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Researching Writing Program Administration Expertise in Action: A Case Study of Collaborative Problem Solving as Transdisciplinary Practice

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Theorizing WPA expertise as problem-oriented, stakeholder-inclusive practice, we apply the twenty-first-century paradigm of transdisciplinarity to a campus WID Initiative to read and argue that data-driven research capturing transdisciplinary WPA methods in action will allow us to better understand, represent, and leverage rhetoric-composition/writing studies' disciplinary expertise in twenty-first-century higher education.

Contemporary research paradigms offer valuable opportunities for the field of RCWS (rhetoric and composition/writing studies[1]) to theorize our disciplinarity, offering new ways to see ourselves and present our expertise to stakeholders. The alignment of RCWS's traditions of applied problem solving and collaboration with twenty-first-century academic paradigms has the potential to resolve debates that have historically pitted RCWS's teaching, research, and administrative mandates against one another. The case study presented here of the SWIRL (Success in Writing, Information,

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and Research Literacy) WID (Writing in the Disciplines) Initiative at Santa Clara University, a midsized private liberal arts college in the western United States, illustrates RCWS's expert practices of inventing solutions to local problems through transdisciplinary collaborative methods, reflecting RCWS's maturity as a field poised to theorize and argue for local, applied WPA research as (one form of) discipline-defining expertise.

Conceptualizations of twentieth-century disciplinarity in US higher education, which define expertise as content knowledge produced by research communities, have historically disadvantaged RCWS as a discipline. Throughout RCWS's evolution as a modern discipline during the twentieth century, we worked to present ourselves as experts within this paradigm of disciplinarity. As a result, many of the foundational texts of RCWS emphasize accumulated knowledge about writing and define the field based on research findings, to the exclusion of disciplinary practices and methods.[2] Scholarship about writing research, however, also demonstrates that we have always valued our expertise as praxis as well as "content" or generalizable research findings (see Phelps's 1988 *Composition as a Human Science: Contributions to the Self-Understanding of a Discipline* as an example). This practical orientation was an obstacle for early writing program administrators (WPAs) whose academic output wasn't easily legible within twentieth-century paradigms that equated disciplinarity with research findings. Explanations of the relationship between "administrative

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work" and "scholarship" in late twentieth-century WPA publications reflect this misfit between the praxis that often defined RCWS expertise and the external audiences who valued expertise as research findings. "The Portland Resolution" of 1992 (Hult et al.), for example, equates administrative work with research, directing institutions to describe "what administrative work will be counted as 'scholarship'" (89). While Joseph Janangelo and Kristine Hansen guarantee readers of their edited collection that administrative work has "intellectually solid bases" (xvii), Patricia Bizzell, operating within the twentieth-century disciplinary paradigm, distinguishes between scholarship and administration by describing the WPA as one

part teacher-researcher and one part managerial survivor of "daily trivia of memos, meetings, and the latest 'crisis'" (vii–viii). These binary distinctions between administration as intellectual service and scholarship as research publications were rhetorically appropriate given twentieth-century disciplinary paradigms.

Karen Bishop was one of the first to explicitly address this false binary with her 2002 suggestion that WPAs be more intentional about capturing our processes via documentation, allowing us to better reflect upon and theorize about our expertise in practice. Yet even scholars like Bishop, who called us to study WPA expertise in practice, tended to frame WPA work in terms of contributions to local, institutional communities, which consequently deemphasized the transferable problem-solving methods that are foundational to WPA expertise. One result, as Colin Charlton et

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al. point out in *GenAdmin: Theorizing WPA Identities in the Twenty-First Century*, has been an overreliance on narrative to document, analyze, and theorize the expertise of WPAs to the detriment of generalizable research applicable across RCWS

contexts.[3] These efforts were crucially important in discourse community formation: we wrote ourselves a community of practice. What these experiential narratives of WPA work tend to underemphasize and fail to theorize, however, are the methods we use to apply RCWS's expertise. Instead, the narrative approach to WPA scholarship encouraged WPAs to deploy their expertise locally to achieve urgent local program goals and then transform the remnants of those tasks into publications. It relegated WPA scholarship to an artifact or afterthought of program assessment, rather than applied research whose practices and methods were themselves worthy of study.

The influence of this twentieth-century approach to RCWS's disciplinarity persists even in recent issues of *College Composition and Communication*. Faye Halpern describes the difficulties of working within a framework of disciplinary expertise WPAs face, presenting RCWS's hard-won disciplinarity as an obstacle to WPA work. Overlooking WPAs' expertise about how to implement RCWS content knowledge in practice, she argues that WPAs' assertion of disciplinary expertise compromises their rhetorical agility and effectiveness in their local institutional contexts. Instead she offers the strategy of "strategic disingenuousness" used by nineteenth-century sentimental

women novelists to disavow the disciplinarity of RCWS, appealing to the expertise and pedagogical values of colleagues in other disciplines while strategically downplaying RCWS's content knowledge. While Halpern offers one strategy for WPAs, we contend that Halpern's approach to WPA intellectual work accepts the limited twentieth-century conceptualization of disciplinarity as content knowledge, falsely isolating WPAs' local program-building work from generalizable research and applied expertise. On the other hand, Anne Ruggles Gere et al.'s use of new disciplinarity as a WPA framework moves us closer to the twenty-first-century academy, arguing for the identity and power of disciplines while also acknowledging their local particularity. However, the focus of Gere et al. is more on understanding how other disciplines operate and train their students to write than on the implications of new disciplinarity for RCWS itself, offering little in the way of a theory of WPA scholarship based on their thorough program assessment and curricular revision.

We argue that viewing and representing ourselves as disciplinary experts *of practice* shifts how we understand our WPA work in cross-disciplinary institutional contexts, providing a way to assert WPA research and expertise within paradigms of twenty-first-century transdisciplinarity.

These pieces represent different and yet familiar approaches to WPA scholarship: strategizing rhetorical ways to effectively conduct WPA work as interdepartmental, institutional service (Halpern), and seizing scholarly opportunities that arise from WPA program assessment work already conducted for outside stakeholders (Gere et al.). Reimagining the disciplinarity of RCWS specifically, however, offers our field—and particularly WPA scholars—new ways to navigate the changing academic landscape from a position of strength, sidestepping the content-focused arguments about disciplinary legitimacy that plagued previous generations. We argue that viewing and representing ourselves as disciplinary experts *of practice* shifts how we understand our WPA work in cross-disciplinary institutional contexts, providing a way to assert WPA research and expertise within paradigms of twenty-first-century transdisciplinarity.

Paradigms of Disciplinarity in the Twenty-First-Century Academy: Affordances for WPA Research

Considering RCWS through twenty-first-century disciplinarity paradigms reveals tremendous opportunities for our field and for WPA research in

particular. We seek the possibilities of twenty-first-century disciplinarity, characterized by a focus on wicked problems that demand the expertise of multiple disciplines, an emphasis on practical and applied research addressing on real-world needs, and accountability of researchers to stakeholders.[4] This paradigm shift, we argue, benefits RCWS, particularly WPA scholars, whose work embodies this applied, collaborative approach to research. Louise Wetherbee Phelps and John M. Ackerman consider these possibilities in their presentation of the rhetorical strategies (the practices and methods) used by different professional RCWS organizations collaborating on the Visibility Project to secure "emerging discipline" status for RCWS in national research databases.[5] They call on RCWS to develop more strategies for capturing our work "through organizational action as well as the scholarly and practical work of faculty members enacting roles as scholars, educators, and administrators" (207). They observe that RCWS is likely to "thrive" in the twenty-first century specifically because disciplines are "disunifying" in the contemporary academy as a result of new paradigms that emphasize applied problem solving and collaboration, which we explore through new disciplinarity and transdisciplinarity.

New Disciplinarity

In their study of the University of Michigan's advanced writing requirement, Gere et al. use new disciplinarity to account for the "intersections, subversions, and interrogations of disciplines" (261) that thrive in WAC/WID programs, a dynamic view of disciplinarity that fits RCWS better than the twentieth-century disciplinarity emphasis on agreed-upon content knowledge. Education researcher Jan Parker likewise advocates for new disciplinarity based on disciplines as communities of practice, warning researchers that

> the focus on subject, rather than disciplinary communities, is part of the commodification of higher education; [...] what is needed to re-energize both teachers and students is an inclusive new model of disciplinary education based on an engaged community's processes and practices. (373)

Parker's ideas challenge RCWS to frame WPA work according to the expert practices of our professional community rather than what she calls "subjects" or content knowledge, emphasizing what we in RCWS might call threshold practices instead of attempting to define our field according to a

coherent set of research findings that have proven too rigid to encompass RCWS's expertise. Using the example of science as a twentieth-century metadiscipline, sociologists of science Anne Marcovich and Terry Shinn argue that new disciplinarity allowed science to proliferate, accelerate, and advance as it reoriented how scientists thought about the goals and work of their disciplines. New disciplinarity, as a methodology—that is, a research orientation—is similarly useful for RCWS scholars as we continue to define and better understand our own expertise. The new disciplinarity paradigm urges us to focus on our work as a disciplinary community, defined by relying upon RCWS's expert praxis. As an orientation that maintains the integrity and import of disciplines while refocusing our attention on activity, new disciplinarity provides a twenty-first-century framework for WPA expertise.

Transdisciplinarity

While new disciplinarity offers a methodological paradigm for understanding the value of RCWS traditions, transdisciplinarity paradigms encourage investigation of *how*—the methods RCWS scholars such as WPAs use—we enact this expertise. Malin Mobjörk describes transdisciplinary work as problem and therefore action oriented, emergent, premised on the mobilization of expertise, and involving both expert and "lay" or practice-based actors. The defining characteristics of transdisciplinary work, Francesco Di Iacovo et al. argue, are the project's methods, resulting in integration of participants and communities; reflective relationships; collaboration strategies; and problem-based practices. Like new disciplinarity, this transdisciplinarity focuses on research practices as much as research findings. The methods of transdisciplinarity that Mobjork and Di Iacovo advocate help RCWS disrupt the twentieth-century tradition of viewing subject and content as more valuable than applied research. Instead, twenty-first-century transdisciplinarity defines disciplinarity as the use of expert methods developed by a community of practice to solve situated problems.

Justin K. Rademaekers applies this paradigm to RCWS, proposing a model of transdisciplinary WID pedagogy. Rademaekers's model (depicted in Figure 1) imagines team members from different disciplines, represented by different ovals, converging to work on a transdisciplinary writing project. In Rademaekers's model, the team's transdisciplinary work is confined to a tiny shared space (represented by the black circle at the center of Figure 1) established by sharing the terminology, practices, and mission the team
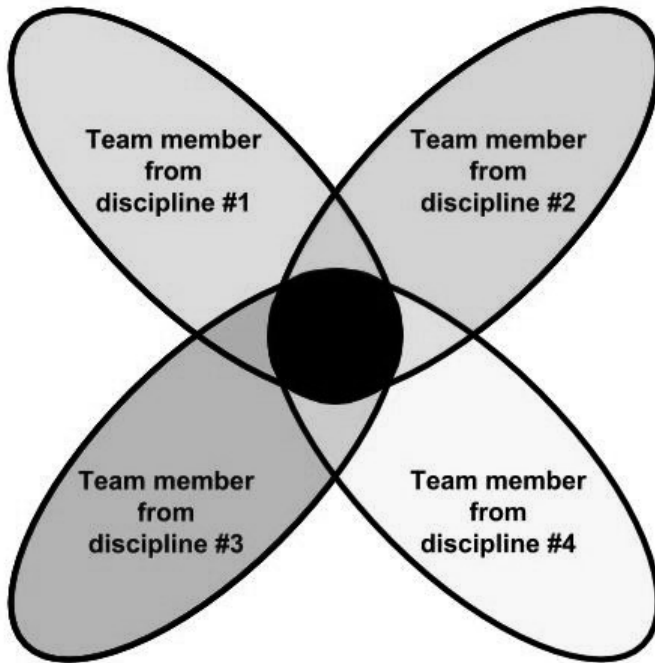
Figure 1. Justin K. Rademaekers's model of transdisciplinary collaboration. In this model, transdisciplinarity consists of the small space of intersection (marked with the black circle at the center of the diagram) where the interests and knowledge of all parties overlap, forged in consensus by the group.

develops by transcending their disciplinary identities through consensus as a precursor to collaboration.

While Rademaekers offers one model of transdisciplinary WID work, our study of the establishment of the SWIRL WID Initiative reveals transdisciplinarity working differently upon application. The SWIRL team's effectiveness was bolstered by each member's different background, rather than limited to established shared knowledge or consensus. Drawing on varied and even divergent expertise contributed to the group's success. Focus on a situated, shared problem and the affordances of our aggregated expertise was much more significant to the team's success than the tran-

scending (that is, abandoning) of our disciplinarity identities to establish a small, consensus-driven collective identity.

Our study of SWIRL demonstrates that the transdisciplinary problem solving typical of writing program building cannot be restricted to so small a shared conceptual space (represented by the black circle in Figure 1) for the important work of problem posing and problem solving to be successful. The paradigm of disciplinarity that we theorize and advocate through this WID program case study synthesizes what new disciplinarity and transdisciplinarity offer RCWS, namely highlighting the contributions of expert practices as disciplinary knowledge applied to a situated, wicked problem that requires collaboration across disciplines and institutional units.

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Inventing and Building SWIRL: Applying Transdisciplinarity to a WID Initiative

Viewing the writing program development work of RCWS through the lens of transdisciplinarity reframes and resolves some of the expertise and identity issues that have troubled the field. The emphasis on communities of practice, characterized by dynamic work on concrete projects and tasks, subverts historic limitations placed on our discipline. This perspective pushes RCWS beyond definitions of disciplinarity that force binary participation in higher education either as a research tradition that distances itself from pedagogical practice or as a service tradition that must appease institutional masters without an identity of its own. RCWS can now align itself with this capacious view of disciplinarity as a way to accommodate our tradition of practicing research, teaching, and administration simultaneously.

The work of the SWIRL team, an example of transdisciplinary WPA work in action, was premised upon the deployment of members' expertise simultaneously to collaboratively solve a problem. The transdisciplinary SWIRL team focused on applied expertise (as well as content knowledge)

to approach this issue in two stages: (1) developing a persuasive problem paradigm and (2) mobilizing team members' expert practices to invent solutions.

Contexts for the SWIRL Initiative

In the spring of 2016, a group of seven women faculty and academic staff members began a conversation about three crucial areas of undergraduate learning—writing, critical thinking, and information literacy—at Santa Clara University (SCU), a midsized private liberal arts university in northern California. The group included the following members:

- Authors Tricia and Julia, both tenure-track faculty in English at the time, specializing in RCWS

- Kamala,[6] head of Instruction and Assessment for the University Library

- Shirley, a senior lecturer[7] in political science specializing in comparative politics, with years of experience working in the Academic Advising and Learning Resources Center

- Nora, a lecturer in civil engineering specializing in water resource engineering

- Michelle, director of University Assessment, co-director of the Faculty Collaborative for Teaching Innovation, and tenured communication faculty specializing in youth media use and civic participation

- Susan, assistant director of University Assessment and quantitative analysis expert

The group, assembled by Michelle, participated in the 2016 Teaching and Learning National Institute (TLNI) at Evergreen State College's Washington Center for Undergraduate Education. To prepare for TLNI, SCU's team gathered institutional data and interviewed undergraduates to document student experiences and perceptions of critical thinking, writing, and information literacy development.

TLNI's four-day program included plenaries, concurrent sessions highlighting research-based practices in faculty development and cur-

riculum design, and team meeting time devoted to drafting an action plan responding to specific institutional needs. During TLNI the SCU team developed a three-year plan that became the SWIRL (Success in Writing, Information, and Research Literacy) Initiative, designed to support the teaching of research-based writing in the disciplines, especially in upper-division undergraduate courses. The components of the Initiative will be familiar to WPA and WAC/WID scholars:

- **Year 1:** gather campus data to document current state of writing, critical thinking, and information literacy in the disciplines (compile existing data, conduct surveys, interview student and faculty focus groups)

- **Year 2:** provide faculty development through a pilot faculty learning community (FLC), one-off workshops/guest speakers, and online pedagogical resources (common vocabulary, model assignments, sample lesson plans, just-in-time materials, etc.)

- **Year 3:** continue FLC and workshop programming with new groups of faculty, expand/revise online resources, and assess impact of Year 2 interventions

This article's focus on the rarely documented methods of writing program building in real time depicts the transdisciplinary nature of RCWS work. The data from the SWIRL development process documented here include transcripts and artifacts from team meetings, analyzed to demonstrate how transdisciplinary work shaped the SWIRL team and Initiative as well as how transdisciplinarity as a framework and heuristic can benefit RCWS more broadly. We illustrate how problem-based, expertise-driven practices helped the SWIRL team create the Initiative's focus, goals, timeline, and strategic plan. Documenting and theorizing WPA work in this way embraces twenty-first-century disciplinarity, making our discipline even more legible and compelling within the academy.

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Transdisciplinary Program Building: Inventing Problems and Including Stakeholders

Because transdisciplinary work focuses on practice and collaboration, teams must create conditions for their work through problem posing, both within the group and in the broader contexts where their work will be received. Articulating the shared problem establishes the parameters and purposes of the transdisciplinary collaboration, becoming crucial proto-program building work the team must undertake. In order to practice this kind of transdisciplinary research, the team engaged in activities rooted in rhetorical practices of RCWS: inventing a central, defining problem and planning stakeholder appeals to realize proposed solutions.

Problem Posing: Program Design through Data-Driven Invention

The team struggled initially to focus our efforts. SWIRL members used a dialectical process to present evidence-based observations, shaped by team members' different disciplinary backgrounds. The group used this process to identify upper-division discipline-specific writing courses as our site for intervention. Our process of problem development embodies Karen Burke LeFevre's argument for invention as a social act, that is, one that both takes place between interlocutors and constitutes the social world in which those interlocutors operate. The team arrived at TLNI with disparate sets of information: quantitative assessment data, such as scores on the NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) and inter-institutional studies, and qualitative data, such as student interviews, classroom observations, and local artifacts. We lacked a shared sense of what strengths and weaknesses in writing, critical thinking, and information literacy learning this information collectively showed; much less did we have a sense of what should be done about them. The lengthy discussions that parsed this information to invent a concrete and specific problem around which to focus our transdisciplinary work were difficult and yet crucial, necessary steps for articulating a problem (that is, a raison d'être) that the whole team recognized and supported. Team members did this by drawing on their expertise to interpret our data, performing the kinds of discipline-influenced topical invention described by new disciplinarity scholars such as Parker and rhetorical theorists such as Carolyn Miller and Jack Selzer. Our discussion of quantitative assessment data, for example, illustrates this

point, showing how team members began to zero in on the problems with research-based writing from different disciplinary angles:

Shirley: [Y]es, the data shows that students are writing a lot, but what they understand writing to be is in this first year system. Now, we're looking to take the success of that and push it upwards.

Julia: Also, the pilot assessment that you guys [Michelle and Susan] had done indicates that—especially with advanced writing—the level of proficiency and content development and stuff in what we call the advanced writing was not as advanced as what we would want to see.

[. . .]

Michelle: Yeah. Fifty-some [percent of freshmen] were reporting doing more than one draft, and then it drops to 37 [percent of seniors].

[. . .]

Kamala: I don't know if we want to bring in information literacy, or just focus on that their [students'] understanding of information literacy is practically nonexistent.

Shirley and Michelle—social scientists with backgrounds in quantitative analysis—focused on self-reported statistics documenting how students approach writing tasks, noting that use of a multidraft writing process drops off after students complete their first-year writing requirement. This data suggested that advanced writing courses were a good place to position an intervention that reinforced writing as a process. Julia, a RCWS specialist, focused on direct assessment of writing artifacts indicating that critical thinking suffers in upper-division courses where students more frequently write single drafts. Kamala raised questions about information literacy, using her own disciplinary focus to add (invent) a dimension not included in the existing assessment reports. This exchange illustrates how—as Miller and Selzer describe—team members applied disciplinary expectations for what topics to consider and what evidence to use while considering them, which were instrumental in defining the problem the team would address.

Similarly, locating the issue in the advanced writing course allowed team members to further deploy their expertise as they discussed the rationale for and impact of a local artifact, the Core Curriculum requirement that advanced writing students produce a minimum of twenty pages of "original

work" during the ten-week quarter, not counting any prewriting, drafts, or informal writing (Writing Faculty Core Committee). Tricia questioned the validity of this rigid focus on the amount of writing produced, which, she stated, was "not supported by [RCWS] research." Michelle agreed that the emphasis on number of pages written was misplaced, supporting her objection with an assessment-related study she recently read that used bivariate analysis to demonstrate that characteristics other than length (such as clear instructions, specific outcomes or criteria, scaffolding, and formative feedback) contribute more to students' writing quality, deep learning, and personal and social development.[8]

Due to the transdisciplinary nature of the SWIRL team, members could not take for granted shared ideas about the state of writing on campus or how to improve it. As a result, in order to define our problem and decide how to address it, team members drew on their own disciplinary expertise to identify the parameters of the problem and persuade the rest of the team to accept them. This occurred in conversation, where one team member identified a writing, critical thinking, or information literacy challenge demonstrated in an artifact or piece of data based on their own disciplinary training, and, by explaining it to the rest of the team, incrementally built a shared understanding of the issue. In the exchange above Tricia drew on decades-long traditions of research that critique artificial measurements of writing quality and development to question the twenty-page requirement. Michelle reinforced Tricia's critique with recent, empirical data aligning with her own background in quantitative analysis in communication and assessment. This incident illustrates how topical conventions from different disciplines contributed to the invention of our problem. In this dialogic way, the SWIRL team constituted the institutional conditions to which we would respond, laying groundwork for the next step of engaging outside stakeholders and systems in solution-oriented WID programming.

Aligning Interests around a Problem: Building Audiences and Engaging Stakeholders

As Michelle Cox et al. argue, successful WAC initiatives must involve multiple stakeholders at multiple institutional levels and leverage systems outside the institution whose purview includes writing. However, while Cox et al. describe the process of involving stakeholders and engaging with outside systems as a fait accompli through retrospective vignettes by

program directors, we capture the process in action to study the impact of building multiple stakeholders and systems into the transdisciplinary design of the SWIRL team and Initiative. Including staff and faculty from different appointment types and disciplines set up the team to consider multiple stakeholders inside and outside the institution informed by members' diverse disciplinary and professional expertise.

The process of strategically aligning with stakeholders and anticipating the impact of outside systems began when Shirley proposed that the team follow a piece of advice she heard at a TLNI session: "find out what your provost cares about" and align our efforts with resource-rich, decision-making audiences at SCU. A longstanding institutional citizen, Shirley answered her own question: "STEM, STEM, STEM, STEM, STEM. That's what I hear." Mobilizing her own disciplinary expertise as a comparative political scientist, Shirley tuned into the different organizational systems and priorities of campus leaders to identify other potential stakeholders in the writing, critical thinking, and information literacy problems the team identified. Likewise, team members who were also program directors used their administrative expertise to tease out the connections between our problem-based project and other powerful campus players. Michelle and Susan (director and assistant director of University Assessment) connected issues with students' writing, critical thinking, and information literacy with upcoming visits from the regional accreditor, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), as these areas are three of the five competencies WASC assesses. Leveraging accreditation as an external system provided a way to engage upper-level administrators who interact with WASC (provosts and deans) as stakeholders in the SWIRL Initiative.

As Cox et al. observe, while cultivating the political and financial support of upper-level administrators is essential, a successful initiative must also involve less visible institutional actors, especially those who will participate in and be affected by its programming. Shirley strategized ways to attract the faculty audience whose participation was necessary for the success of SWIRL. She argued that the team should cultivate key people teaching writing-intensive courses in "big departments" who could inform SWIRL's pedagogical recommendations, implement them, and persuasively disseminate these ideas in their large and influential units. Shirley was also particularly attuned to the influence that appointment type and rank would have on faculty participation, asserting that the most useful resource for

teaching-focused lecturers and junior faculty anticipating tenure would be practical, online pedagogical tools (model assignments, sample lesson plans, recommended readings, etc.) and on-demand guidance in implementing them, accessible to faculty who don't spend much time on campus or whose teaching schedules conflict with face-to-face workshops. Because teaching weighs so heavily in performance evaluations for lecturers, Shirley saw them as benefiting most from SWIRL's programming and therefore likely to be its most receptive audience.

Engaging in applied, transdisciplinary work demands that WPAs focus on specific, concrete problems and incorporate the knowledge and needs of multiple groups of stakeholders. The SWIRL team's experience illustrates how complex problem articulation can be and how much it relies on disciplinary expertise in the form of both content and practices. Once the problem had been identified and located in a concrete context, the varied expertise built into the SWIRL team's diverse composition made us aware of multiple potential stakeholders to engage and strategies for engagement.

Scaffolded Program-Building Practices: Backward Design in Action

A central feature of transdisciplinarity is approaching research as problem solving through applied expertise. Bringing to bear practices from their individual disciplinary backgrounds, team members defined their tasks in response to a problem, informed by their research, administrative, and pedagogical experiences. SWIRL's problem-solving efforts materialized in WPA program-building heuristics (facilitated visual invention and collaborative planning via GANTT chart) premised upon backward design as a scaffolding paradigm. Backward design, as a framework, highlights two significant characteristics of WPA program-building work as it emphasizes outcomes and invests in the transferability or cumulative yield of any singular activity or endeavor.[9] Thus, backward design was the methodological framework that guided the SWIRL team as we drew on different strategies to create WID programming.

Backward Design as Program-Building Framework

Once the central issue of inconsistent undergraduate instruction in research-based disciplinary writing was established, the team eagerly moved on to problem solving. Members mobilized their divergent expertise—from managing water security engineering projects to training faculty to advising

undergraduate students—to address this situated problem. While diversity of expertise is often seen as a challenge that can thwart cross-disciplinary WPA work (as in Rademaekers's description of transdisciplinary teams), the SWIRL team's transdisciplinary approach to problem-based program development allowed members to draw on expert practices to collect and synthesize multiple perspectives in pursuit of backward design. This commitment to backward design evolved as the group talked about *how* to design programming together. Figure 2 captures elements of group members' expertise that contributed to the group's strategies for doing the work of writing program building as a transdisciplinary team; Figure 3 locates this expertise in team members' disciplinary and professional backgrounds. Without explicit discussion, these team members offered tools of program development based upon their disciplinary expertise. SWIRL's use of backward design and corresponding strategies did not emerge from consensus and shared knowledge established at the outset. Instead, group members contributed to the team's work by mobilizing their own expertise, presented in ways that made it accessible to other team members.

Scaffolding Practices in Action

Two particular methods emerged from the team's commitment to backward design: use of facilitated visual invention strategies (see the chalk boards presented in Figures 4 and 5) and use of collaborative programmatic scaffolding and planning tools (see the GANTT chart development across Figures 6 and 7).

The use of this expertise-driven collaborative invention was not established via explicit discussion or consensus by the team but arose from suggestions made and ratified by individual members, informed by their distinct disciplinary experience in the academy and at SCU. We identify the SWIRL team's expertise-driven, collaborative problem solving as an

We identify the SWIRL team's expertise-driven, collaborative problem solving as an example of a transdisciplinary method that elicited multiple perspectives and techniques for applying the expertise of different team members. Methods such as facilitated visual invention embody a central feature of transdisciplinarity that already enriches twenty-first-century writing program administration.

example of a transdisciplinary method that elicited multiple perspectives and techniques for applying the expertise of different team members.

Project Management	Curriculum Design and Assessment	Pedagogy	Faculty Development
Nora asked the group to articulate a working mission statement to focus and clarify our efforts.

Julia, Kamala, and Nora suggested and developed a digital Gantt chart for SWIRL's strategic development (the chart is depicted in Figure 7). | Tricia and Michelle suggested using backward design to create guiding Initiative outcomes.

Susan suggested creating common vocabulary that would allow us to measure SWIRL's impact through the language students and faculty used to talk about writing, critical thinking, and information literacy.

Tricia pointed out that developing and implementing this common vocabulary would require reaching a campus consensus about what constitutes writing "proficiency." | Tricia transcribed team members' suggestions at the board, asked prompting questions, and summarized emerging consensus about the Initiative's goals and outcomes (see Figures 4 and 5).

Julia used the chalkboard mounted in the team's meeting area to remediate the group's ideas into a timeline (see Figure 6). | Michelle and Julia suggested setting goals for faculty participation, which Susan and Kamala specified should be separated from assessing the impact on student learning (see Figures 4 and 5).

Shirley requested tracking the relationship between SWIRL Initiative participation and faculty promotion.

Julia and Kamala noted the ambition of SWIRL's plans and suggested the team map the results of our backward design brainstorming onto a 3-year timeline in Gantt chart form (see Figure 6). |

Figure 2. Transdisciplinary SWIRL team members drew on different kinds of expertise to mobilize backward design methodology into writing program building and scaffolded practice (documented in meeting transcripts).
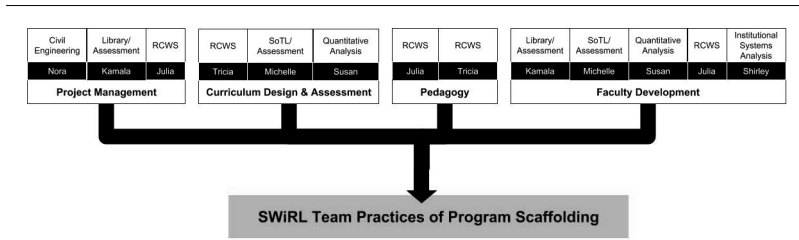
Figure 3. How team members' expertise came together to scaffold the process of building the SWIRL Initiative.
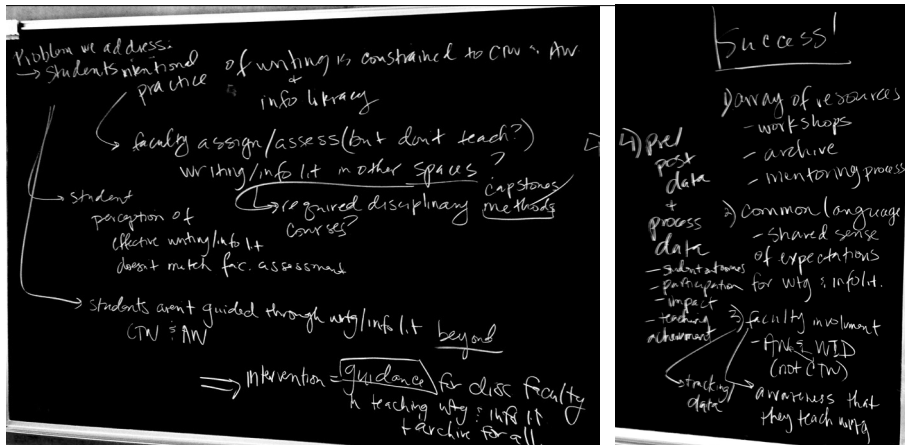

Figure 4. (First board) Tricia's notes from TLNI visualize the team's brainstorming, detailing problems the Initiative will address, shown on the left: (1) students' intentional practice of writing and information literacy is constrained to first-year writing and designated advanced writing courses, (2) many faculty—especially those teaching disciplinary methods classes—*assign* research and writing but don't *teach* students how to do it in a disciplinary context, and (3) students' perception of their writing and research abilities do not match faculty's assessment of these skills. Demonstration of Initiative success is shown on the right: (1) development of an array of resources, (2) establishment of common expectations and language for writing and information literacy, (3) involvement of faculty teaching upper-division writing-in-the-disciplines courses, and (4) collection and analysis of pre- and post-data to assess the impact of these interventions.

Figure 5. (Second board) Tricia's notes describing the actions the team will undertake to solve the problems we identified. Our strategies appear on the left: (1) drafting a "user guide" for teaching writing and information literacy in the disciplines using evidence-based guidelines that address page length as an artificial requirement, (2) contacting disciplinary writing faculty by reaching out to individual units and identifying writing-intensive courses in the majors, (3) gathering data using the NSSE and locally developed surveys, and (4) learning what writing and research skills employers look for in our graduates. These actions reflect the larger inquiry questions that guide SWIRL (shown on the right): What is disciplinary writing? How do features manifest in disciplinary writing? What evidence-based guidelines can we use to address page length as an artificial requirement? *(Photo Credit: Arielle Benson | The Evergreen State College)*

Methods such as facilitated visual invention embody a central feature of transdisciplinarity that already enriches twenty-first-century writing program administration.

The team translated its goals into a series of tasks, using collaborative visual invention to taxonomize tasks, enumerate their parts, and place them on a rough timeline in order to bring coherence to our goals (see Figure 6). The processes of public composing and strategic arrangement of information that Julia drew from her own disciplinary training in RCWS were, like the use of backward design described above, not explicitly discussed by the SWIRL team but enacted as a problem-solving heuristic. The kind of practice Julia exercised here, an often invisible but crucial type of WPA work (see Tarabochia's discussion of WPA work as pedagogical[10]), is the result of

Figure 6. (Third board) Julia recorded the team's plans and remediated them into a timeline, divided into fall, winter, and spring quarters. Fall plans: gather data; identify stakeholders in writing, critical thinking, and information literacy on campus; recruit faculty for winter quarter focus groups. Winter plans: run three focus groups (in-person and online versions) to generate common understandings and language about writing, critical thinking, and information literacy; identify specific areas to focus on during year 2 programming; cultivate additional potential stakeholders. Spring plans: draft resource documents on writing, critical thinking, and information literacy; develop outreach strategies, divide SWIRL team into multiple working groups with separate tasks (planning, execution, assessment, etc.). *(Photo Credit: Arielle Benson | The Evergreen State College)*

the layers of expertise that constitute the disciplinary knowledge of WPAs and RCWS scholars in the transdisciplinary paradigm.

As the timeline developed on the board (Figure 6), Julia, Kamala, and Nora began remediating this rough planning draft into a more nuanced and dynamic depiction of our scaffolded approach using a Gantt chart,[11] a project-planning tool adapted from technical communication and familiar to all three team members as a disciplinary tool. The Gantt chart became a scaffolding tool used to identify resources, arrange tasks chronologically, distribute labor, and coordinate progress in real time, as well as to clearly present the project to various external audiences. Kamala, Nora, and Julia used a collaboratively editable Gantt chart in a Google Sheet (see Figure 7)
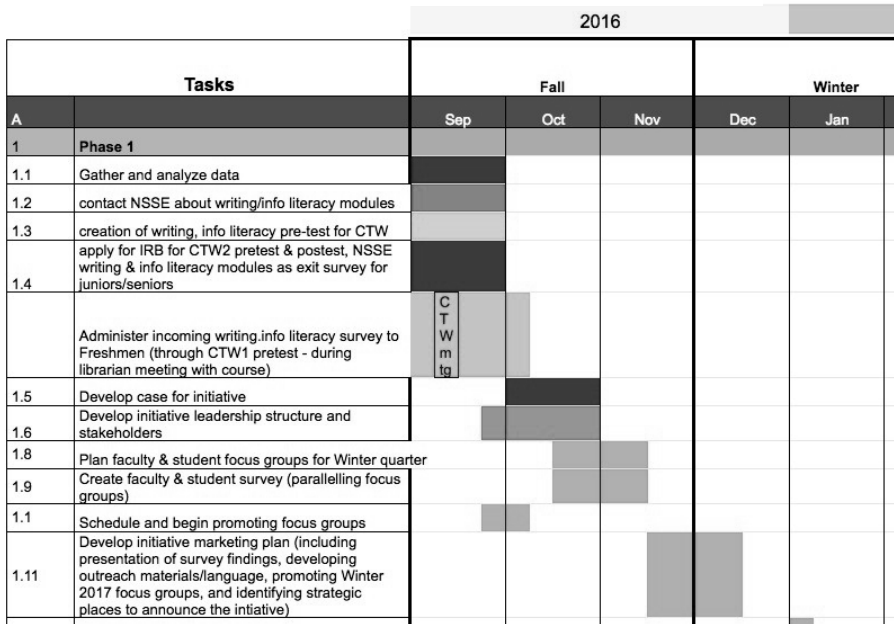
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Student Writing and Research Learning (SWIRL) Initiative
Team: Michelle, Julia, Susan, Nora, Shirley, Kamala, Tricia

		2016				
Tasks		**Fall**				**Winter**
A		Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
1	Phase 1					
1.1	Gather and analyze data					
1.2	contact NSSE about writing/info literacy modules					
1.3	creation of writing, info literacy pre-test for CTW					
1.4	apply for IRB for CTW2 pretest & postest, NSSE writing & info literacy modules as exit survey for juniors/seniors					
	Administer incoming writing.info literacy survey to Freshmen (through CTW1 pretest - during librarian meeting with course)	CTWm tg				
1.5	Develop case for initiative					
1.6	Develop initiative leadership structure and stakeholders					
1.8	Plan faculty & student focus groups for Winter quarter					
1.9	Create faculty & student survey (paralleling focus groups)					
1.1	Schedule and begin promoting focus groups					
1.11	Develop initiative marketing plan (including presentation of survey findings, developing outreach materials/language, promoting Winter 2017 focus groups, and identifying strategic places to announce the intiative)					

Figure 7. Gantt chart as scaffolded program development tool: Julia, Kamala, and Nora created the chart to identify the tasks that need to be done to meet each quarter's goals. This figure shows the tasks planned for Fall 2016: analyze existing NSSE data, create surveys for use in first-year writing courses, articulate the case for the Initiative, plan Winter quarter focus groups, develop marketing plan for Initiative and its programs. They plotted these tasks on SCU's academic calendar, assigning them to different group members using a color-coding scheme.

to remediate the chalkboard timeline into a digital chart accessible to the entire team, drawing from their experiences using Gantt charts as project management tools in contexts ranging from writing pedagogy to library administration to civil engineering.

The SWIRL team's use of the Gantt chart is important for several reasons. First, it illustrates the facilitation that WPAs do as an enactment of expertise, outlined in statements of professional standards such as "The Portland Resolution" (Hult et al.). What generalized descriptive materials

like the Resolution can't capture, however, are the methods and practices used by WPAs, invented in situ and integrated into writing program development via collaboration with other experts. Like all research traditions, WPA scholarship needs to account not only for our work as deliverable products (the SWIRL Initiative, for example) but also the expert methods that we develop, refine, adopt, adapt, and master as we work with others on these deliverable products. Second, the Gantt chart is a crystallization of the transdisciplinary methods of the SWIRL team: different members of the team had experiences using the tool that, together, allowed for quick and collaborative remediation of the timeline into the Gantt chart.

Conclusion: WPA Expert Practices as Sites of Research

Our documentation of the SWIRL team's work exemplifies transdisciplinarity approaches to WPA work in the twenty-first-century academy. Our study of the SWIRL team's methods—posing a data-driven problem, engaging stakeholders, and scaffolding program development—was possible because we had recordings and artifacts from team meetings to analyze. We drew from qualitative research methods that have become standard in RCWS writ large to document emergent WPA practices in order to better understand how our expertise is applied in practice. We traced how disciplinary expertise emerged by capturing SWIRL's practices, a divergence from the more familiar reasons for documenting WPA work to provide data that protects our programs or assures the wider institutional community of our transparency and accountability. We hope that the case study of transdisciplinary WPA practices presented here not only demonstrates the value of transdisciplinary WID programmatic development but also makes a case for the need for more research about actual WPA expert practices.

Capturing actual WPA methods in action via transdisciplinarity paradigms highlights the value of the complicated work we do.

Capturing actual WPA methods in action via transdisciplinarity paradigms highlights the value of the complicated work we do. To articulate this theoretical approach to WPA work, the model of WPA transdisciplinarity we propose, presented in Figure 8, revises Rademaekers's transdisciplinary WID pedagogy model (see Figure 1 above), which requires disciplinary actors to transcend and overcome their disciplinarity. As Figure 8 shows, the large black surrounding oval representing the situated problem and its
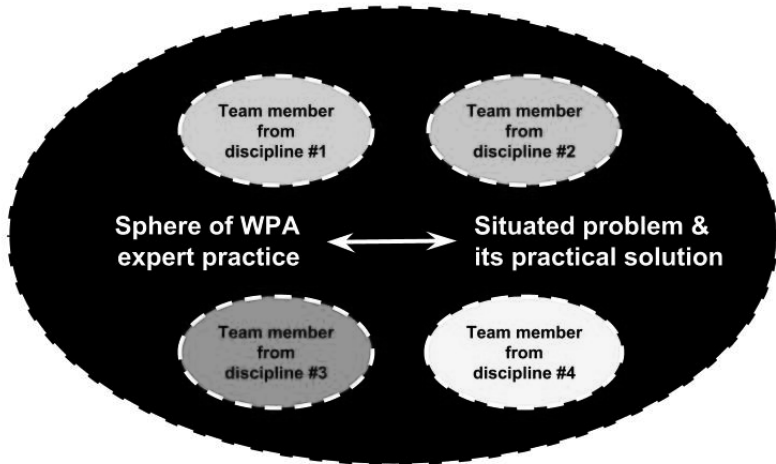
Figure 8. WPA work as transdisciplinary applied expertise.

practice-based solution is the domain of WPA work and, we argue, should be a subject of systematic RCWS research. Our model of transdisciplinarity departs from Rademaekers's, which limited the space of transdisciplinary action to the small overlap of consensus established between multidisciplinary collaborators (the small black circle in Figure 1). Instead, our model of WPA transdisciplinarity leverages the entirety of members' disciplinary experience and expertise, creating conditions that make the boundaries of that disciplinary expertise permeable. Our transdisciplinary WPA model adds a sphere of action populated with team members' application of their expertise, represented by the surrounding oval within which the smaller ovals representing individual team members are located. This surrounding oval is constituted by the exigent problem that calls the transdisciplinary team into existence. The dotted, permeable borders of the small ovals represent different disciplinary collaborators and signify the contribution of their expertise to a collaborative project that crosses disciplinary boundaries. Defining the problem that serves as the context for transdisciplinary work is central to successful collaboration, especially for teams working on writing programming. This sphere of action and transdisciplinary collaboration didn't exist, for example, until SWIRL struggled to invent a specific

problem. Effective transdisciplinary teams require a concrete, situated, and shared problem whose solution begs expertise-driven practices. Instead of stressing common knowledge, vocabulary, and methods, our model of transdisciplinary WPA work emphasizes a common *problem*, which allows for considerably more discipline-based autonomy and contribution. Equally important is the fact that the broad sphere of action centered around the problem represented in Figure 8 is also depicted by a dotted line. This signifies the importance of a permeable sphere of WPA practice that facilitates dynamism and collaboration with external stakeholders.

Transdisciplinarity's emphasis on situated problems and responsiveness to local conditions and stakeholders also requires careful regard as we consider its application across different institutional contexts. The flat hierarchy of expertise in the SWIRL group was enabled not only by the fact that the team assembled to solve a local writing problem but also by SWIRL's location at a midsized liberal arts university that values faculty collaboration. Different specific challenges would have emerged if the problem had involved an existing program with established leadership, policies, and stakeholders, or one located in a larger or less intimate institution (such as the one Gere et al. describe). However, despite these limitations, the twenty-first-century transdisciplinarity WPA paradigm we propose—defined by discrete yet permeable domains of faculty expertise and driven by a shared problem concerning student learning—allows faculty and administrators to honor and leverage one another's expertise in ways that respond to local conditions.

Documenting WPA expertise in action by designing data-driven research projects about the practices, methods, and strategies we deploy and develop as expert practitioners can help us better understand ourselves as RCWS scholars and ultimately create better writing programming for our students, our institutions, and ourselves.

Documenting WPA expertise in action by designing data-driven research projects about the practices, methods, and strategies we deploy and develop as expert practitioners can help us better understand ourselves as RCWS scholars and ultimately create better writing programming for our students, our institutions, and ourselves. These kinds of real-time WPA methods, we argue, become more apparent and discernible when viewed through a transdisciplinary lens. Studying WPA expertise through the practice-orientation of transdisciplinarity suits the intellectual work

we do as WPAs, encouraging us to capture and analyze the methods that practitioners enact daily but struggle to represent as systematic, theorized intellectual work that constitutes our disciplinary expertise. The kind of research attention we devote to the literacy practices of our students, for example, needs to be deployed to strategically account for WPA expertise in action if RCWS is to utilize the strengths of our practice-orientation in the twenty-first-century academy.

Doing WPA work in an era when RCWS has become established as a discipline, we recognize ourselves in the changing twenty-first-century academy and suggest here one way to take up the kairotic opportunities our current moment offers. RCWS scholars already work on problem solving in pursuit of more just writing education. We already partner with stakeholders to create more effective writing programming. We now have the luxury—and the responsibility—to more intentionally study WPA methods and practices as deployments of RCWS expertise, expanding our vision of WPA work beyond documenting our outcomes toward documenting the exercise of our expertise. As we move into the next chapter of RCWS's disciplinary history, we need more data-driven research that captures not only the histories and retrospective assessments of our programs but also the methods and practices that enact our expertise.

> **We now have the luxury—and the responsibility—to more intentionally study WPA methods and practices as deployments of RCWS expertise, expanding our vision of WPA work beyond documenting our outcomes toward documenting the exercise of our expertise.**

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. We use the term *rhetoric and composition/writing studies* and the acronym RCWS to align with the disciplinary name our professional organizations provided to national research bodies (National Research Council and National Center for Education Statistics).

2. RCWS's twentieth-century tendency to define itself primarily in terms of content knowledge and research findings about writing is evident in many of our foundational texts: Braddock et al. (1963) synthesized and organized existing research projects in RCWS; Cooper and Odell (1978) expanded RCWS's disciplinary domain by highlighting points of departure from existing research toward new research questions; Hairston (1982) identified a research paradigm shift sparked by the process movement; Lauer (1984) explored the "dappled discipline" of composition studies; North (1987) depicted the approaches of discourse communities within RCWS guiding composition research methods and findings.

3. George's 1999 edited collection, *Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers & Troubadours: Writing Program Administrators Tell Their Stories,* exemplifies the narrative approach to early WPA research. *Kitchen Cooks* is a compilation of WPA narratives recounting individual experiences, historical accounts of writing programs, and advice for other WPAs. Vidali's 2015 "Disabling Writing Program Administration" is a more recent example of mobilizing narratives to concretize, study, and theorize WPA work.

4. Gibbons explains that twenty-first-century research must be driven by the needs of society, government, or industry (rather than the agenda of any one discipline); take advantage of the expertise found across disciplines (transdisciplinarity) in both the formation of research teams and in the review and quality control of their work; rely on flat organizational structures built around concrete (and possibly transient) problems; and embody a reflexive orientation to research findings that is socially accountable to both stakeholders and society at large. Wernli and Darbellay assert that the transdisciplinary research teams Gibbons describes offer a way to leverage the hyper-specialization produced by the increasing pace and depth of research during the second half of the twentieth century: by working together, twenty-first-century disciplinary experts fill in each other's blind spots and build on one another's expertise to produce work that is greater than the sum of its parts.

5. The Visibility Project refers to the work that resulted in our inclusion in National Research Council and National Center for Education Statistics data to

track things like number of RCWS undergraduate majors, doctoral programs and graduates, etc., increasing recognition of RCWS as an academic discipline.

6. Pseudonyms are used for members of the SWIRL team other than the authors. SWIRL team members selected their own pseudonyms, drawing from feminist political and disciplinary history.

7. Lecturer positions at Santa Clara University are defined as majority assigned teaching time (70–85 percent), with the remaining job duty percentage distributed between professional activity and service. Thus, lecturers are evaluated primarily in terms of teaching.

8. The study Michelle described is Paul Anderson et al.'s "The Contributions of Writing to Learning and Development: Results from a Large-Scale Multi-Institutional Study," published in *Research in the Teaching of English*.

9. Wiggins and McTighe describe backward design as a logic for curriculum design that begins by identifying student learning outcomes (what students should understand, be able to do, etc.) and then works "backward" to determine first what evidence would demonstrate this learning (assignments, tests, etc.) and finally what and how students should be taught to enable them to produce this evidence. Smagorinsky and Graff offer examples of RCWS scholars adapting backward design for writing instruction. We apply the backward design approach—familiar as a pedagogical tool to writing instructors and WPAs—to program building, applying the same steps of setting outcome-goals, identifying markers of success, and planning programming to produce these markers.

10. Tarabochia offers a pedagogical framework for WPA work in cross-curricular literacy contexts, presenting scaffolded approaches to working with colleagues to disrupt the "dominant culture of expertise" that devalue WPA work (118). She uses transcripts of conversations from two partnerships to demonstrate how this dominant culture works and to illustrate pedagogical strategies useful for mentoring and teaching peer faculty via reflexive inquiry.

11. The Gantt chart is named for Henry Gantt, who developed and used the project management tool to display tasks visually to demonstrate their relationship to time needed for completion and the relationships of the tasks to each other. See Clark et al. (1922) for historical context; see Mara and Hart-Davidson et al. for its use in technical communication.

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