collaboration but continue to explore new ways to enrich the learning experience for our students. Regardless of technological advancement, team projects and collaborative writing remain to be a frustrating experience for many instructors and students (Cella & Restaino, 2014). In response, William Duffy (2014), in “Collaboration (in) Theory,” revisited the social dimension of collaboration and presented entrancing rationales for a return to Bruffee’s transactional framework.

Taken as a whole, the development of collaboration research within business and technical communication showed that collaboration studies are influenced by evolving technologies as well as ideologies for working together. Collaboration is widespread and

the importance of building collaboration practice into business writing courses is apparent; however, what it means to collaborate, how collaboration looks in various contexts, and how collaboration is linked to community are important questions that warrant further investigation. Collaboration presents as a *shared value*, and it is often understood as necessary not only in preparing students for the work they will do beyond the university but in building communities within the classroom.

While much research has investigated collaboration tools, methods, and justifications in writing courses, our study picks up on an undertheorized aspect, which Spinuzzi et al. (2019) took on in their research into coworking communities: what is the relationship between collaboration and community building, and how are each of these things imagined and valued, both by instructors and students of business writing courses? What initially sparked our case study investigation was an immediate, seemingly unanimous *valuing* of collaboration, to the point that each instructor, with their distinct pedagogical approach and course emphasis, highlighted collaboration as a fundamental, necessary component of the business writing course. Further, each instructor seemed to value collaboration: collaboration among students was framed as not only useful or necessary, but as inherently beneficial and valuable to students and to the course.

In this study, we analyze data collected over the course of two years (refer to Figure 1) from questions that asked both students and instructors to reflect on collaboration as a shared value and that reflects on perceived connections between collaboration and community building. Our values and assumptions were, in part, rooted in such research that values the importance of collaboration and the relationship between collaboration and community. Our case study compared instructor values and assumptions with student responses to collaborating in online and onsite spaces and situations. Rather than focusing on tools and sites, we reflected on how collaboration is positioned, described, and commonly understood as inherently valuable or beneficial. We positioned collaboration as a shared value, among teachers and students, and we called into question how that value is operationalized differently. We took up the problem articulated by Spinuzzi et al. (2019) that collaboration and community are loosely defined terms and, as such, potentially difficult to “pin down” or operationalize. In other words, while students and instructors today agree that collaboration is “valuable,” “necessary,” or generally “beneficial,” how are they actually understanding the fuzzy concept of “collaboration”? Further, how do students and instructors understand collaboration and community?

Based on the above concerns, we have formulated the following research questions for this study:

1. How do students and instructors value and weigh the importance of collaboration in the context of a business writing course?
2. How do students and instructors define collaboration?
3. How do students and instructors frame the various costs and benefits of collaborative work?
4. How do students and instructors understand the relationship or connection between collaboration and community?

METHODS

We took a case study approach to this project, describing and reflecting on the process of five business writing instructors tasked with developing an online section of an existing business writing course. We followed this case of creating and implementing an online business writing course over a two-year period, reflecting specifically on how collaboration and community emerged as a value throughout the process. We investigated how collaboration and community were defined, framed, and valued among the instructors working to create the course and among the undergraduate students enrolled in various sections of this course across two semesters.

Within our case study framework, which examined this specific project over time, we collected data through various methods over the course of two years during the creation and initial run of the online course. We reflected on our assumptions, challenges, choices, and values. We report in this article on survey results gathered from students who enrolled in this business writing course over two semesters. Through describing and reflecting on our processes as instructors and reporting the survey data from enrolled students, we highlight here moments of dissonance and alignment among students and instructors.

Case Study

The case study approach (Yin, 2018) allowed us an in-depth reflection and analysis of how a business writing course was collaboratively developed, and how this collaborative project reveals shared values and assumptions among business writing instructors who each take a unique approach to teaching and designing this course. We focused on consistencies across our courses, as these suggest core assumptions and beliefs not only related to this course but to how we frame business writing, collaboration, and online instruction more generally. Figure 1 shows a visual schematic of this case study.

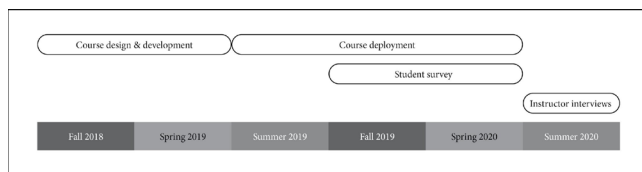


Figure 1. Timeline of our case study.

Our project emerged out of a collaborative effort to develop and launch an online business writing course at a large midwestern research university. In Fall semester 2018, we were tasked with developing an online section of an existing, onground business writing course. Initially, five current and previous course instructors met to discuss standardizing the course across sections and to decide how we might develop this course in a fully online environment.

We met as a team of five instructors over the course of one academic year: we worked together to design the course during Fall and Spring semester of 2018/2019, and the online section of the course launched during the summer semester of 2019. Our survey data were collected during the Fall and Spring semester of 2019/2020. In total, this case study took place over the course of two academic years, beginning with the request from our department chair that an online section of our business writing course be developed. This request came from observations that 1)

this is a popular course (based on how quickly each section and enrollment waitlists fill every semester), 2) online sections of other courses in our department tended to fill quickly, and 3) incentive from administration to meet student needs and college initiatives related to online and technology enhanced learning.

While the task of developing this online course was not originally assigned as a collaborative project, it immediately became collaborative as the lead author of this article reached out to instructors who were currently teaching or had recently taught the course. Of the instructors she reached out to (including the second author), most were willing to collaborate. We met in person 3-4 times during the fall and spring semesters and did much of our work online and asynchronously. This work included:

- Meeting in person to talk about shared approaches and core components of the course;
- Collecting and sharing readings and assignments;
- Developing an online course “shell” using our university’s learning management system (LMS), Canvas; and
- Using email and updating a shared Google drive between meetings to share resources, thoughts, suggestions, reflections, and schedule meetings.

Over the course of our meetings, both in person and through shared Google Drive and Canvas LMS course development, we established that we approached this course distinctly: we used different texts, focused on different assignments, etc. We also noted and built on what we shared in common, despite our distinct approaches. During our conversations, along with some shared readings, assignments, and core genres, we noted a focus on student collaboration as a common, shared approach and component. Through our discussions, collaboration became a key value, and we focused on ways to make collaboration a successful, meaningful focus for the online section of this course.

As we showed earlier, there is already a wide range of literature that demonstrates the importance and value of collaboration in business and technical communication. In addition to the rich tradition of collaborative learning in our field, Lauer and Brumberger (2019) argued that many instances of professional writing are not only collaborative across time and distance, but are also what they refer to as “multimodal editing”; according to their study of workplace writing, folks often work together on documents that they did not originate. Specifically, they contended that it is important to

- Understand what tools students already use;
- Teach the “right” tools/emphasize use of tools for various types of collaboration;
- Understand that workplace collaboration happens often and happens over distance and space—folks collaborate without being in the same room; and
- Define collaboration as working together on all aspects vs. dividing up the work.

In light of strong evidence that workplace writing is collaborative, and based on our own experience and values surrounding collaboration, we designed this online course and our student survey with collaboration as a central, important component. Beyond an important component or crucial skill, we frame collaboration as a *value*. We understand value as something that is assumed to

be inherently beneficial, good, or useful. In the context of this case study, we also understand values as oftentimes unspoken or assumed worldviews that frame how we make decisions regarding what students “need” or what makes writing—either the product or process—“better.” The values attached to writing, to pedagogy, etc. shape the way we understand how writing functions and how it shapes (and is shaped by) various realities. As we present our case study, we also reflect on collaboration not only as an act or a teachable skill but as a value, both for ourselves and for our students.

During our initial meetings, we agreed that collaboration—group work and collaborative writing—is a valued component across each of our sections of this business writing course. We agreed that collaboration should be a central component of the online section of this course. Collaboration seemed to be a shared investment for both business writing as a subject matter and for our pedagogical approaches. As such, our early discussions of adapting this course to an online environment centered around questions of how best to focus collaboration in a business writing class and how to *do* collaboration in an online class.

Throughout our discussions of the importance of collaboration in a business writing course and of the ways to make collaboration “work” in an online course, we realized that our valuing and understanding of collaborative writing and collaborative work more generally was framed by our roles as writing teachers and researchers. We knew why we felt collaboration was important, in other words, and we could make decisions regarding how collaboration might be handled online. However, we wanted a better understanding of how students felt about collaboration, as it relates to a business writing course, to online environments, and their daily academic and non-academic lives.

Gauging Instructors’ Perceptions

In this article, we comment on our recollections regarding the decisions we made during our collaboration and designing of this course. We also conducted a brief email interview consisting of five questions, which we asked all collaborating instructors (including the authors of this paper) to respond to after having worked together. So, the interview took place after the course design project had wrapped up and after the student survey (described below) was completed.

The survey asked instructors to respond, in writing, to the following questions:

1. How do you value and practice collaboration (in any context, for your students and in your own work)?
2. How do you value and weigh the importance of collaboration in the context of a business writing course?
3. How do you prefer to collaborate (in person, digitally, some combination, etc.)? What tools do you consider essential in your own collaborative work?
4. In your experience as an instructor, describe how your students approach collaborative projects. Consider their attitudes, methods, preferred tools, and finished projects.
5. How would you describe the costs and benefits of collaboration (in your own work and for your students)?

These questions were not directly tied to the creation of the online business writing course; rather, the questions focus on how instructors value collaboration, both in their students’ work and in their own work. The five instructors who worked together to build this online course were contacted via email during the summer of 2020; of those five, four responded. Our goal with the email interview questions was to, again, better understand how instructors involved in designing this course perceived the benefits and drawbacks of collaborative work, and how they value and participate in collaboration. We use their responses to highlight differences and similarities regarding student responses to similar questions about collaborative work, both within and outside their courses.

In addition to this more formal gauge of instructor perceptions and relationship to collaboration, we reflect throughout this article on how the decisions we made during our course design reflect our feelings toward collaboration and its importance to business and technical communication. While it falls outside the scope of this project, we might question whether some of our attitudes towards and emphasis of collaboration in writing courses is a reflection of the university department culture, or whether it is in part an instance of sampling bias, as we each agreed initially to take part of this collaborative project ourselves. Our very engagement in this project, as we mention above, suggests an implicit valuing of or bias towards collaborative work as yielding “better” results.

Gauging Students’ Perceptions

In order to gauge student perceptions across two years and 10 sections of this course, we employed a survey method. A questionnaire was distributed digitally to students enrolled across four face-to-face and three online sections of the business and professional writing course. The same survey was administered during the first 4 weeks of fall and spring semester; instructors briefly introduced the project and allowed class time for their students to complete the survey. The rationale for distributing the survey towards the beginning of the semester was to capture student attitudes and perceptions of collaboration in a business writing class before they had completed many collaborative assignments. In other words, we hoped to understand student attitudes towards the beginning of, rather than after having taken, this business writing course.

During the Fall semester, across four sections of 24 students enrolled in each section, the survey had 52 individual responses. Spring semester yielded a lower response rate of 26 responses, and most respondents were enrolled in the online course. Overall, the survey respondents included 28 (35.9%) students enrolled in a face-to-face section of this course, and 50 (64.1%) students enrolled in an online section.

The 15-question survey included multiple choice responses, Likert scale questions asking students to rate experiences, multiple selection questions that allowed students to select more than one response, and some open-ended response questions. The survey asked students to reflect on several key components (see Appendix A for full survey questionnaire):

- General conceptions of collaboration and group work (i.e., How they define or understand collaboration, the benefits and pitfalls of collaboration, whether they enjoy collaborative work, and their expectations of collaborative work in a business writing) course.

- Collaboration tools/technologies.
- Collaborating in online and face-to-face environments.

The survey was created and distributed using Google Forms, and students responded online using their university Google email accounts. We did not retain any email addresses or other identifying student information.

Analyzing Data

We took a grounded-theory approach but modified it with iterative analysis approach (Tie et al., 2019) to make sense of the data collected both from the student survey and the instructor questionnaire. We looked over the answers to the student survey separately, noting and coding for response patterns and paying special attention to language use in the short response questions. The student survey responses impacted the questions we developed for the instructor questionnaire; once we collected and analyzed those responses, we looked again at student survey responses.

This iterative process allowed our data coding to grow organically: Each set of data impacted how we saw and coded the other set. Along with the grounded-theory approach, we utilized reflection and rhetorical analysis both in shaping our survey and questionnaire and in understanding the data. Our initial reflections regarding how we worked together and stressed the importance of collaboration led to our investigation of collaboration as a shared value.

Using the principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we looked for themes to emerge from the initial data collected through student surveys. We found that themes of community building through collaboration and emphasis on final products of collaboration were consistent across student responses. Given these emerging themes, we re-coded the data for collaboration framed either as positive or negative and for collaboration associated with either process or product. We then applied these same categories to instructor reflections. Finally, we coded student and instructor responses that emphasized collaboration as community building—associated with positive experiences throughout the process and as a means to create interpersonal connections or networks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Case Study Observations

Overall, our case study highlighted the perceived value placed on collaboration. Some major observations from our interactions include:

- Our tendency to prioritize or privilege collaboration as a fundamental value.
- Our tendency to associate collaboration with community building.
- Our tendency to place collaboration as a core skill for students to develop *and* as a necessary tool for building community online.

First, we observed collaboration as a core value in the way we approached the assigned task to develop an online course. Although this task was assigned to one faculty member, that individual chose to reach out to other instructors and to pursue the task collaboratively. At no point did the instructors question the value of collaboration as a way to create an online course; rather, the benefits of collaborating seemed apparent. We opted to

spend time meeting together and workshoping ideas rather than developing the online course individually. There was an inherent trust in our collaboration that by pooling our resources we may optimize the design process and create richer course contents for our students. This perceived implicit valuing of collaboration—that it would yield a better product—framed our case study and various data collection methods. After investigating this perceived value, we found a similar overall sentiment among students: collaboration may be difficult for a variety of reasons, but it is inherently valuable because collaboration leads to a better finished product.

Second, collaboration appeared as a core value in our pedagogy and work with students as, early during our meeting stages, we acknowledged that we each place importance on student collaboration in our individual approaches to teaching business writing. As instructors we agreed that collaboration is a required competency for the modern workplace regardless of the profession. Thus, we were keen to include at least one collaborative project in the assignment sequence for the new online course. We also committed to giving students the tools to facilitate collaboration, including its theories, technologies, and best practices.

Finally, collaboration remained a guiding value or core tenet in the ongoing deploying of the online business writing course. While we acknowledge difficulties of building an online course around collaborative student projects, at no point did we raise the idea of foregoing collaborative assignments. Rather, much of our work became focused on the best or most effective ways to help students collaborate in an online course. We shared stories of successes and failures in our own pedagogies, exchanged teaching strategies, and shared student examples as a way to establish a shared toolkit for sound pedagogy.

As noted above, we observed that collaboration was valued among instructors both in its ability to yield better projects (in terms of building a new course or in terms of students producing better papers) and in its ability to build community. A key concern among business writing instructors, throughout our case study, was building community among students, particularly in an asynchronous online course. We understood collaboration among students, and collaborative writing projects, as a way to build that community that might happen more organically in a face-to-face classroom that could rely on real time student discussions and relationship building. Despite this shared understanding of the connection between collaboration and community building among instructors, students tended to only value collaboration as a way to create better products. In fact, students tended to associate any negative aspects of collaboration with what might be understood as community (i.e., group members not participating, the difficulty of having to rely on others, the difficulty regarding communication and workload).

Below, we describe our findings regarding instructor perceptions and compare those to our findings regarding student perceptions, making a special note of this dissonance between students and instructors regarding the relationship between collaboration (which both groups overwhelmingly frame as valuable) and community building.

Instructor Perceptions

Noted earlier, all five instructors agreed that collaboration is a key component of business writing and observed collaboration to be an expectation in the workplace. This sentiment was shared in the

instructors' reflections as well. The instructors were all invested in incorporating collaborative learning and writing components in their respective business writing courses, even in the online version of the course. It is worth noting that prior to this case study, collaboration was not a required part of the course. However, all five of the instructors surveyed here have included collaborative projects in their business writing courses as they believed that collaboration yields diverse perspectives and expertise, and thus may lead to more meaningful learning and exchanges among students. As one instructor put it, collaboration helps foster "a sense of community" in the classroom, be it onsite or online. This instructor also argued that the lack of collaboration can be a "very limiting and frustrating experience for students. In addition, it limits their ability to learn skills."

One instructor expressed that he used collaborations "as a means to expand my own horizons." This instructor noted that collaboration benefits his learning by being exposed to more viewpoints and skill sets to a project. For this reason, he is motivated to help students learn the same way. This sentiment is shared with another instructor who saw collaborations as rewarding because it can generate a sense of collegiality, a feeling that is "most welcome since so much of academic work seems to be done in relative isolation."

The above observations from instructors frame the benefits of collaboration in terms of community building, or something we might call *process*. Instructors emphasized the benefits of collaboration in their own growth or learning and in forming relationships with colleagues; this link between collaboration and community, in the sense of relationships, personal growth, and a relief from isolation, is present as instructors describe both how they benefit and how students benefit from collaboration.

In addition to the benefits of collaboration associated with community, instructors noted that student collaboration tends to produce better finished products. The "inevitably different experiences, lenses, perspectives that are brought to a collaborative project" can contribute positively to the quality of the collaborative project, another instructor noted. In reflecting on their own practices, the instructors recognized the benefits of collaboration in producing scholarship and in designing and teaching courses. One instructor reflected in length:

Collaboration is very integral to my work as a scholar and as a teacher. As a scholar/researcher, I find that the collaboration process makes the work better in most cases. Co-researchers often will ask questions about the work that I would not have considered if I were working on the project myself. [...] In teaching, collaboration helps me to learn about readings, lessons, course design strategies, and assignments that enhance students' learning. [...] I try to help colleagues develop their own teaching strategies in a similar way—often by sharing assignment ideas or course design strategies with them when they first start teaching the course.

Even when focusing on product, instructors still tended to return to the connection between collaboration and community. Collaboration yielded better products, as noted above, because they provided a connection among individuals who could then learn and grow together. The "better product" was, in fact, framed as a reflection of this community.

In addition to noting the various benefits, and while collaboration was continually understood as valued and valuable, we also

noted the challenges or costs to collaborative work. Interestingly, these costs were also strongly associated with the relationship between collaboration and community. Among the biggest "costs" of collaboration, according to the five instructors, was time. All instructors in some respect reflected about the concerns for varying work habits and speed when collaborating with others. "Collaborative projects can take longer because there is the work of coordinating schedules and holding other team members accountable," one instructor's response summed it up. Any seasoned instructors who have assigned collaborative assignments would agree that student conflicts are common in team processes. Our instructors' reflections also captured this concern: "Collaboration does not necessarily mean dividing the workload and making things easier... it usually is the opposite of that." Indeed, the difficulties of periodic disagreement can be seen as a disadvantage of collaboration even for instructors. Even though it's been observed by early research in the last century (see Bosley & Morgan, 1991; Burnett & Duin, 1993), both time and interpersonal conflict remain the top concerns in collaborative learning today. One of our instructors borrowed an African adage to iterate this conviction, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

Throughout our data, a key and repeated point is the way that instructors consistently valued collaboration and the way that this value was tied to community. Implicitly, collaboration was believed to be beneficial and valuable because of this link between collaborative work and building community. When teased apart further, community—developing projects with other people, avoiding isolation, drawing on others' experiences and points of view—was also understood as inherently or implicitly valuable. Even as the costs or struggles came up in our conversations and email interviews, these costs were understood as always outweighed by the benefits of community building. When comparing differences between collaboration costs and benefits in online versus face-to-face settings, instructors acknowledged increased potential difficulty in online spaces, but also an increased need for collaboration in online spaces. Specifically, because online courses carry the potential for increased isolation among students and because there is less room for organic community building in an online course, instructors emphasized the specific need for collaborative projects in an online version of our business writing class. The underlying assumption that collaboration provides the opportunity for community building rests on the ways that instructors associate collaboration with community and the ways that they value both collaboration and community.

Student Perceptions

With the underlying assumptions that 1) collaboration is valuable and the benefits outweigh the costs, 2) collaboration is inherently tied to community building, and 3) community building is necessary in online courses, our student survey focused not only how they perceived the value of collaborative work but also on their perceptions of collaboration in online and offline spaces. The results of the survey mostly confirmed what we suspected regarding student attitudes towards collaboration in online and face-to-face business writing courses. Namely, students generally reported that they found collaborating easier in face-to-face settings. Before we discuss the findings that stood out from the survey, we present the following the major takeaways:

- Students reported more comfort or ease collaborating in face-to-face settings compared to online settings.

- Students reported using a variety of tools to collaborate both in and out of the course.
- Overall, students did not prefer using the Canvas LMS site for collaboration and instead preferred to collaborate using other platforms or tools with which they were already familiar.
- Students reported that the major benefit to collaborative writing was multiple perspectives/stronger quality of work.
- Students reported that a major pitfall of collaborative writing was “social loafing,” or the perception that some group members would not pull their own weight.

Among the questions that students were asked in the survey, we wanted to better understand student expectations related to collaboration and how they would describe their comfort level regarding collaboration. Further, we wanted to know the student comfort level regarding particular collaborative environments and various collaborative tools. Finally, we wanted students to define collaboration and to articulate specific costs and benefits that they associate with collaborative work. In this way, we gauge whether students, like instructors, value collaboration or view collaboration as inherently valuable, and whether they associate collaboration with community building (in either positive or negative ways).

Regarding expectations, students were asked to select an amount of collaborative writing that they were expecting to complete in a business writing course. Students were then asked to articulate their own definitions of collaborative writing, the major benefits and challenges, and to rank various methods or tools for collaborating.

Interestingly, although most of the student responses (64.1%) to the survey came from students enrolled in an online section, most students (a combined 71.4%) preferred to collaborate in a face-to-face, in person setting (either primarily verbally or through a combination of verbal communication and online tools). Student response rate may have been impacted by instructor encouragement and enthusiasm for the project: instructors teaching online sections encourage their students to respond to the survey. Further, students were already used to interacting with the course material and instructor in an online environment, so completing an online survey aligned with their expectations of the course. Students in onsite sections were also asked to complete the survey online, but may have lacked the framework to participate in asynchronous course related activities. The lower response rate certainly presents a limitation for our data collection.

To learn about students’ use of the course LMS, we asked students how “easy is it to collaborate with [their] classmates using the course Canvas site (and any features available through that site)”, and 45.4% of the students do not find the LMS to be a convenient platform for collaboration (Figure 2).

Overall, how easy is it to collaborate with our classmates using the course Canvas site (and any feature available through that site)?
77 responses



Figure 2. Student responses to the question regarding use of Canvas LMS for peer collaboration.

When designing our course, we assumed that most of our students would be comfortable using online tools to collaborate. Our survey results appear to reinforce that assumption, as 85.9% of respondents replied that they already use digital or mobile communication tools 6 or more times per week to communicate. While this finding was not surprising, it is interesting that students still reported a preference for collaborating “in person,” despite their frequent use and reported comfort with digital and mobile communication technologies.

Only 18.2% of survey respondents said that they feel more comfortable collaborating “in an online space”; this question was broken up between two potential responses of “In an online space, using digital tools to communicate synchronously” and using digital tools to communicate “asynchronously” (see Figure 3). The questions of collaborating using either asynchronous or synchronous digital tools suggest that there is something about working “face-to-face” that is not replicated even using synchronous digital communication tools, and that the “face-to-face” collaboration is overwhelmingly preferred, even among students who self-select an online version of this course. In other words, we found it interesting that, given students have the option to take this class face-to-face, and given that the online course appears to be the most popular format, and even given that the majority of survey respondents were enrolled in this online course, students still preferred collaborating offline.

Complete the following sentence: I feel more comfortable collaborating...
77 responses

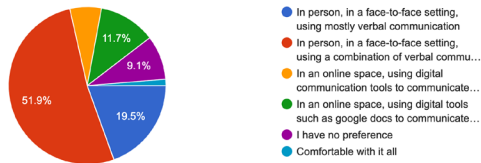


Figure 3. Student responses to the question about their comfort level with in-person (physical) versus online collaboration. More than 50% of the responses indicated preference for in person, face-to-face meetings

The majority of students surveyed indicated a preference for in-person collaboration, but using various digital tools to supplement or during in-person meetings. A smaller percentage (19.5%) indicated a preference for in-person collaboration using mostly verbal communication. Whereas 29.9% replied that they had no preference/felt comfortable with any type of collaboration. Only 18.2% preferred to collaborate in an online space, and of that 18.2%, 11.7% preferred to do so asynchronously. The most interesting finding, for us, was a preference for collaborating in person *and* using digital tools such as google docs. So, much in the same way that framed our own collaborative project of developing this online course, students preferred a combination of in-person meetings and digital, asynchronous tools when collaborating on projects.

Similarly to a preference for face-to-face collaboration, students reported increased ease with face-to-face collaboration. Students were asked how easy it is for them to collaborate in an online course, ranking their level of ease between 1 (very easy) and 5 (very difficult). While few students said that it was “very difficult,” most fell between a 3 and a 4 (see Figure 4).

Overall, how easy is it for you to collaborate on a group assignment in an online course?
77 responses

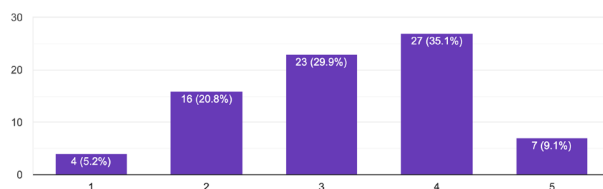


Figure 4. A comparison of students’ rating for ease of collaboration in an online course. More than one-third of the responses rated it four (difficult) out of five (very difficult).

Figure 5 shows almost an inverse of responses for ease in collaboration in a face-to-face class. When asked how easy it is to collaborate in a face-to-face course, students rated their level of ease between 1 (very easy) and 5 (very difficult). While again most students avoided selecting either a 1 or 5, most students selected a 1 or 2. The trends of the two charts, taken together, suggest increased ease in face-to-face collaboration and decreased ease of online collaboration.

Overall, how easy is it for you to collaborate on a group assignment in a face-to-face or “onground” course?
77 responses

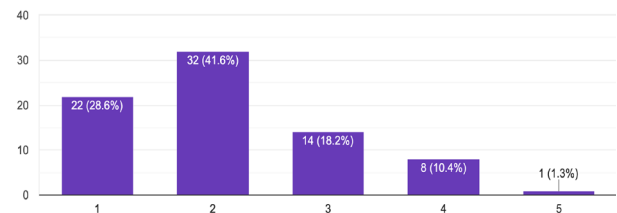


Figure 5. A comparison of students’ rating for ease of collaboration in a face-to-face/“onground” course. More than one-third of the responses rated it two (easy) out of five (very difficult).

The data from the previous two questions indicate that students were more comfortable collaborating in a face-to-face than in an online setting. While this particular finding matched our assumptions, we did note that overall students find it easy to collaborate in a face-to-face course. When asked how comfortable students felt, in general, collaborating in their courses, 50% rated their comfort a 1 or 2 (highest level of comfort). When asked how easy it was collaborating specifically in a face-to-face classroom setting, 70.2% rated their ease level a 1 or 2 (highest level of ease).

The level of ease or comfort collaborating in a face-to-face setting was higher than we had assumed, and informs how we frame online collaboration going forward. For example, knowing that students find collaboration easy, but find online collaboration more difficult, could impact how we design online collaboration in ways that draws on their comfort collaborating face-to-face. These findings also warrant further investigation into comfort or ease of online collaboration. Further, while students indicated high levels of dis-ease collaborating in an online course, they also indicated a preference for collaborating in a hybrid manner: Combining both face-to-face meetings and digital tools. These findings could inform various ways to frame collaboration in online courses, encouraging students to create some hybrid way to work despite the class meeting fully online.

Perceived Costs and Benefits

Although our case study began with a focus on the *hows* of collaboration, specifically in an online course, examination of our own data led us to reframe our project as an attempt to better understand the implicit *whys* of collaborative work. In other words, we take on a similar task to Spinuzzi et al. (2020) in that we recognize a tendency to value collaboration without understanding specifically why it is useful and, further, to assume some positive connection between collaboration and community building.

Along with asking about preference and ease related to student experience with collaboration, the survey asked about benefits and drawbacks of collaboration. These questions were posed as short answer questions, and students could write any benefits or drawbacks that they associate with collaborative work.

Students tended to focus their comments about perceived benefits of collaboration on the finished product; instructor interviews, on the other hand, focused on benefits related to the experience of collaboration and on the role that collaboration plays in building community. For example, student responses to the question “What do you consider some of the biggest benefits of group assignments?” one student responded “the experience of working in a group environment,” and another responded with “Learning to balance leadership and following skills, as well as being willing to delegate, share the task, and remember to share and take in opinions respectfully.” These are examples of responses that indicated a connection between collaboration and the value of community, or that associated positive elements of collaboration with community. Two similar comments that we tied to the value of collaboration and community are “working on communication skills” and “learn things from others.” While most of the answers to this question pertained to the final assignment or finished product being “better” when completed collaboratively, these sample responses suggest that, like instructors, some students do understand collaboration benefits beyond the finished product.

While students more frequently tied the benefits of collaboration to the product, instructors focused more on process, specifically tying the benefits of their own and their students’ collaborative work to the value of building community. Instructors did also remark that the benefits of collaboration included both a better finished product and a richer experience. For example, several instructors noted such benefits as “the conversations you have,” “the feelings of collegiality,” and “the fact that you can share the labor involved.”

As for perceived costs, both students and instructors mentioned increased time and potential group member conflicts. Neither group mentioned costs of collaboration associated with the finished product: for both groups, any costs or negative perceptions of collaboration had to do with navigating differences of opinion, differences in work ethic, certain group members not contributing equally, and the need to spend extra time on a collaborative project (as compared to an individual one). For example, one instructor noted that “collaborative projects will slow me down” and another noted that “it may take longer to accomplish something because of varying work habits.” Both of these costs are associated with time; we also associate these costs with process rather than product.

Understanding how students and instructors frame the costs and benefits of collaborative work in terms of either focusing on the process or the community benefits (i.e., working with others, learning to communicate, making connections and building community with others) or by focusing on the final product (i.e., a better piece of written work, a more polished text, a more nuanced or substantiated research project) could inform further research into collaboration. It is interesting to note distinctions among instructors and students in where the focus lies, and it is worth reflecting on how we discuss these costs and benefits with our students. While it seems evident that both students and instructors do recognize both benefits and costs of collaborative work, framing the costs in terms of process/community (students) and the benefits in terms of finished product (students) could illustrate a need to

further emphasize the benefits of collaborate work attached to the process and to building a community/learning to communicate. It is possible that, as instructors, we anticipate our students will run into trouble working in groups, and (as an attempt to navigate those concerns) we emphasize the benefits of a “better paper” or emphasize how to overcome to costs of working with others rather than stress the inherent benefits of working collaboratively, even in situations where problems arise.

These data suggest that, while both students and instructors in this case study placed inherent value in collaboration, and while both instructors and students agreed that collaboration is both necessary in a business writing course because of the demands in the field, there was a distinction between how instructors and students associated collaboration and community building. Instructors focused on an assumed connection between collaboration and community building; students placed more emphasis on collaboration as beneficial because the final product is “better.” In fact, students tended to frame any community aspects of collaboration (working with other students who may not pull their own weight or difficulties with communication and work styles) as costs rather than benefits. Instructors, on the other hand, assumed that collaboration builds community among students, and the instructors involved in this case study individually assumed that an online course could use more collaborative work as a way to build that community.

This dissonance between instructors and studies warrants further research and reflection, as it indicates a disconnection regarding how collaboration is framed and understood. Further, this dissonance and disconnection presents an opportunity for more explicit work on the part of instructors as they build collaboration into their courses regarding framing collaboration as community building; in other words, instructors might consider how they can be more explicit about how students can participate in collaborative work with an emphasis on community and process rather than product. Extra readings or activities can help to do this work, along with conversations with students that state expectations regarding how collaboration might work to create community.

Finally, an interesting point for further research may be in the agreement that collaboration yields better work. Both students and instructors, overwhelmingly, referred to the final product and quality of work when listing the benefits of collaboration, while there were mixed results related to costs and benefits of the collaborative process. Any broad assumption—that collaboration yields a better final product—is worth reflection and further discussion both among instructors as they design assignments and with our students as we frame the costs and benefits of collaboration.

CONCLUSION

Limitations

The small sample size of our study poses constraints on what we can say about the generalizability of our findings. While the student survey was somewhat representative of the population of students we served in our online sections, the instructors’ responses were limited by a convenience sample and their potentially biased opinions about online teaching due to their role in the deployment of these online courses. The instructors who agreed to participate in this study were the ones who were invested in online pedagogy plus the two authors. We recognize this positionality and how they might inform the perception of collaboration by students in online courses. We also recognize potential biases that may have skewed

our perceptions on the data given the authors' involvement in the reflections. However, we were confident the ground-theory method and iterative analysis helped neutralize our subjective perspectives.

Dissonances

While our case study confirmed many assumptions that we shared at the beginning of our course development project, we noted some key dissonances and so we suggest further research and reflection on such observations. Students self-selected an online version of this course; there are 2-3 onsite/face-to-face sections offered each semester, typically including an evening once per week section. Further, as mentioned above, the online sections typically fill much more quickly: the course caps at 24 students, and while it is open to any undergraduate student, because juniors and seniors can register earlier, the course typically fills with juniors and seniors. Each section of the course typically fills and the waitlists for each course also fill. All of this data points to the conclusions that 1) this is a popular course and 2) the online section is more popular or more desirable than the face-to-face sections. As such, students prefer or self-select the online section over the face-to-face section, either due to scheduling or because they prefer an asynchronous, online format.

Despite such evidence to suggest preference for enrolling in an online section of a business writing course, the survey data suggest that students prefer collaborating in face-to-face situations, even with the aid of online collaboration tools. One important point to consider regarding the context of our course case study is that most students live on or near campus; so, even students enrolled in online courses very typically have easy access to campus. Further, while students can select some online classes, the majority of undergraduate courses are offered onsite. Students enrolled in one or two online courses but who are taking a full credit load will likely still take most of their classes in a face-to-face format. There are very few fully online students, and in our department, it would not be possible to only enroll in online courses. So, students taking this course online likely are still able to meet up with group members in person.

The shift to online learning that happened in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic may have significantly changed how students engage each other, since stay-at-home/shelter-in-place mandates and university campus closures make it challenging, or impossible, for students to collaborate in person. Moreover, the shift to online instruction has likely changed the comfort level—and perhaps preference—regarding certain online collaboration and video-conferencing tools.

The major potential dissonance, here, is that students seem to prefer, based on enrollment data, the online section of this course. However, students reported a preference for in person collaboration. The survey also suggests that most students expected collaborative writing or collaborative projects to be part of this business writing class, and so, presumably enrolled in the online section knowing that they would need to collaborate.

Perceived Values

According to our survey data, students saw the value in collaboration. They identified collaboration as valuable in that it allowed students to draw on various expertise and knowledge and ultimately led to a “better” end product. Instructor responses to the questionnaire—and our discussions during course development—indicated the same assumption. So, collaboration is a value tied to

a better product or a better paper. Various values or assumptions that tie into this way of valuing collaboration include beliefs that more “voices” or more insight leads to a stronger project—working together is preferred over working alone. Going forward, we will be more transparent with students by discussing this assumption or value attached to collaboration. Is it always the case that more input or multiple authors yields a better project? If we generally accept that collaborative work is “better” or stronger than individually developed projects, why is that the case? What can these beliefs and values tell us about communication, research, and writing more broadly?

As instructors, our collaboration took place in a face-to-face setting, but we also worked together in an online space by sharing resources and by creating a course learning management site, like Canvas. Further, we used email and Google Drive to brainstorm, share resources, schedule meetings, and follow up on conversations or ideas. However, most of our conversations and decisions took place in a face-to-face setting.

There is an interesting connection, both among students and instructors, between collaboration and *community*. For instructors, community is expressed as a value associated with collaboration: one benefit of collaboration includes fostering a sense of community. For students, however, the perceived benefits of collaboration focus heavily on product rather than experience. However, while a positive association between collaboration and community seems missing from student responses, both students and instructors express the costs of collaboration in ways that tie collaboration to negative community experiences. In other words, the costs for both (such as conflicts among team members, difference in work ethic, extra time spent on the process) are tied to the experience and to the collaborative community. The benefits, however, are distinct for instructors and students; for instructors, community is an expressed benefit, as well as a motivating factor for developing effective collaboration experiences (in their own work and for their students). For students, the product remains the main benefit.

Finally, the data gathered from this case study indicated a strong tendency for both students and instructors to see the value of collaboration—rather framed in terms of the finished product or the process. They also indicated a strong preference, from both students surveyed and instructors involved in this case study, for a hybrid model of collaboration. Going forward, we can work to frame collaboration and design collaborative assignments with that hybrid model in mind. Some questions for future consideration might be:

- If students prefer a hybrid approach to collaboration, how can we create that environment in an online course?
- In what ways can we enhance the experience of distance collaboration in a hybrid situation?
- How can we reframe collaboration from working together to working as a community?
- If we value collaboration, what does that say about how we understand the importance and work of the field?

Our case study has provided an opportunity for instructors to reflect on their own practices, values, and assumptions regarding not only how students prefer to collaborate, but also *why* or *how* collaboration might emerge as a shared value or core tenet of business and technical communication. Further, our study opens up a

conversation about how, and whether, collaboration and community are clearly defined concepts among business writing teachers and students. While the understanding of what collaboration means appears consistent across instructor and student responses and practices, the relationship between collaboration and community was not consistent. While the instructors in our study strongly connected collaboration with community building, students valued collaboration almost exclusively in terms of creating a better finished product, not as a way to foster community. In fact, students tended to associate any “drawbacks” or “challenges” with the community aspects of collaborative work. This disconnection warrants further research, as well as increased reflection and conversation among instructors and students.

APPENDIX A: STUDENT SURVEY

Please take this brief survey for a project measuring student engagement with Canvas and student understanding of and feelings toward collaborative writing.

1. Are you currently enrolled in a section of WRIT 3029W that meets in an online or a face-to-face (onground) format? Mark only one.

- I am enrolled in an online section of WRIT 3029W
- I am enrolled in a face-to-face (onground) section of WRIT 3029W
- Other:

2. How do you define “collaborative writing?”

3. How much collaborative writing do you expect to do in a business writing course? Mark only one.

- A lot (3 or more assignments)
- Some (1-2 assignments)
- None (all assignments written individually)
- Other:

4. How often do you already use digital or mobile communication tools (such as slack, google hangouts, texting, snapchat, etc.) to communicate with friends or peers? Mark only one.

- Often (6 or more times per week)
- Sometimes (3-5 times per week)
- Rarely (1-2 times per week)
- Almost never (fewer than 1 time per week)

5. In general, how comfortable do you feel collaborating on written assignments for your courses? Mark only one.

Very comfortable 1 2 3 4 5 Not comfortable at all

6. Complete the following sentence: I feel more comfortable collaborating...

Mark only one.

- In person, in a face-to-face setting, using mostly verbal communication
- In person, in a face-to-face setting, using a combination of verbal communication and digital tools (such as google docs)
- In an online space, using digital communication tools to communicate synchronously (at the same time/in real time)
- In an online space, using digital tools such as google docs to communicate asynchronously (not at the same time, but each contributor participating in their own time)
- I have no preference
- Other:

7. When collaborating on a group assignment for a course, which tools do you prefer to use? Check all that apply.

- Canvas
- Google Drive
- Google Hangouts
- Skype or Zoom
- Slack
- Texting
- Email
- Other:

8. Overall, how easy is it for you to collaborate on a group assignment in an online course? Mark only one.

Very easy 1 2 3 4 5 Very difficult

9. Overall, how easy is it for you to collaborate on a group assignment in a face-to-face or “onground” course? Mark only one.

Very easy 1 2 3 4 5 Very difficult

10. What do you consider some of the biggest benefits of group assignments?

11. What do you consider some of the biggest difficulties or drawbacks of group assignments?

12. Overall, how easy is it to collaborate with our classmates using the course Canvas site (and any feature available through that site)? Mark only one.

- Very easy: I most prefer to collaborate using Canvas
- Moderately easy: Canvas is not my top choice but I don't mind using the course site for collaboration
- Not easy at all: I prefer to do my collaborating on group projects outside the course canvas site, using other tools
- Moderately or very easy, but I still prefer to use other tools outside the course Canvas site
- Other:

13. How often do you log in to your course Canvas site? Mark only one.

- Multiple times per day
- Every day
- Several times per week
- Once per week
- Less than once per week

14. How do you most often access your course Canvas site? Mark only one.

- Desktop or laptop computer
- Mobile device (such as smartphone or tablet) using the Canvas app
- Mobile device (such as smartphone or tablet) using a web browser
- Other:

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