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Writing as Advocacy: Teaching Writing Across the Disciplines from a Mental Health Perspective

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Abstract: This paper responds to calls for greater advocacy and accessibility in technical and professional communication pedagogy and practice by outlining a unique approach to conceptualizing Writing Across the Disciplines curriculum, one that encourages students to engage in mental health (self-)advocacy, reconceptualize mental health (dis)ability, and view writing studies as capable of engendering access to rhetoric useful for engaging in productive mental health discourse. In this article, I outline key components of my curriculum, including assignments and learning objectives, and ultimately judge the success of this model in practice based on end-of-semester surveys. Student responses emphasized the value of situating writing studies in social justice contexts, indicating that adopting mental health studies as a framework for teaching Writing Across the Disciplines may provide a practical means of responding to calls for improving advocacy and accessibility in TPC pedagogy.

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Introduction

Recent scholarship in technical and professional communication calls for a paradigm shift in TPC pedagogies and practices that explicitly address values of social justice, including advocacy and accessibility. A substantial subfield within TPC has addressed this call, creating an exciting confluence of recent scholarship. For instance, Haas (2012), Mckoy (2020), and Jones (2016) have moved to critique overly pragmatic and expedient conceptualizations of technical and professional communication and place a greater emphasis on diversifying conceptualizations of TPC to include discussions of identity, positionality, and other concepts central to social justice. In particular, Jones advocates for a broader, more socially just and contextualized approach to TPC that allows for "more genuine and critical interrogation of how work in TPC impacts the human experience" (p. 342). Like Henning & Bemer (2016), Jones calls for a drastic rethinking and recontextualization of the field of TPC, arguing that:

> Similar to the manner in which scholars pushed for the integration of ethics into technical communication research and pedagogy… that resulted in ethics becoming commonplace in TPC studies and instruction, scholars must now encourage a reconceptualization of the field to incorporate contexts of social justice and human rights (p. 344).

Authors including Jones & Williams (2017), Hopton & Walton (2019), and Palmeri (2006) identify key components of developing more socially just approaches to TPC pedagogy and practice, which require amplifying advocacy and accessibility in TPC instruction and application. These components not only provide a groundwork for developing more socially just approaches to TPC, but also enable us to better "recognize everyday TPC as a site of power" (Jones & Williams, p. 427), and, as instructors and practitioners, practically envision a possible next step in TPC's ongoing "humanistic journey," a push that originated in the mid-1970s and early 1980s, called for by Miller (1979), Connors (1982), and Katz (1992), among others.

Calls for the reconceptualization of TPC curricula and pedagogy from a more socially just perspective have not gone unanswered. Authors including Jones & Walton (2018) and Walton et al. (2019) have theorized approaches to TPC pedagogy and practice that centralize social justice for the sake of redressing inequities and engendering cultural and institutional change. Additionally, other authors have proposed revisions to TPC pedagogies that "recognize the historical, economic, and sociopolitical forces that promote injustices and normalize them… [and] support and enact systems that magnify the agency of oppressed and under-resourced people and communities" (Walton & Agboka, 2021, pp. 3-4). To that end, Gonzales et al. (2021), Rose & Cardinal (2021), and Lane (2021) have offered theoretical frameworks and approaches for centralizing gender and race, reflecting on social justice work, and broaching issues of social justice with students in TPC pedagogy, respectively. Lane's work in particular presents strategies for fusing together design thinking and social design to "enhance… pedagogies to engage with social justice issues in classroom settings" (p. 29).

In addition, research has been conducted to examine strategies for enacting social justice that are embedded in the pursuit of coalition building at various sites of technical communication, including in the TPC classroom (Baniya, et al., 2022), and the importance of foregrounding positionality in socially just approaches to TPC pedagogy (Wang et al., 2022). Agboka &

Dorpenyo (2022) write however that while the "social justice turn in technical and professional communication (TPC) has inspired a substantial body of progressive scholarship and discussion… it is not clear how these scholarly efforts have shaped… programmatic and curricular efforts" (p. 38). Therefore, despite the work of authors like Shelton (2019), Clem (2023), and others who have published accounts of their attempts to implement more socially just pedagogies and curricula in their own TPC classrooms, the development of practical approaches to enacting more socially just TPC pedagogies have generally lagged behind the development of more theoretical approaches. As such, as Agboka & Dorpenyo explain, this trend necessitates a greater discussion of practical approaches to implementing more socially just TPC pedagogies and of how existing approaches can be effectively constellated and deployed more tangentially across TPC curricular efforts.

In this article, I describe how I redesigned a Writing Across the Disciplines course to achieve several of the aims named by the authors above, including centralizing discussions of social justice issues. Specifically, I describe how I achieved these aims by moving away from the course's core emphasis on developing knowledge of prescriptive usage rules as they apply to disciplinary writing. Instead, I conceptualized writing studies from a critical disabilities perspective informed by Oliver's (1983) social model of disability in order to address Agboka (2013) other others' calls for a paradigm shift in TPC that emphasizes TPC scholarship, research, and practices that "intersect with social justice" (p. 30). I also explain how I aimed to position myself in accordance with Jones's (2016) reconceptualization of the technical communicator as advocate, a role that requires TPC instructors and practitioners to "engage issues of power and legitimacy… by taking a critical stance toward social justice and diversity… [and] acknowledge the impact of communication as a way of mediating the human experience" (p. 343). Lastly, I respond to Obermark's (2019) call for the development of TPC curricula that positions disability as "generative rather than deficit" and "at the center… rather than isolated" (p. 196).

The existing curriculum of most Writing Across the Disciplines courses requires minimal reconfiguration to meet the current social justice and curricular aims of popular and emergent technical and professional communication pedagogies. For instance, many of the major assignments common to popular WAD curricula aim to teach students how to communicate technically and professionally in cross-disciplinary ways (a learning objective common to TPC curricula). Reconfiguring existing WAD curriculum to meet the current social justice and curricular aims of popular technical and professional pedagogies is hugely beneficial to students as well. As Britton (1974) and others have explained, "technical writing, despite its misleading name, is applicable to all fields" because it emphasizes the development of effective cross-disciplinary and contextualized communication skills, both of which are extremely valuable to students regardless of whether their major dictates that they enroll in WAD or TPC courses. These are just a few benefits of reconfiguring existing WAD curricula to better align with current TPC curricular aims. Later, I argue further for the value of incorporating TPC pedagogical aims in WAD curriculum when I discuss specific course outcomes common to university WAD and TPC courses. In my conclusion, I offer additional suggestions for how existing aspects of WAD curricular efforts can be implemented in TPC curriculum to help students better conceptualize a more socially just TPC by, for instance, critically engaging with more literary and pop culture-based perspectives on mental illness and other cognitive disability.

To lay the theoretical groundwork for my course, I begin by outlining advocacy and accessibility as key components of a more socially just approach to TPC pedagogy and practice. I then provide an overview of Oliver's social model of disability and explain how I applied this critical disabilities studies approach by conceptualizing TPC instruction in my Writing Across the Disciplines course from a mental health studies perspective, which I argue also lends itself to the pursuit of the social justice aims specifically noted by Jones and Obermark. I also provide a detailed overview and rationale of my course's redesigned curriculum, highlighting the ways in which it reconceptualizes traditional Writing Across the Disciplines curriculum that prioritizes the development of students' knowledge of prescriptive usage rules. To that end, I describe how specific projects, discussions, assignments, and aims were designed to help not only meet the course's intended learning outcomes, but also encourage students to engage in mental health (self-)advocacy, reconceptualize mental health (dis)ability, and view writing studies as engendering access to rhetoric useful for engaging in productive mental health discourse. I also argue that this approach provides a practical, accessible method for instructors to better incorporate social justice aims into their TPC pedagogy alongside approaches centralizing the concepts of identity, positionality, and others designed to improve the overall accessibility and socially just nature of recent TPC curricular efforts.

I ultimately judge the success of this model in practice based on end-of-semester surveys completed by students gauging their perceptions of their own roles as (self-)advocates, mental health as (dis)ability, and their ability to effectively access and engage with disciplinary writing that participates in discourse directly related to mental health, illness, histories, and associated concepts. At the conclusion of my article, I discuss my methodology, its limitations, and results. Based on the results of my research, I ultimately claim that approaching TPC curriculum design from a critical disabilities perspective and utilizing studies of mental health as a framework for teaching Writing Across the Disciplines may provide a practical means of responding to calls for improving advocacy and accessibility in TPC pedagogy that works well in tandem with existing contemporary approaches to emphasizing identity, positionality, mad studies, and other socially just concepts in the TPC classroom.

Advocacy and Accessibility: Cornerstones of a More Socially Just TPC

Jones and Williams (2018) begin centering advocacy as a "new" cornerstone of more socially just TPC by writing that "technical communication is not always in the service of empowerment or user agency" (p. 384) and is often "complicit in supporting and promoting oppressive practices that have social, cultural, embodied, and material impacts on communities" (p. 371). Other contemporary scholarship in technical and professional communication has also sought to identify the ways in which TPC engenders more than the simple transmission of information, including by recognizing the capability of TPC to negatively influence behavior (Grabill & Simmons, 1998; Duchsherer et al., 2020), reinforce narrow conceptualizations of normativity (Palmeri, 2006; Oswal, 2014; Oswal, 2018) and perpetuate oppression (Miranda, 1998; Johnson et al., 2008; Jones & Williams, 2017). Inspired by these problematic histories and calls for paradigm shifts aiming to centralize advocacy as a cornerstone of more socially just TPC practice and pedagogy, Jones (2016) explains that "Contemporary sociopolitical climates provide an exigence for reenvisioning the field of technical communication to fully integrate social justice" (p. 357). To incorporate relevant social justice aims in the TPC classroom, Jones

advocates for "exposing hegemonic practices and ideals in the texts that we develop or analyze in order to promote social change," "incorporating alternate views about learning and knowing into our classrooms' curricula," "instilling in… students an appreciation that technical communicators are often in positions to explicitly advocate for oppressed groups," and "fostering multidisciplinary and cross-domain collaborations for research, pedagogy, and advocacy" (p. 357). These methods, Jones notes, move technical communicators away from considering social justice issues on "a purely descriptive level" and instead encourage their development of pedagogies that promote agency and advocacy and foster "collaboration for and about social change across disciplines, domains, and communities" (p. 357).

Scholars in disability studies, including Palmeri (2006), Oswal (2018), and Melonçon (2019), have formulated several disciplinary concepts to "critique oppressive and discriminatory language employed in common discourse, especially those coined by various disciplines to segregate, undermine, or reject disability and disabled people" (Oswal, p. 15). Their work largely navigates and grapples with the concepts of normativity, non-normativity, disability, and accessibility. Below, I explain how I generally define these terms as they appear in this text. These definitions are largely based on definitions commonly accepted in the field of disability studies, and while these definitions often informed my contributions to in-class discussions and my framings of assigned texts, students were encouraged to develop their own shared, situated conceptualizations of these terms, curated by their interpretations of readings and personal experiences.

1. *Normate/Normativity* – I conceptualize these terms from a critical disabilities perspective, relying on Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's (2002) definition of the normate as "the corporeal incarnation of culture's collective, unmarked, normative characteristics" (p. 10).

2. *Non-normative* – This term describes all bodies excluded from conceptualizations of the "normate," which in white, heteropatriarchal culture often includes women, blind people, people of color, neurodivergent people, and the elderly, thereby problematically conceptualizing gender, race, and disability as deficit (pp. 6-7).

3. *Disability* – Here again I rely on Garland-Thomson (2014), conceptualizing disability as the product of a material relation between bodies and their environment, created "when the environment does not sustain the shape and function of the body that enters it." As such, I also lean on Jay Dolmage's (2014) conceptualizations of disability as not "fixed," but instead as "culturally located" (p. 10).

4. *Accessibility* – While scholars in TPC currently use this term in a variety of uniquely contextualized ways, I use this term specifically when I refer to the "accessibility aims" of my course, to refer to my use of inclusive course materials and practices with the intention of developing students' cultural literacies and critical thinking skills.

With these concepts in mind, the aforementioned authors and others have initiated and continued the work of arguing for the implementation of accessibility as the second of two new critical cornerstones of more socially just TPC. These authors have done so by recognizing how

classrooms, curricula, and pedagogies "both construct and are constructed by normalizing discourses, which can marginalize the experiences, knowledges, and material needs of people with disabilities" (Palmeri, p. 49). Obermark's (2019) work on pedagogical access builds off these authors' work as well as off the works of Browning (2014), Dolmage (2014), Kerschbaum (2015), and others to argue that:

> There is acknowledgment that disability is often overlooked, even in progressive discussions surrounding difference and diversity; there is a connection to specific practices, like lesson planning and syllabus or course design; and there is an emphasis on the need to bring disability to the forefront of pedagogical preparation (p. 196).

Alongside her acknowledgement of the critical role that amplifying accessibility in the TPC classroom plays in the development of a more socially just TPC pedagogy and practice, Obermark explains that doing the work of reconfiguring disability's place in the classroom and increasing awareness of disability is "difficult and ongoing work" (p. 198). Similarly, Kerschbaum (2015) notes that "Making moves towards social inclusion and welcoming can be difficult to enact, even for the most well-intentioned teachers, and they involve more than following minimum standards or implementing specific accommodations communicated through the disability services office." Obermark offers solutions: her study of graduate students' experiences with disability (in)accommodations produces strategies for better amplifying accessibility in the TPC classroom. Obermark claims that "positioning disability as generative rather than deficit, at the center and often intersected with other identities, rather than isolated and bypassed" (p. 196) may offer methods of addressing the often inherently disabling nature of the TPC classroom and pedagogy, and better acknowledge the existence of disability "all around campuses" (p. 180). With the field's ongoing pursuit of these broader accessibility aims in mind, as I noted, my course aimed specifically to improve inclusivity and reduce stigma in the classroom itself, as well as improve students' cultural sensitivity and literacy and their critical thinking skills, particularly when it comes to interrogating representations of mental health and cognitive and physical disabilities in popular culture and literature. I explain how these aims were pursued in more detail below when discussing how students were tasked with engaging in culturally and critically informed semiotic and literary analyses in weeks five, six, and nine of the course.

This project also considers the need for the improved visibility of and discussions concerning psychiatric disability, including research that incorporates elements of neurodiversity studies and intersectional mad studies, the latter of which Pickens (2019) explains "opens up the opportunity to examine how the charges of cognitive disability and mental illness… or congenital, race-based neuroatypicality… bear repercussions for imagining, analyzing, and theorizing Blackness and madness" (p. 8). Examining the often multiply oppressive role of technical writing in conceptualizing disability and mental health conditions is hugely important. As Cathryn Molley (2020) explains, "overlapping markers of gender, race, and social class" as well as "stereotyping or decisional biases by clinicians" often play a role in clinical exchanges, diagnosis of mental conditions, and the conceptualization and authoring of neurodiverse and other mental health conditions (p. 26). As noted, however, despite the work of Pickens, Molley and authors like Frost et al. (2021), Jones & Williams (2022), and Holladay & Price (2020), the latter of whom interrogate the rhetorical function of references to mental health in public discourse, there are

limited references to such scholarship in the broader field of TPC, and even fewer practical approaches to initiating relevant conversations in the TPC classroom. As such, ways for implementing this research and these concepts related to neurodiversity and mad studies—including discussion of cultural productions of multiply-marginalized people's experiences with psychiatric disability and the influence of mental health activism on psychiatric approaches to conceptualizing, diagnosing, and treating neurodiversity and other psychiatric disabilities—are discussed later in the section "Amplifying Accessibility." Specifically, I identify avenues for initiating these discussions as I explain how mental health studies operated as a functional framework for studying Writing Across the Disciplines, particularly as students studied mental health representation in literature, communication studies, and in studies of linguistics and other semiotic approaches to technical and professional communication.

The Social Model of Disability and Mental Health Studies as Framework

The application of the social model of disability, like any reconceptualization of writing studies curricula from a critical disability studies perspective, requires a lot of meaningful consideration. As Dolmage (2014) writes, reconfiguring writing studies and composition curricula from critical disabilities perspectives requires that instructors rethink, rather than retrofit, their pedagogies. Dolmage explains that the act of retrofitting speaks "to our desire for equality," but emphasizes the reality that instructors often "go to great lengths to avoid re-engineering our pedagogy," arguing too that "too often we react to diversity instead of planning for it. We acknowledge that our students come from different places, and that they are headed in different directions, yet this does little to alter the vectors of our own pedagogy" (p. 22). Similarly, Browning (2014) argues: Although disability is becoming more apparent in first-year composition curricula, too often disability has been simply 'tacked on' to existing courses. Scholars have argued that composition instructors interested in fully integrating a disability studies perspective into their curriculum would do well, instead, to think critically about every aspect of their classroom spaces, the subject matter they teach, and the ways in which they teach it (p. 96).

As such, I centralized Oliver's (1983) social model of disability in my approach to revising my Writing Across the Disciplines curriculum, rather than taking the current curriculum and retrofitting Oliver's model. This involved rethinking course readings, major assignments, projects, and grade weighting in order to achieve my intended aims of encouraging students to engage in mental health (self-)advocacy, reconceptualize mental health (dis)ability, and view writing studies as capable of engendering access to rhetoric useful for engaging in productive mental health discourse.

Oliver's social model of disability emerged in direct contrast to the medical model of disability, the latter of which conceptualizes disability as "an impairment in a body system or function that is inherently pathological. From this perspective, the goal is to return the system or function to as close to 'normal' as possible" (Olkin, 2022). As Palmeri (2006) and others write, these "normalizing discourses… marginalize the experiences, knowledges, and material needs of people with disabilities," particularly when they inform the design of physical learning spaces like classrooms as well as curricula and pedagogy (p. 49). On the other hand, in Oliver's model, disability is seen as an aspect of a person's identity. From this perspective, the way to address disability "is to change the environment and society, rather than people with disabilities.

Negative stereotypes, discrimination and oppression serve as barriers to environmental change and full inclusion" (Olkin). Of course, Oliver's theory is not without its critics, who claim, among other critiques, that "Defining impairment and disability in terms of their consequences may exclude people with cognitive impairment, acquired impairment, and fluctuating impairment; failing to consider that their experiences of externally imposed restrictions may not be similar to those of people with physical impairments" (Owens, 2015, pp. 388-389). Regardless, there are still a variety of benefits of centralizing this model, particularly in an undergraduate course, where centralizing the social model of disability can offer an accessible, intuitive option for pushing students to rethink more "organic," medical-based conceptualizations of disability without completely revolutionizing their thinking in ways that challenge their own political utility. Despite the potential of approaching the design of composition pedagogy and curricula from a perspective that centralizes Oliver's social model of disability, little work has been done that illuminates practical ways of conceptualizing curricula from this perspective, or that emphasizes the ways in which neurodiversity and psychiatric disorders are socially constructed. Oliver (2013) himself wrote over a decade ago that "all we now seem to do is talk" about the benefits of approaching pedagogy and critical disability studies from the social model perspective (p. 1024).

Mental health studies, in addition to being a field of personal interest and relevance to me, provided a useful way to centralize Oliver's social model of disability in my Writing Across the Disciplines curriculum. Despite critiques of Oliver's model that suggest it may fail to consider the experiences of people with cognitive disabilities, I believe thematizing the course around mental health studies helped largely alleviate this concern. Thematizing the course in this way also meant that utilizing the social model of disability to guide studies of how disciplinary writing has addressed mental health and related concepts like mental health conditions, histories, misconceptions, and stigmatization also provided me an effective means of amplifying advocacy and accessibility in my course. As noted above, I will discuss the specific choices I made when revising my Writing Across the Disciplines curriculum later. First, I turn my attention to providing an overview of existing Writing Across the Disciplines curricula, critiquing existing learning objectives and course descriptions as emphasizing prescriptive conceptualizations of TPC. I segue from these discussions into naming ways in which utilizing studies of mental health as a framework for teaching Writing Across the Disciplines can lend itself to amplifying advocacy and accessibility in TPC pedagogy by encouraging students to reconceptualize TPC from a critical disabilities perspective.

Course Overview

Writing Across the Disciplines is a common core writing studies and general education course often required of first- or second-year undergraduate students in the United States. It typically requires students to read and interpret disciplinary texts and demonstrate knowledge of disciplinary writing conventions. It also requires students to demonstrate their ability to communicate technically and professionally across a variety of academic disciplines in their own end-of-semester research projects. I taught the section of Writing Across the Disciplines that I reference in this article in the fall of 2023 while working as a graduate assistant in New Mexico State University's English Department. The standard learning outcomes for the Writing Across the Disciplines course I taught and redesigned are as follows:

1. Develop the ability to interpret and respond to humanities and social sciences texts.
2. Analyze and evaluate cultural artifacts such as texts, images, and practices as a means of academic inquiry.
3. Critique arguments offered in the readings to determine the underlying methodology as well as underlying values.
4. Construct a rhetorical argument with evidence appropriate for an explicit audience and purpose.
5. Use written, visual, or oral strategies to persuade, inform, or engage, considering situation, audience, purpose, aesthetics, and diverse points of view.
6. Practice effective research strategies and integrate research correctly and ethically from credible sources.
7. Understand and apply components of the writing process such as planning, collaborating, organizing, composing, revising, and editing.

The contents of this list resemble projected learning outcomes common to other institutions' Writing Across the Disciplines courses or similar courses situated in TPC, as they primarily emphasize the importance of developing students' knowledge of prescriptive usage rules as they apply to disciplinary writing. Western Kentucky University's description for their "ENGL 300 – Writing in the Disciplines" course similarly explains:

> Writing in the Disciplines courses give students advanced instruction and practice in writing and reading essays within an academic discipline and make students aware of how disciplinary conventions and rhetorical situations call for different choices in language, structure, format, tone, citation, and documentation. Students conduct investigations into writing and reading conventions in their fields and receive advanced instruction in planning, drafting, arranging, revising, and editing discipline-specific essays.

At New Mexico State University, incoming freshmen are required to take Composition I (ENGL 1110) and then *choose* between either Writing Across the Disciplines (ENGL 2221) *or* Technical/Professional Communication (ENGL 2210). As I noted above, because the skills taught in TPC courses are inherently valuable across a variety of academic and professional disciplines, and are often a necessity for improving students' upward mobility in an array of academic and institutional contexts, I aligned many of my assignments and pedagogical considerations with learning outcomes assigned for introductory TPC courses offered at New Mexico State University, which are as follows:

1. Choose professional communication appropriate for audiences and situations.
2. Write in different genres of professional communication.
3. Identify the purpose of a work-related communication and assess the audiences' informational needs and organizational constraints.
4. Employ appropriate design/visuals to support and enhance various texts.
5. Demonstrate effective collaboration and presentation skills.
6. Integrate research and information from credible sources into professional communication.

It is evident that several of the standard learning outcomes for the Writing Across the Disciplines course I taught already overlap with outcomes common to TPC courses offered at NMSU and other universities across the U.S. While this means that WAD curricula in many ways already lends itself to readaptation for implementation in the TPC classroom, my specific redesigns take things a step further, firmly situating my framework in the field of TPC and further simplifying the process of translating and implementing this framework in the TPC classroom. These redesigns, described in detail below, involved challenging students to frequently apply discipline-specific knowledge in mental health contexts and produce writing appropriate for audiences across a variety of disciplines, not only through writing, but other forms of multimodal communication. As such, though not technically conceptualized as a TPC course, by aligning my assignments and pedagogical considerations for my Writing Across the Disciplines course with those common to TPC courses (specifically those offered at NMSU), I encouraged students to consider the various forms that technical and professional communication can take to meet the distinct needs, wants, and expectations of various audiences situated in different academic and professional disciplines. I also emphasized commonalities across conventions present in various disciplines to stress how principles and conventions of situated, disciplinary writing and communication strategies can be translated and utilized in a variety of contexts. During this time, I also encouraged students to rethink prescriptive conceptualizations of TPC and instead conceptualize technical and professional communication from a distinctly humanistic perspective, particularly as they worked to produce work that communicated ideas and concepts related to mental health in socially and culturally sensitive ways.

Because Writing Across the Disciplines courses are ultimately grounded in the study of writing and communicating in academic contexts, I acknowledge that this presents a limitation in translating and implementing this framework in TPC classrooms, where skills are typically taught for use in distinctly professional contexts, for use largely in institutions *outside* the university. However, by aligning many of my assignments and pedagogical considerations for this course with those common to TPC courses, this framework still presents many useful implications for the TPC classroom, not only by encouraging the development of professional, multimodal, and inclusive communication skills, but also by teaching students how to write in ways that encourage advocacy, improve accessibility, and perpetuate productive, socially just discourse concerning mental health. Additionally, such a framework and the incorporation of more literary and pop culture texts into TPC study (such as personal narratives, novelizations, advertisements, and other texts more common to WAD courses) provides students with more contextualized resources for examining how mental illness, other cognitive disabilities, and marginalized human experiences are conceptualized from a variety of unique and often cross-disciplinary perspectives. Finally, translating and implementing this framework in TPC pedagogy can also help emphasize the role of technical writing in conceptualizing disability and mental health conditions and illness in popular culture. As Frost et al. (2021) write, it is imperative to reimagine TPC research, pedagogies, and practices that center "the perspectives, experiences, and embodied realities of multiply-marginalized communities" (p. 223). Such a framework aids in this call to center "bodyminds and communities whose lives and experiences have been disregarded, or viewed as disposable, in medical and technical communication" (p. 223) by teaching students how to evaluate technical and professional communication from a critical, distinctly humanistic perspective and by providing them access to multiply-marginalized

perspectives on the diagnosis, treatment, and social construction of mental health and psychiatric disorders.

Redesigned Curriculum

As previously mentioned, I developed this course in response to calls by Agboka (2013), Jones (2016), Palmeri (2006), and others for a paradigm shift in TPC theory, practice, and pedagogy; one that repositions social justice aims at the center of technical and professional communicators' work and addresses an exigence raised by contemporary sociopolitical climates and TPC texts that continue to implicitly and explicitly narrow conceptualizations of "normativity" and perpetuate oppression of multiply-marginalized groups. My course's curriculum specifically addresses historical and contemporary climates concerning mental health, particularly as historical climates contribute to the perpetuation of the modern-day stigmatization of mental health and mental health issues and as contemporary political actors increasingly draw associations between mental illness and acts of gun, racial, and gendered violence. To counter these, I designed the curriculum of my course from a critical disabilities perspective—specifically using Oliver's social model of disability as a framework—aiming to:

1. Reduce mental health stigma.
2. Help students reconceptualize mental health from the perspective of (self-)advocates.
3. Reenvision writing studies as capable of engendering access to rhetoric useful for engaging in productive mental health discourse.

Generally, the course followed a simple structure. The section of Writing Across the Disciplines I taught met Mondays and Wednesdays for 75 minutes. Each week, we studied a different academic discipline (history, art, linguistics, geography, etc.), beginning the week with discussions of readings that provided brief overviews of the disciplines as fields of study. Several of these readings are named in the following paragraphs, though *all* course materials are listed in the syllabus included in the appendix. After reading these texts, students worked to answer questions, including:

1. What topics, issues, or ideas are often explored in this field?
2. What are some research methods and methodologies common to this field?
3. What is the purpose of texts written in this discipline?
4. What are some conventions of writing in this discipline?
5. To which audience does writing in this discipline tend to appeal?

The incorporation of multiple disciplines as foci for our studies aligns with pedagogical strategies common to TPC, which emphasize the development of skills useful beyond the classroom and that are applicable across a variety of academic and professional disciplines. As noted above, two key learning outcomes of TPC courses offered at New Mexico State University suggest that students should learn to "choose professional communication appropriate for audiences and situations" and "assess… audiences' informational needs and organizational constraints." By assigning students multiple disciplines from which to focus their studies, I aimed to develop their knowledge of discipline-specific communication habits and constraints

and encourage them to recognize how principles and conventions of situated, disciplinary writing and communication translate across varied academic and professional contexts.

I chose the disciplines assigned based on departmental guidelines (which require that studied disciplines must be situated in the social sciences or humanities) as well as enrollment data. Specifically, I based my decisions on how many majors were represented in my tentative class list, which included predominantly sociology, psychology, and criminal justice majors. As such, I chose disciplines that I felt best complemented the majors presented. In future iterations of the course, I may survey students, asking them to identify three to four of the disciplines they enjoyed studying most. I may also provide them an opportunity to propose other disciplines they would have liked to see represented in the course. I address this more below in my conclusion, where I offer other suggestions for improving the course's overall accessibility and student engagement with course materials.

For our second meeting of the week, we read and discussed texts situated in these disciplines. These texts specifically addressed concepts or issues related to mental health, including readings on mental health histories, stigma, and representation. This structure aimed to provide students some stability as they encountered and explored a variety of different academic disciplines, many for the first time, and to enable them to witness the practical application of disciplinary approaches in mental health contexts. At the end of each week, students were tasked with completing brief, written reflections requiring them to demonstrate knowledge of discipline-specific conventions, summarize the central argument and claims of weekly readings, and practice developing unique, discipline-specific research questions addressing concepts related to mental health.

Amplifying Advocacy

Utilizing the critical disabilities perspective I described previously, I positioned advocacy as central to students' engagement and learning by encouraging students to conceptualize themselves as (self-)advocates. To that end, I first weighted students' grades so that in-class discussion was worth the highest percentage of their overall course grade (35%) and prepared readings by Busfield (2000), Arboleda-Flórez & Stuart (2012), and others whose work emphasized to students the historical, anthropological, and sociological perpetuation of mental health stigma. Combined with our readings on stratagem for fighting the stigmatization of mental health, I encouraged (but never required) students to speak freely and rely on their own experiences with mental health conditions and stigmas to reconceptualize our classroom as a space for open communication and challenging stigma. Despite this, I recognized that there would be students who, understandably, might feel uncomfortable sharing potentially traumatizing narratives or experiences with mental health. As such, I made it clear to students that sharing takeaways or synthesizing major concepts from assigned readings also constituted "discussion" and, therefore, their grade was not dependent on their willingness to discuss their own experiences with mental health. In fact, synthesis of major concepts typically framed class discussions, with students encouraged to interject with personal insights or anecdotes. Still, each week, I continued to encourage students to conceptualize our space as one of participatory knowledge building, leaning on De Lissovoy's (2010) principles of a "renewed emancipatory pedagogy," including "recognition of an essential equality between students and teachers and a

liberatory agency that uncovers and builds on students' effectivity as beings against domination" (p. 203). This work included introducing students to the concept of epistemic injustice and frequently challenging students to "unsettle expertise" (Guzmán & Amrute, 2019) and rethink lineage, validity, and the value of lived experience in academic spaces, like the TPC classroom. This emancipatory work also included my participation in discussions. I tried to avoid assuming the role of facilitator, a role which often operates as an extension of institutional power, and instead sat among students, allowing them to lead discussions. I sometimes refocused the discussion but attempted to use my voice only to share experiences or draw comparisons between student experiences and assigned readings. To that end, I often acknowledged my own vulnerability in the classroom and my positionality as someone with first-hand experience with mental health conditions, like depression and PTSD, and as a middle-class white male, who has not encountered many of the racialized/cultural, gendered, and ableist barriers to mental health diagnosis and treatment in the United States (as discussed in assigned readings by Bhugra et al. (2021), Bernardi (2021), and Grinker (2021), respectively). Improved student engagement and end-of-semester survey results indicated that students seemed to appreciate this approach, which helped contribute to their conceptualizations of the classroom as a space of participatory knowledge building.

After several weeks, many students appeared comfortable discussing their experiences with mental health conditions and stigma and seemed to have reconceptualized themselves not merely as students or the consumers of knowledge but as contributors to the creation of a shared, situated knowledge of mental health studies, key concepts (inclusive of (dis)ability, "normativity," etc.) and writing studies. By week six of the course, students (as well as myself) had begun participating in practices suggested by Arboleda-Flórez & Stuart by communicating with the aim of educating others and replacing "myths and misinformation with accurate conceptions about the nature and prevalence of mental illnesses, thereby improving mental health knowledge and overall mental health literacy" and by facilitating interactions "between members of the public and people who are successfully managing a mental illness" (p. 461). According to the authors, these approaches, "have been used successfully to improve knowledge, reduce negative attitudes, and minimize self- reported social distance in high school students, undergraduate psychology and social work students, journalism students, and medical students" (p. 461).

Articles like these provide both a means to segue into discussions of limitations in mental health studies, as well as of how technical communication influences conceptualizations of mental health. Some questions that instructors might ask to facilitate discussion after reading Arboleda-Flórez & Stuart's article include:

- How do the authors seem to define the "successful management" of mental health disorders?
- How do race, gender, class, and other demographics influence popular conceptualizations of mental illness and what it means to "successfully manage" psychiatric disorders?

In other words, engaging with and interrogating technical documentation and other forms of communication conceptualizing experiences of living with and treating psychiatric disorders provides TPC instructors with yet another avenue to explore the idiosyncratic nature of mental

health and address the multiplicity of ways that psychiatric disorders and mental health narratives are socially and culturally constructed, a reality I explore further below. By undertaking this work, students become better able to conceptualize themselves as (self)advocates capable of criticizing culturally constructed conceptualizations of disability, as well as to develop a proficiency perpetuating stigma-fighting discourses both in and outside the classroom. Ultimately, students become culturally informed, technical communicators capable of aiding in wider mental health advocacy aims and engaging in stigma self-management (Arboleda-Flórez & Stuart, p. 462), thereby practically beginning the work of accommodating the request Jones (2016) makes by reconceptualizing the role of technical communicators as advocates for social justice.

Amplifying Accessibility

As I noted earlier, the specific "accessibility aims" I designed for my course included developing students' cultural literacies and critical thinking skills. In-class discussion played a major role in achieving these aims. It also helped improve inclusivity in the classroom and encouraged students to foster a generally more inclusive mindset when discussing and reflecting on assigned course materials. For instance, informed by Oliver's social model of disability, readings taking anthropological, sociological, and poly-scientific approaches to mental health and subsequent discussions were meant to help students reconceptualize mental health (dis)ability from a social perspective. Specifically, readings encouraged students to interrogate "the formation of bodies, and the national interest in producing templates for bodies and souls" (Davis, 1999, p. 45) and reconceptualize mental health disabilities not as "fixed," but rather as "culturally located" (Dolmage, 2014, p. 10). These readings were followed up by in-class discussions in which students and I thoroughly explored the ways mental health conditions like depression, anxiety, OCD, and neurodivergence have been conceptualized as disability and inherently "non-normative." This then propelled us into critiques of the concept of "normativity." We also frequently acknowledged the ways in which perceptions of mental health conditions or "disabilities" as inherently "non-normative" are culturally and socially constructed and informed by "normalizing" ideologies, like capitalism (Grinker, 2021). As such, by participating in our weekly discussions, students engaged in the work called for by authors like Palmeri (2006), who advocates for critique of "normalizing discourses… [that] marginalize the experiences, knowledges, and material needs of people with disabilities" (p. 49) while the course's design itself aimed to make the classroom's physical learning space more accessible by presenting a space in which students were continually encouraged to develop shared, situated conceptualizations of major course concepts, including of mental health conditions like depression, anxiety, and OCD, conceptualizations applicable and relevant to their own, individualized experiences.

In weeks three, five, six, and nine, we also touched on the subjects of neurodiversity and mad studies, as well as discussed cultural productions of multiply-marginalized people's experiences with psychiatric disability and the influence of mental health activism on psychiatric approaches to conceptualizing, diagnosing, and treating neurodiversity and other psychiatric disabilities. Discussions concerning these subjects especially helped with fostering a better sense of inclusivity in the classroom and encouraging students to develop a greater cultural sensitivity when engaging with literary and pop culture texts (like advertisements or even medical

documentation). Specifically, in week three, students read and discussed texts tracing historical conceptualizations of mental health—which often linked psychiatric disorders like depression and anxiety to demonic possession—and noted possible linkages between these historical (and often gendered) conceptualizations of psychiatric disability to current perceptions and stigmatization of mental health. Students also identified linkages between these histories and current practitioners' stigmatizing attitudes concerning mental health and psychiatric disorders (Arboleda-Flórez & Stuart, 2012; Holley, 1998). Later, in weeks five and six, we took semiotic approaches to communication campaigns and identified the rhetorical functions of references to mental health in public discourse, including uses of stigmatizing words like "crazy," "loonie," and "psycho" (Kousoulis, 2019). We also examined how advertisements perpetuated racialized and gendered conceptualizations of mental health, and discussed how contemporary social media campaigns and activism, as well as the emergence of mental health resources and nonprofit organizations like Active Minds, have helped shift contemporary perceptions of mental health and reduced the stigmatization of mental health in popular culture. In week nine, we looked at literary representations of mental health, celebrating works that challenge gendered conceptualizations of mental health and associations between femininity and hysteria—like Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*—and critiqued the stigmatization of black madness in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. As such, this framework provided multiple opportunities to see how various forms of technical, professional, and literary communication contribute to shaping popular conceptualizations of mental health and psychiatric disorders like depression, hysteria, and anxiety, often from gendered, racialized, and multiply-marginalized perspectives.

Finally, in adherence with the course's core curricular requirements, students were required to read and interpret disciplinary texts and demonstrate knowledge of disciplinary writing conventions in their own end-of-semester research projects. However, I also designed these final projects to, of course, encourage students to think critically and inclusively about the concepts we discussed in class, providing students space to further their roles as mental health (self-)advocates, reconceptualize mental health (dis)ability, and, ultimately, demonstrate the capability of disciplinary writing studies to engender access to rhetoric useful for engaging in productive mental health discourse. Specifically, students were provided the following instructions:
Your final in this course will take the form of a creative project. The specific form that your project will take is largely up to you, and can be completed individually or as a group, depending on the format you choose. To successfully complete this assignment, you will create a project that in some way reflects a discipline-specific approach to a concept related to mental health.

Such an open-ended approach aimed to improve the overall accessibility and relevance of the course (and students' final projects) to their overall professional goals. Specifically, this approach permitted students improved flexibility in designing and executing their projects, as well as challenged them to consider the various forms that technical and professional communication can take to meet the distinct needs, wants, and expectations of various audiences. This approach, like many other considerations for this course, helped further align the work and proposed learning outcomes of the course with those common to TPC courses in the United States, including those offered at New Mexico State University. As referenced previously, three key proposed learning outcomes for the undergraduate TPC courses offered at NMSU suggest that students should be able to "write in different genres of professional communication,"

"employ appropriate design/visuals to enhance various texts," and "demonstrate effective collaboration and presentation skills."

Student projects took a variety of exciting forms, including interpretive dances, hand drawn art pieces, seminar papers, course proposals, mock legal documentation, and comic strips approaching concepts related to mental health from unique disciplinary perspectives. Across the various mediums students chose to utilize for their final project, I found that students ultimately succeeded in demonstrating their ability to appropriately approach mental health studies from informed, discipline-specific perspectives. I also found that students were able to deploy knowledge of discipline-specific conventions of writing (including knowledge of the style, tone, written conventions, and intended audiences of writing in a specific discipline) *rhetorically* in order to engage in and contribute to productive mental health discourse. Standout examples include mock legislation arguing for greater political saliency for mental health issues in the United States and more efficient allocation of mental health resources in Doña Ana County, New Mexico, as well as a mixed media collage conveying the role of "normalizing" societal discourses on perpetuating mental health stigma and worsening sensations of isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic [See Figure 1].

In creating these works and others, students successfully employed verbal, oral, and written modes of TPC, creating diverse, often multimodal projects appropriate for specific, clearly defined audiences and uniquely situated in a chosen academic and/or professional discipline. Students' work, overall, successfully addressed and conveyed mental health conditions, stigma, and other concepts in effective, socially just ways that operated as calls to action aiming to improve mental health advocacy and accessibility from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

Fig 1: A student's final project depicting worsening mental health and feelings of isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic and associated news cycles.

Methods

While observations of students' engagement and coursework were used as one measure of the success of my course's redesigns, I also implemented an optional, end-of-semester survey for students to complete, gauging their conceptualizations of their own roles as (self-)advocates, perceptions of mental health as (dis)ability, and ability to effectively access and engage with disciplinary writing that addresses mental health, illness, histories, and related concepts. Students were asked to complete the survey anonymously and their emails were not collected, though students were given the option to include their name in their response if they preferred to.
The survey, created and issued through Google Forms, contained a total of nine questions. Of these, four were required and collected quantitative data by asking the following "Yes or No" questions:

1. Did this course help you better understand the role you can play as a (self-)advocate by simply talking about mental health and dismantling mental health stigma?
2. Did this course change the way you think about the *sociology* of mental health? In other words, did it change the way you think about the *causes* of mental health issues or stigma?
3. Did this course change the way you think about mental illness as (dis)ability? In other words, did your concept of "mental illness," "normality," "abnormality," and/or mental illness as (dis)ability change?
4. This course is meant to give you an overview of how to (and how others) communicate technically and professionally in a variety of disciplines (geography, philosophy, sociology, etc.). However, I also aimed to help you see how studying writing can provide you the tools necessary to communicate in effective, culturally and socially sensitive ways about mental health and illness (from geographical, philosophical, sociological, etc. points of view). Do you believe that the course accomplished this/encouraged you to see that writing studies can be valuable in a humanistic/social justice context, rather than just as a way to learn about objective writing conventions and practices?

Each of these questions was followed up by an optional, short answer question asking students to expound on their answer, especially if they answered "yes" to preceding questions. Students were asked generally to explain what aspect of the course (readings, discussions, in-class activities, etc.) had the greatest impact on their answer to the question preceding.
At the conclusion of the survey, I included one final, optional question asking students to tell me anything else they'd like me to know about their experience in the course, including about how (or if) the course changed other opinions they had about the purpose of writing studies courses, mental health and illness, or the role of technical and professional communication and writing studies classrooms as spaces for enacting social justice/advocacy. Pertinent responses to this final, optional question are also referenced in my analysis below.

Analysis

I received a total of 21 responses, 11 of which were anonymous. While the data collected largely supplemented conclusions I drew based on my observations of in-class discussions and students' completed assignments, I recognize that regardless of my promise of anonymity, it is likely that students' responses were influenced by their knowledge that I would review their response data prior to my submission of their final grades to the university. While I tried to avoid wording that

was in any way "leading," it is possible that the phrasing of my questions and the timeliness of the survey could have influenced participants to believe that there may have been a "correct" answer to any one of the questions included in the survey.

Results for the four required "Yes or No" questions [See Figure 2] indicated first that 100% of survey participants felt that the course helped them better understand their role as self-advocates, a role they can assume by simply speaking about mental health issues from critically and culturally informed perspectives. One student wrote that, "The classroom activities… and discussion allowed me to see the perspectives of others and dismantle the mental health stigma I might have even subjected myself to," while another explained that the course helped them more broadly conceptualize mental health advocacy and the ways in which they could engage in mental health (self-)advocacy. Students' responses indicate that approaching redesigns of my course curriculum from a critical disabilities perspective with the aim of amplifying advocacy as a central focus of TPC pedagogy and instruction was (provisionally) successful, as students quickly became aware of the ways they could utilize the classroom as a space for self-advocacy and the roles they could play beyond the classroom as technical communicators able to communicate about mental health in perspective-driven and critically informed ways. As another student wrote:

> I found that while taking this course, I've discovered so many other ways to see mental health not only as a topic but how it can be approached. I am an art student, but before the art portion of this course, I had never even thought of the way [the use of] lines could translate to mental health. Strangely enough this course has taught me a lot about my degree and how I create my own art.

Given these results, my redesigned curriculum seems to be situated in harmony with Jones's (2016) reconceptualization of the technical communicator as advocate and Wang et al.'s (2022) goal of "pushing the growth edge of students' capacities, values, and beliefs" in the TPC classroom "in order to foster their ability to see themselves as coalitional advocates with oppressed groups" (pp. 118-119).

According to results, 61.9% of students felt that the course changed the way they thought about the sociology of mental health and the causes of mental health conditions and stigma, while only 38.1% of students felt that the course altered their concept of mental illness as (dis)ability. In a following optional response, one student remarked, "Coming from personal experience I used to think that having a mental health issue such as anxiety or depression was wrong. I felt guilty for feeling sad, angry or sometimes happy. Knowing how sociology or what the causes of this might be helped me accept that fact that it is normal to be happy one day and sad the other." Another explained that:

Listening to my classmates talk about the way they perceive mental health and giving their own examples, I learned that mental health issues is a very common thing and nothing to be ashamed about, specially at our age when life may feel and seem overwhelming. It made me be more open and kinder to people and not "judge a book by its cover". It as well helped me see that there is not a "normal" or "abnormal" concept amongst people; we're all different, we're all unique and we all experience this world differently.

Students shifting their conceptualizations of mental health conditions and illness away from a medical, causal model of mental illness is exciting, especially given the social justice implications of conceptualizing mental health conditions and stigmas as socially constructed. However, the low percentage of students who felt that the course had either initiated or perpetuated a shift in their perception of mental illness as (dis)ability is disconcerting, given the intended aims of my redesigned curriculum. Multiple students mentioned that prior personal and academic experiences had already initiated a "shift" in rethinking mental illness as (dis)ability; a shift toward disassociating mental health conditions and illness with the socially constructed concepts of non-normativity or abnormality, a reality supported by recent scholarship emphasizing positive trends in representation of and attitudes toward mental health, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (Haikalis et al., 2021). Interestingly, however, many students, in their optional responses, did not seem willing to take things a step further and conceptualize (dis)ability itself as socially constructed; as a "system of exclusions that stigmatizes human differences" or "an effect of power relations" (Garland-Thomson, 2005, p. 1557). This, of course, has implications beyond mental health studies and offers interesting implications for further revision of the course, as I will note in my conclusion.

Finally, 90.5% of respondents felt that the course succeeded in helping them see the value of a writing studies course from a social justice perspective. In the optional responses that followed, one student remarked that they believed studying mental health from a variety of disciplinary perspectives provided them the tools to "talk and write about mental health issues … in turn helping alleviate some of the logistical difficulties for beginning to fix" these issues. Other respondents submitted similar comments, explaining that "Before starting this course, I didn't really know how professional and cultural paths and differences could impact mental health… I was able to develop a wider perspective and understanding of global mental health and also develop more empathy towards others." Based on these results, it appears a majority of students left the course having reconceptualized the purposes of TPC and writing studies courses, re-envisioning these courses as sites of power, engendering the development of skills central to taking critically and culturally informed approaches to social justice issues, including mental health stigmatization and marginalization of associated issues in contemporary global politics.

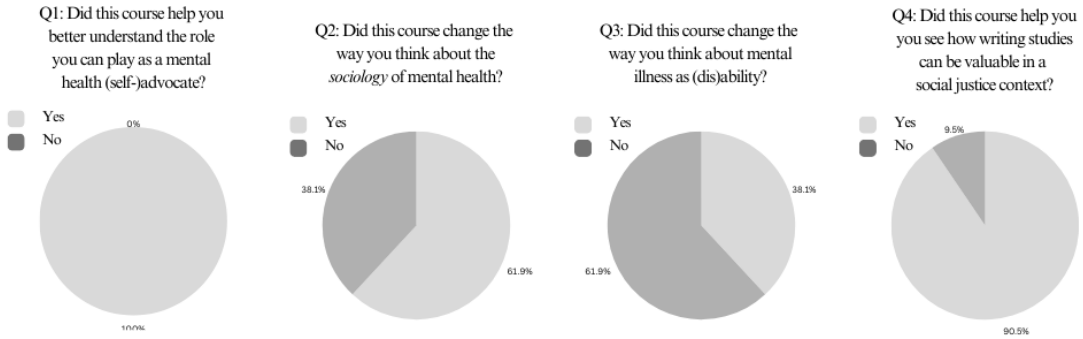

Fig. 2. Results of the four "Yes or No" questions included in my end-of-semester survey, indicating students' perceptions of themselves as (self-)advocates and their (revised) thoughts on the sociology of mental health and mental illness as (dis)ability.

Results and Conclusion

Agboka (2013) and others call for a paradigm shift in technical and professional communication pedagogy and practice, grounded in a social justice turn that encourages the incorporation of greater advocacy and accessibility in TPC theory and praxis. While there is no lack in recent scholarship that theorizes ways that TPC instructors can better incorporate relevant social justice aims into their pedagogy, there is limited scholarship that offers practical approaches to amplifying advocacy and accessibility in the TPC classroom. To that end, I redesigned the curriculum for my fall 2023 Writing Across the Disciplines course from a critical disabilities perspective, centralizing the social model of disability and the interrogation of disabling, stigmatizing, and socially constructed concepts of normativity as they relate to mental health and illness. I did this in an attempt to encourage students to engage in mental health (self-) advocacy, reconceptualize mental health (dis)ability, and view writing studies as capable of engendering access to rhetoric useful for engaging in productive mental health discourse. I ultimately judged the provisional success of my redesigned curriculum in practice based on end-of-semester surveys completed by students gauging their conceptualizations of their own roles as (self-)advocates, perceptions of mental health as (dis)ability, and ability to effectively access and engage with disciplinary writing that addresses mental health, illness, histories, and related concepts.

Ultimately, I feel satisfied that my curriculum helped students achieve the course's original and updated intended outcomes, including those that emphasize developing knowledge of prescriptive usage rules as they apply to disciplinary writing, as well as the social justice aims I incorporated by redesigning my curriculum from a critical disabilities perspective. Again, though Writing Across the Disciplines is not technically conceptualized as a TPC course, by aligning my assignments and pedagogical considerations for my course with those common to TPC courses, I intended to develop students' ability to consider the various forms that technical and professional communication can take in order to appropriately communicate across different academic and professional disciplines. I also encouraged students to rethink prescriptive conceptualizations of TPC and instead conceptualize technical and professional communication from a distinctly humanistic perspective. As the results from my survey indicate, students felt confident in their ability to appropriately initiate and perpetuate productive, socially just discourse concerning mental health from a variety of disciplinary perspectives as well as in their ability to understand how technical communication contributes to the cultural production of mental illness and mental health (dis)ability and how TPC discourse can improve representation of mental health in broader, societal contexts. As such, this framework presents positive potential outcomes if implemented in the TPC classroom, offering opportunities for practically demonstrating to students how TPC operates in ways that have real, embodied effects. Translation and implementation of this framework into TPC pedagogy also provides avenues for incorporating discussions of neurodiversity and mad studies into the classroom, providing much-needed visibility to these under-cited subfields of mental health studies and engendering students' access to multiply-marginalized perspectives on the diagnosis, treatment, and social construction of mental health and psychiatric disorders. As I noted previously, such an approach also works well in tandem with approaches called for by Haas (2012), Mckoy (2020), Jones (2016), and others

that similarly emphasize socially just approaches to TPC that centralize the concepts of identity, positionality, race and mad studies, among others.

For future iterations of the course, I plan to incorporate readings that explicitly address critical disability theory in the hopes that readings by authors like Davis (1999), Garland-Thomson (2005), Dolmage (2014), or other voices from the field of disability studies will begin the work of wholly reconceptualizing (dis)ability in the minds of students as socially constructed. This is especially important, given that only 38.1% of students surveyed felt that the course and its redesigned curriculum altered their concept of mental illness as (dis)ability. While students overwhelmingly noted that the course was effective in encouraging them to identify conceptualizations of mental health conditions as (dis)ability as socially constructed, many were seemingly uncomfortable with completely moving away from the still predominant medical model of disability or conceptualizing (dis)ability as a whole as a social construct, thereby refusing to challenge what Dolmage (2014) calls "the hegemony of the norm" (p. 60). As I noted above, the implications of resistance to the reconceptualization of (dis)ability as social construct are far-reaching, well-beyond mental health studies, and is something I aim to address in future revisions of my course. Another change I plan to make, as I noted earlier, is to give students the opportunity to choose three to four specific disciplines they would like to see represented in future iterations of the course, which may include disciplines already present in the course's current iteration or that could be added in future iterations. I plan to implement this change in order to practice self-reflexivity, encourage student agency, and improve the overall accessibility of the course and student engagement with course materials. I plan to implement this in the form of an end-of-semester survey, which will provide students a chance to offer feedback on the course and comment on the relevance of the disciplines studied to their own professional interests and goals as they worked to develop critical technical and professional communication skills.

While results of the survey referenced in this article indicate that utilizing studies of mental health as a framework for teaching Writing Across the Disciplines may provide a practical means of responding to calls for improving advocacy and accessibility in TPC pedagogy, there are a number of variables that complicate the findings from this study, including location, demographics, and course delivery methods. Further studies implementing similarly informed pedagogies in other locations across the United States and in international contexts or in online spaces can provide valuable insights into how socially just pedagogies might take shape or be effectively put to use in more varied contexts. To that end, I encourage others to develop pedagogies and curricula informed by the social justice aims named here for the sake of practically enacting the paradigm shift in TPC instruction called for and reiterated by Agboka (2013), Agboka and Dorpenyo (2022), and others in more diversified contexts. Not only that, but I encourage instructors to consider the value of incorporating critical disabilities perspectives into other TPC courses and the implications of establishing a transactional relationship between revised, more socially just TPC curriculums and WAD curricular efforts, to ask: What would it look like to bring these perspectives from TPC into WAD courses? What sort of implications are possible by establishing a bi-directional translation of these frameworks? Further, for faculty in administrative roles, what might it look like to incorporate a critical disabilities perspective (or any of those also named by authors like Mckoy, Gonzales et al., Rose & Cardinal, and Lane, among others) across curricular development efforts?

As I suggested previously, there are plenty of potential benefits to incorporating aspects of TPC curricula into existing WAD curricula (and vise-versa). As other scholars have suggested, technical writing skills are generally applicable to all fields, improving the general inclusivity of existing WAD curricula for students of all majors. Further, incorporating readings and resources common to WAD courses into TPC curricula provides students with more contextualized resources for examining how mental illness, other cognitive disabilities, and marginalized human experiences are conceptualized from a variety of unique and often cross-disciplinary perspectives. These are just a few potential benefits—this brief list is far from exhaustive. Ultimately, the development of translational frameworks like mine, and the continued development and deployment of pedagogies and curricular development efforts in alignment with the advocacy and accessibility aims outlined by Jones (2016), Palmeri (2006), and others that combine critical disability perspectives with other contemporary social justice approaches to TPC pedagogy will contribute to the development of a more universal approach to practically furthering the latest step in TPC's "humanistic journey." It is an important undertaking, and as many other contemporary scholars have noted, more radical approaches combining multiple socially just approaches to reconfiguring TPC pedagogy will continue to advance the field in its ultimate goal of amplifying student advocacy and accessibility in TPC classrooms.
I would like to leave with this quote, taken from an anonymous response to my end-of-semester survey:

I would just like to say that I really enjoyed this course; I believe I had never in my life taken a course that focused greatly on mental health. I think even before I started this course, I tried to deny all the things that had happened in my life that had negatively impacted my mental health until I discovered that it is a very important topic to address and be open to… I think this was my favorite course this semester, not only because I learned content I had to, but because in some way it also helped me realize things about myself and helped me get to know myself better and understand others more.

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Appendix: Course Syllabus

ENGL 2221G | Writing in the Social Sciences and Humanities: Disciplinary Approaches to Writing About Mental Health

Course Description

English 2221 is a course that emphasizes the study and practice of writing and research across the social sciences and humanities. In the course you can expect to spend time paying attention to (or studying) the ways that disciplinary writing takes the forms that it does based on its purpose, audience, and functions within a discipline. You can also expect to practice research-based writing that draws on discipline-specific thinking to advance nuanced, developed arguments.

Teaching and learning about how to write in the social sciences and the humanities is a daunting task. How can students develop proficiency writing across the disciplines in a single, semester-long introductory course? To foster a productive space for students to begin developing the necessary skills for effectively writing across such varied disciplines, this section of ENGL 2221 is designed as a survey course that allows students to develop knowledge of the conventions of writing in the social sciences and humanities in a low-stakes environment that encourages them to experiment with form, technique, and engaging with uniquely situated approaches to mental health history, ideology, and representation. This theme of mental health is meant to help ground students in formulating their approaches as guided by the distinct conventions unique to several fields within the social sciences and humanities, including anthropological, psychological, and literary approaches to mental health history, ideology, and representation.

Course Organization & Delivery

Students can expect to first examine the foundations of fields in the social sciences and humanities and to answer questions about the forms/genres that these texts take, their major claims/concerns, how their texts use evidence to support their claims, and what disciplinary audiences these texts hail or appeal to in their specific use of contextualized and distinctly situated rhetorics. Then, students will be asked to consider how these disciplines' forms, genres, purposes, and audiences inform their approaches to writing about mental health history, ideology, and representation. Finally, students will take the knowledge gleaned from our discussions of conventions and applications of these conventions and practically apply them in weekly writing assignments. In these assignments, students will reflect on conventions unique to specific disciplines, practice developing discipline-specific research questions, and identify how authors assigned for that week apply major concepts from specific disciplines to writing about mental health and illness, as well as how these authors interrogate representations of mental health and illness in popular culture, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Required Texts

All required readings for the course will be uploaded and posted to Canvas.

Learning Objectives

1. Develop the ability to interpret and respond to humanities and social sciences texts.
2. Analyze and evaluate cultural artifacts such as texts, images, and practices as a means of academic inquiry.
3. Critique arguments offered in the readings to determine the underlying methodology as well as underlying values.
4. Construct a rhetorical argument with evidence appropriate for an explicit audience and purpose.
5. Use written, visual, or oral strategies to persuade, inform, or engage, considering situation, audience, purpose, aesthetics, and diverse points of view.
6. Practice effective research strategies and integrate research correctly and ethically from credible sources.
7. Understand and apply components of the writing process such as planning, collaborating, organizing, composing, revising, and editing.

Course Policies

Engagement. Engagement in this course means completing assigned readings, writing and review exercises, draft workshops, and major writing projects. More than that, it means sharing your knowledge and insights in a variety of ways *and* being prepared to learn from other people enrolled in your section of the course. It includes asking questions and helping other students get answers to questions that they may have.

Engagements in our classroom community also ask everyone to take responsibility for class dynamics and be responsive to the situation of the classroom. You should think about who is talking the most, when, and why that might be. And about how you can personally encourage equitable distribution of "air time." Ask yourself: what histories are at play? How are certain kinds of bodies implicated differently in each topic we discuss? When readings, comments, or structures participate in the normalization of discriminatory views or expectations (which they inevitably will at times), we all have a responsibility to call attention to these "invisible" cultural dynamics. When we (together) fail to engage a difficult topic well, please feel welcome to speak up in class or to contact me and let me know where you think we failed and what you think doing better would look, sound, or feel like.

Grading. I will assign due dates and will provide you with detailed assignment overviews that describe expectations and constraints for each major assignment.

Course Assignments. Your grade in this class is comprised of five major components:

- *Academic/Style Profile*—5pts: In week two, you will draft a largely informal academic and style profile in which you will reflect on your academic career thus far, including by

reflecting on how experiences and writing within your chosen field of study has shaped your style as a writer.

- *Weekly Writing Exercises*—20pts: These low-stakes assignments ask you to reflect on major concepts from each week and explain how assigned authors tackled issues related to mental health representation, awareness, history, and conceptualization in popular culture from situated, discipline-specific perspectives.

- *Participation*—35pts: Discussion is a major component of this course. You will be expected to come to class prepared with notes from assigned readings and ready to share your ideas and questions with me and your classmates.

- *Final Project Proposal*—15pts: Prior to our group conferences (scheduled for week fourteen), you will create a proposal that outlines your plans for the final creative project. This proposal will be around 1-2 pages in length and should explain the disciplinary approach you plan to use and the form that your final project will take.

- *Creative Project and Memo*—25pts: The final project for the course asks that you create your own multimedia representation of a concept related mental health and/or illness, framed through a specific social science or humanities lens. Accompanying your multimedia project will be a short memo explaining how the stylistic choices you made for your project were informed by the conventions of a particular genre situated in the social sciences or humanities.

Course Overview

Week One | Introductions and Course Overview
Our course, note taking, key concepts

Week Two | How to Study Writing: Conventions, Citations, and Methods
Sharp-Hoskins, Paideia 18 *Chapter One*
Southwestern University, "An Introduction to Disciplinary Writing"
Guzman, "How to Cite Like a Badass"

Academic/Style Profile drafting

Academic/Style Profile Due

Week Three | History: Marginalization, Stigma, and Discourse Analysis
History Today, "What is History?"
UNC Chapel Hill, "History"
Southwestern University, "A Guide for Writing in History"

Touro University Worldwide, "Breaking America's Mental Health Stigma"
Arboleda-Flórez & Stuart, "Fighting the Stigmatization of Mental Illness"

Weekly Writing #1 Due

Week Four | Art: Representation, Perspective, and Writing Theses

No class

Armstrong, "What is Art For?"
UNC Chapel Hill, "Art History"
Waugh, "The enduring connection between art and mental health"
White, "Art and Mental Illness, An Art Historical Perspective"

Weekly Writing #2 Due

Week Five | Communication: Theory, Praxis, and Rhetorical Analysis

UNCW, "What is Communication Studies?"
Cappella, "Theoretical Approaches to Communication Campaigns"
van Ruler, "Communication Theory"

Cho & Salmon, "Unintended Effects of Health Communication Campaigns"
Snyder, "Health Communication Campaigns and Their Impact on Behavior"

Weekly Writing #3 Due

Week Six | Linguistics: Semantics, Signification, and Critical Analysis

UCLA, "What is Linguistics?"
Hall, "Representation"
Saussure, "General Linguistics" (Optional)

The National Library of Medicine, "Linguistic Expression in Blog Content and Symptoms of Depression"
Kousoulis, "Why Language Matters"

Weekly Writing #4 Due

Week Seven | Geography: Identifying Exigence, Audience, and Evidence

Miami University, "Writing in Geography"
Beck, "What Geographers Do"
NMSU, "Geography Courses Overview"

Jones, "The Geography of Mental Health"
Holley, "Geography and mental health: a review"

Weekly Writing #5 Due

Week Eight | Anthropology: Culture, Normativity, and Objectivity (?)

UC Davis, "What is Anthropology?"
UNC Chapel Hill, "Anthropology"

Wulff, "Writing Anthropology"

Allinsmith & Goethals, "Cultural Factors in Mental Health"
Bhugra, et al., "Culture and mental illnesses"
lorenz, "Nobody is normal"

Weekly Writing #6 Due

Week Nine | Literature: Literary Analysis, Representation, and Textual Evidence

UNC Chapel Hill, "Literature"
Germanna Community College, "Writing a Literary Analysis"
MasterClass, "Understanding Literary Criticism"

Shemilt, "Tracing the Portrayal of Mental Disorders in Literature"
Public Libraries Singapore, "Exploring Mental Illness in Literature"

Weekly Writing #7 Due

Week Ten | Philosophy: Inquiry, Argumentation, and Epistemology

American Philosophical Association, "Philosophy: A brief guide"
Southwestern University, "A Guide for Writing in Philosophy"

Stammers, "The value of doing philosophy in mental health contexts"
Sforzini, "Mental illness, philosophy and the search for meaning"

Weekly Writing #8 Due

Week Eleven | Sociology: Society, Self-Stigma, and Data Gathering

UNC Chapel Hill, "Sociology"
SNHU, "What Do Sociologists Do?"
Pohl, "Why study sociology?"

Busfield, "Rethinking the sociology of mental health"
Foucault, "Panopticism"

Weekly Writing #9 Due

Week Twelve | Political Science: Positionality and Political Philosophy

Ondrová, "Politics Begins in Your Everyday Life"
Weinberg College, "What is Political Science?
Oregon State University, "Political Science"

Bernardi, "Mental Health and Political Representation: A Roadmap"
Iemmi, "Establishing political priority for global mental health"

Weekly Writing #10 Due

Week Thirteen | Final Project Proposals
Proposal drafting

Final Project Proposal Due

Week Fourteen | Group Conferences
Group conferences

Week Fifteen | Fall Break
No class (Fall break)

Week Sixteen | Final Project Workshop
In-class workshopping/peer review

Week Seventeen | Finals
Creative Project and Memo Due