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# Apparent Feminist Pedagogies: Embodying Feminist Pedagogical Practices at East Carolina University

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**Abstract.** This curriculum showcase reports on the adaptation of apparent feminist pedagogies (which have been previously featured in a curriculum showcase) to a distance education course. I seek an answer to the question of how apparent feminist pedagogies work differently when the embodiedment of the instructor is not apparent by default. After drawing on cyberfeminist theories to adapt apparent feminist pedagogies to a digital learning environment, I describe and reflect on the work done by students in this course across several platforms, including a public website. This article can help readers to better understand the effects of the instructor's embodied presence on students and the ways that those effects might change in and across educational contexts. It explains how apparent feminism works in digital contexts; how this pedagogical approach might look in an online graduate seminar; how it affected specific student learning in this specific case; and how these results differed from those I found in face-to-face contexts.

**Keywords.** technical communication; apparent feminism; digital education; distance education; online pedagogy; cyberfeminism; course design; social justice; efficiency; objectivity; women; culture

Apparent feminism is a methodological response to discourses that allege we live in a postfeminist world. The theory offers a means of resistance and response to the confluence of current political trends that render misogyny unapparent and uncritically negative responses to the term *feminism*. Emerging from technical communication scholarship and informed by several related disciplines, apparent feminism calls for its practitioners to 1) make their feminism explicit or apparent, 2) engage in conversation with non-feminist-identified allies, and 3) question rhetorics of efficiency. Because the aforementioned political trends and negative responses to feminisms occur often in the educational sphere, this article continues prior work toward applying apparent feminism in

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classroom settings. In particular, it focuses on ways of translating this methodology to pedagogical practice in digital contexts.

This curriculum showcase builds upon another curriculum showcase published in the Spring 2014 issue of Programmatic Perspectives. That showcase reported on the use of apparent feminist pedagogy in a face-to-face undergraduate classroom; this article reports on the adaptation of this pedagogy to a distance-education graduate course. This work offers a juxtaposition that can help readers to better understand the effects of the embodied presence of a (female and feminist) teacher on students and the ways that those effects might change in and across educational contexts. It also offers another perspective on what apparent feminist pedagogies—something that I argue are increasingly important—might look like in a variety of classes across differences in content, demographics, institutional levels of learners, institutions, and delivery models.

The aforementioned Spring 2014 curriculum showcase argued:

> [A]pparent feminist pedagogies seek to recognize and make apparent the urgent and sometimes hidden exigencies for feminist critique of contemporary politics. Functioning at the nexus of social, ethical, political, and practical technical communication domains (Hart-Davidson, 2001; Johnson, 1998; Miller, 1989), apparent feminism is a theoretical approach that emphasizes responses to social justice exigencies, invites participation from allies who do not explicitly identify as feminist but do work that complements feminist goals, and seeks to make apparent the ways in which efficient work actually depends upon the existence and input of diverse audiences. (Frost, 2014, p. 110-111)

I reiterate now that apparent feminist pedagogies—centered on the practice of instructors making their own identifications and biases apparent—are an increasingly necessary part of technical communication and rhetoric discourses and that they stand to enhance the efficiency with which technical communicators reach diverse audiences.

Thus, this article seeks to describe the effects of this pedagogical approach on a more diverse set of students in distance learning situations in order to better respond to the growing "diversity and innovation of our curricular goals, content, structures, or approaches" (Ilyasova, 2012, p. 138). I have written more extensively elsewhere about the theoretical framework used in this course and its implications for the field (Frost, forthcoming). Here, I focus specifically on how apparent feminism works in digital contexts, when embodiment is not apparent; how this pedagogical approach

might look in an online graduate seminar; how it affected specific student learning, and how these results differed from those I found in face-to-face contexts. I also reflect on the learning that students were able to do and on the consequences of making this pedagogy digital and public. I conclude the article by discussing the affordances and limitations of apparent feminist pedagogies in face-to-face and digital spaces and reviewing how those affordances and limitations may change across contexts.

## Exigency

From Wendy Davis' filibuster and the prevalence of laws limiting female reproductive freedom (Frost, 2013, 2014; Tumulty & Smith, 2013) to increasing backlash against feminists, especially those who identify as such publicly (Auerbach, 2014; Women Against Feminism, 2014), exigency for apparent feminism is everywhere. Further, this pervasive exigency in combination with a decline in technical communication scholars' interest in feminisms and women's studies (Frost, 2014; Thompson & Overman Smith, 2006) means that attention to feminist and social justice issues in technical communication classes is increasingly important. Students too often arrive in technical communication classrooms convinced of the objectivity and neutrality of technical documents.

> This cultural belief in the objectivity and efficiency of technical documentation is recognizable when we encounter two characteristics in combination: 1) a document (or set of documents) that supports a hegemony and 2) popular resistance to any and all critique of said document(s). In other words, it is precisely a resistance to critique—often manifesting as apathy— of particular materials that makes those materials so important to study. (Frost, 2014, p. 113)

Technical communication instructors' obligation to teach critical engagement with just these types of technical and supposedly "objective" documents only increases with the prevalence of exigencies like those mentioned above.

However, this obligation is not currently refle cted at the programmatic level. Further, it is not reflected in graduate-level curricula, which are perhaps one of the sites where such critical engagement could make the most difference to the field. For example, Lisa Meloncon's (2009) survey of 84 technical communication master's programs found so little mention of specific cultural theories involving gender and race that neither of these words even showed up as a key term in her results. While there were

several categories under which courses focused on *gender* and *race* might fall—"Ethics," "Specialized Other," "Specialized Technical," "Other," or, the most likely, "Intercultural/Global"—Meloncon wrote "Although intercultural/global communication can be covered as a unit in the introductory course, design, or rhetoric/theory course, or as a topics course, it was surprising not to see more courses specifically named intercultural or global" or, I submit, invoking specific cultural theories (p. 144). In fact, according to Meloncon, only 5% of schools require "Intercultural/Global" courses for a master's degree in technical communication. Similarly, just 5% require "Ethics" courses, 1% require "Specialized Other" courses, none require "Specialized Technical" courses, and only 13% require coursework falling under the broad "Other" category. This survey demonstrates a serious dearth of required cultural work in graduate technical communication programs.

A number of scholars and organizations have already begun to respond to this problem. For example, the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC) has made its commitment to cultural issues explicit by articulating a goal to "increase diversity in its membership and in the field of technical communication" as the foundation of a co-sponsored diversity scholarship, and by having a standing Diversity Committee (Council, 2011). Godwin Y. Agboka (2012) recently argued that "the concept of culture has not been satisfactorily interrogated to support effective intercultural technical communication approaches" (p. 161) and as a result, he advocated for a discursive (and thus contextual) understanding of culture. Scholars including Natasha Jones (2014), Kristin Moore (2013), Flourice Richardson (2014), Barbi Smyser-Fauble (2012), and Rebecca Walton, Ryan Price, and Maggie Zraly (2013) have taken up this call for culturally informed critique of technical rhetorical patterns. Meanwhile, Gerald Savage, Kyle Mattson, and Natalia Matveeva all have recently published work on racial and ethnic diversity in *Programmatic Perspectives* (Savage & Mattson, 2010; Savage & Matveeva, 2010). In fact, Savage and Mattson argue that "[c]ommitment to diversity is now vital to sustained relevance for our field" (p. 5). I myself have responded to this established need by theorizing and practicing apparent feminism both in my research and in my pedagogy—work that I continue to do in context through this curriculum showcase.

## Course Descriptions, Goals, and Contexts

This curriculum showcase focuses on my use of an apparent feminist pedagogical approach in a distance-education graduate course on risk communication that I taught through East Carolina University (ECU) in

Spring 2014. ECU is a public doctoral/research university that serves an ethnically diverse student population. This university was an early adopter of online curricula. Although the popularity of ECU's online programs has plateaued as more universities develop digital platforms, ECU's Department of English retains robust online course offerings. Students can earn a graduate certificate in technical and professional communication or a Master of Arts in English (with a variety of concentrations, including technical and professional communication) entirely online.[1] English 7765: Risk Communication, the focal course for this article, included eleven students: five students enrolled in the technical and professional communication graduate certificate, five students pursuing a Master of Arts in English, and one undeclared graduate student-at-large. In addition to these, three students dropped the course in the first half of the semester. English 7765 is a topics course in ECU's curriculum. However, it has been taught as Risk Communication previously by associate professor Donna Kain (2015), and it will likely be developed into a permanent course based on its popularity and success.

This department's history in online teaching, dedication to accessible education, and diverse student population make for a productive milieu for researchers interested in online teaching and embodiment. I've often heard other ECU instructors note that graduation—when many distance education (DE) students physically travel to campus for the ceremony—is the time when they are most aware of the ethnic diversity of ECU graduate students, because this is often the place where those students' bodies are first visible to instructors (and vice versa). Because of my research agenda, teaching practices, and the prevalence of these sorts of anecdotes, I have been especially aware of the effects of bodies and embodiment—mine and students'—as I have grown more accustomed to teaching DE graduate courses over the past several semesters.

I designed this course to bring together an array of current perceptions of what constitutes risk communication and to involve students in each of those approaches' theories, methodologies, and ideologies. Layered over this inquiry was an understanding that we would be interrogating the gendered realities that both support and contradict particular understandings of risk. I wrote in the syllabus (see Appendix):

[1] The Department of English is also home to a face-to-face PhD program in Rhetoric, Writing, and Professional Communication. Meaning, face-to-face courses are available, and students enrolled in online programs do sometimes take advantage of such courses if it is geographically feasible for them to do so.

> Beginning with popular risk communication staples such as *Readings in Risk* and *The Peter M. Sandman Risk Communication Website*, this course will then move into interrogating constructions of risk that are situated historiographically and culturally, including Beverly A. Sauer's *The Rhetoric of Risk*, J. Blake Scott's *Risky Rhetoric*, and articles that highlight the processes of risk construction (Bowdon; Grabill and Simmons). Further, participants in this course will work to understand how constructions of risk that hegemonic forces frame as neutral are anything but for indigenous populations (LaDuke; Smith; Wildcat) and other marginalized peoples (Woods). Finally, students will theorize ways to intervene in constructions of risk that do not take into account the ethical effects on those who speak from the margins.

After this introductory section of the syllabus, students were presented with a set of goals. The third goal of the course—after those directly related to surveying the scope and content of our intended studies—states that students who complete the course will have "[r]esearched the importance of cultural studies to work in risk and TPC." This goal appears where it does because I conceive of cultural awareness as inarguably necessary for any would-be technical communicator.

## Theoretical Rationale and Methods

When I set out to design English 7765: Risk Communication as a DE course with an apparent feminist approach, I began by reflecting on the online graduate teaching experience I already had. One of the first courses I taught as a new assistant professor at ECU was a graduate-level DE course on research methods in technical and professional communication. I used videos to communicate much of the early course content to students. One of the students later told me that she'd been shocked by my appearance; specifically, my apparent relative youth disconcerted her for some time. Thus, I was forced to confront a point of discomfort. My embodiedment—my physical appearance—and its effects on students is something I have spent considerable scholarly energy thinking about and which I had purposefully made apparent. However, in this case, it had detracted from my professional ethos (as perceived by this particular population) in a substantial enough way that it took some time for a student to overcome—without my ever knowing it. I had grown used to navigating my embodiedment in a face-to-face classroom. In a space where I can move around, show things on a screen, invoke the physical presence of others

in the room in relationship to myself as a means of example, and so forth, it's easier to help students through the preconceptions that my embodiedment often places upon me. That is, it's easier for me to move students from a focus on my *embodiedment* to a focus on my *embodiment* in face-to-face contexts. Embodiment is a more complex characteristic than embodiedment in that it encompasses a person's physical appearance as well as the ways they use and occupy their physical body—and the ways they occupy that body are always already informed by past reactions and experiences as well as in-the-moment responses. Although many technologies seek to bridge the gap between embodiedment and embodiment, some element of face-to-face interaction remains lacking in (at least my own) DE teaching. Without immediate feedback (both verbal and non-verbal) from students, I'm left unable to adjust my embodied pedagogical practices effectively. This leads me to wonder: How do apparent feminist pedagogies work differently in distance learning environments, when embodiedment is not apparent by default?

The theoretical bases of apparent feminist pedagogies cross the fields of anthropology, queer theory, social justice, and feminist studies (Bray, 1996; Halberstam, 2005; LaDuke, 1999; Mohanty, 1988, 2003) as well as rhetoric and composition (Ahmed, 2012; Bitzer, 1968; DePew, Fishman, Romberger, & Ruetenik, 2006; Eubanks, 2011; Flynn, Sotirin, & Brady, 2012; Grabill, 2007; Grabill & Simmons, 1998; Glenn, 1994; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; Haas, Tulley, & Blair, 2002; Johnson, 1998; McRuer, 2006; Munster, 2006; Ratcliffe, 2005; Rothschild, 1981, 1988; Schell & Rawson, 2010; Vatz, 1968; Yoon, 2005) and technical communication (Allen, 1994; Bosley, 1992; Durack, 1997; Flynn, Sotirin, & Brady, 2012; Flynn, 1997; Flynn, Savage, Penti, Brown, & Watke, 1991; Haas, 2012; Katz, 1992; Koerber, 2000; LaDuc & Goldrick-Jones, 1994; Lay, 1993; Ornatowski, 1992, 1997; Rauch, 2012; Ross, 1994; Royal, 2005; Sauer, 1994; Simmons & Zoetewey, 2012; Tebeaux, 1998; Thompson & Overman Smith, 2006). In this class, as well as in others where I utilize this approach, I identified myself as a feminist early on. I asked students to take note of any "technical system that produces ideas about women, and therefore about a gender system and about hierarchical relations" (Bray, 1999, p. 4). I asked them to resist homogenizing women as a category (Mohanty, 1988, 2003), to consider the validity of a diversity of sexual identities (Halberstam, 2005), and to advocate for social justice (LaDuke, 1999). More specifically, in this case, I planned for students to complete this course with a more complex understanding of the social processes that result in particular iterations of supposedly objective formulations of risk. In particular, I wanted students to be aware that

"risk estimates are made by people and groups with strong beliefs, vested interests, and policies to advocate" (Stone, 2012, p. 141); thus, I was asking students to understand that greater amounts of risk become attached to particular kinds of bodies—those of women, indigenous peoples, and the poor—and to think about why this happens and what sorts of processes support the status quo.

In moving an apparent feminist pedagogical approach to a digital space, I looked to cyberfeminist pedagogy. Cyberfeminist pedagogy (like apparent feminist pedagogy) draws on traditional characteristics of feminist pedagogy—collaborative work, critique of hegemony, distributed power, and acknowledgement of embodied/experiential knowledges—to leverage new ways of learning in digital environments. Cyberfeminism, Lisa Nakamura (2008) claimed, has been called a "'restart button' for gendered ideologies" because it tries to reclaim machines and "machine-enabled vision for women" (p. 160). According to Maria Fernandez and Faith Wilding (2002), cyberfeminism arose in response to the popularity of new technologies—"historically, waves of feminism have often accompanied technological expansion" (p. 17)— and they establish that cyberfeminism is, by nature, undefinable.[2] In an effort to provide the movement some shape, though, some scholars conceive of cyberfeminism in waves: one that concentrates on the relationships of women and machines and a second wave that deals with politics and embodiment.

It is through that second wave—the one dealing with embodiment—that I drew the theoretical frame for this course. More specifically, I sought to make apparent to students Paasonen's (Fernandez & Wilding, 2002) argument that Internet users often incorrectly see the Internet as gender-neutral, and by extension, unencumbered by embodiedment and embodiment (p. 94). Further, I wanted students to know that a combination of visual cues and hidden power structures in academia (Berkovitch, Waldman, & Yanay, 2012), online, and elsewhere—including in constructions of risk—may participate in the both the subordination of female instructors and the covering up of that condition. Although students in English 7765 were not provided constant visual reminders of my embodiedment, they were made aware of my embodiment (and my modeling of experiential learning) through our conversations throughout the course and were asked to think about what this meant for their own learning. The follow-

[2] For more on cyberfeminism in some of its many iterations, see Anne Balsamo (1993), Donna Haraway (1991), N. Katherine Hayles (1999), Chela Sandoval (2000), and Sherry Turkle (1995).

ing quotation from Celeste Del Russo (Szabady, Fodrey, & Del Russo, 2014), which includes her own first-person reflections on an Advanced Composition course, proved instructive:

> Embodying education means being fully present and aware of our educational experiences as both teachers and students, affording us the potential to identify ourselves as members of a learning community. An engaged and embodied classroom can be a space that initiates and sustains dialectic, a space that fosters intellectual growth. For students, it is important to realize that how they engage in this conversation around them once they leave the classroom is crucial to whether or not their views will be heard, acknowledged, understood, and valued. My approach to teaching is an embodied one that has developed over time, place, and the classroom spaces that I occupy alongside my students. I acknowledge in my pedagogy that I am positioned, as are my students, in multiple locations of understanding. We all bring with us to the classroom a range of background knowledge that spans disciplines, majors, and personal experiences—knowledge that affects our views on the value of writing and composing texts.

Although the above quotation was drawn from an article published after this course was completed, I recognize my own motivations and beliefs in these words. My use of cyberfeminist pedagogical theories to create a digital learning environment resulted in a pedagogy that is more focused on embodiment than on bodies. Thus, I hope this curriculum showcase can help respond to Rebecca Richards' (2014) contention that "cyberfeminist pedagogy has been under-theorized," leading to embodied hierarchies from "real life (RL)" being uncritically mapped onto the digital realm. To explain, I enacted a pedagogy that explicitly recognized the presence of embodied injustices in digital spaces as well as RL, and I provided students with and modeled a theory—apparent feminism—that is equipped to respond to those injustices and the ways they circulate through embodied practice even when bodies themselves are absent.

In translating apparent feminist pedagogies to a digital context, I also gave thought to everyday practices and contexts of teaching and learning. Drawing on apparent feminism's dedication to explicit feminist identity and to acceptance of non-feminist allies as a means of generating productive discussion and activism, I elected to create a public space in which the class would do a significant portion of the coursework. As Gina Szabady

(Szabady, Fodrey, and Del Russo, 2014) recently wrote, writing "framed as a form of participation in public discourse" can be an especially useful experience for students because this kind of work creates "a sense of accountability in students that is based not just on my expectations for their work, but on their expectations of me and of one another" as well as of (real and imagined) third parties. It's true that this kind of public work also requires students to take risks—and that is precisely the sort of challenge I wanted students to get practice at navigating.

My data collection from this course comes mostly from the public website.[3] However, ECU uses Blackboard as its default DE delivery option, and the course did utilize that space as well. Thus, some de-identified data comes from conversations that occurred in the private Blackboard space. I also call on one-on-one conversations with students and individual students' work to help describe the learning that went on in this DE class. Further, because of educational privacy laws as well as students' own careful navigation of their public profiles, a significant portion of the work in this class—especially preparatory work for student projects—was done via small group and one-on-one email conversations.

## Critical Reflections

My name is relatively ungendered. Although the spelling often hints that I am female, not everyone has been trained to this distinction. It's common for me to receive several emails at the beginning of a semester in which I teach a DE course addressed to "Mr." or that somehow otherwise indicate the sender assumes I am male.[4] When this happens, it reminds me that my sex matters to students, and it certainly affects students' perceptions of my mastery of the material and my abilities as a teacher. This perception leads me to wonder how a constant reminder of my sex—my body, unavoidably apparent in a face-to-face classroom—might affect student learning. Conversely, how might the absence of my female body in a DE class affect student learning? And, finally, what effect might an apparent feminist pedagogy have on either situation? The experience of teaching English 7765 with an apparent feminist pedagogical approach has led me to believe that apparency is a valuable teaching concept, though embod-

[3] See ‹http://riskcomm7765.wordpress.com›.

[4] Likewise, it's extremely common for students who've met me in person to send correspondence addressed to "Ms." or "Mrs." rather than "Dr.," a complaint I've heard often from female colleagues, though I've rarely heard its equivalent from male colleagues. This anecdotal evidence contributes to the exigence for apparent feminism in general and apparent feminist pedagogies specifically.

ied apparency—at least for someone embodied as I am in the contexts where I teach—is not necessarily an advantage in taking on such work. In other words, the concepts that apparent feminist pedagogies ask students to struggle with are difficult; for students to struggle through them practically (as when a student recognizes that preconceived notions associated with an instructor's embodiedment are affecting that student's understanding of those concepts) as well as theoretically is exponentially more difficult.

Based on the theoretical framework outlined above, I proactively made my personal ideological approach to teaching, which includes my identification as a feminist, apparent to students in English 7765 from the first email I sent. However, I did not offer a representation of my own embodiedment. Always in the past, I've offered some sort of representation of myself in the hopes that students would feel more connected to the class that way. In this course, though, I did not contribute a photo to the "Instructor Information" page on Blackboard, and I did not utilize videos or even audio files as a means of transmitting information. We did not do synchronous class video chats. The only time in the course when students would ever have encountered a visual representation of me was when I responded to their conversations with each other on the discussion boards; my responses included a thumbnail, head-and-shoulders image of me in professional attire.

I often find instances of resistance or breakdown to be the most instructive pieces of an experimental course. Being reflective about such instances helps me to do my work better in the future, and I think it also can be very productive for other instructors who may be thinking about employing similar approaches. Unlike in my study of an apparent feminist pedagogical approach to a face-to-face course, I encountered very little resistance to my apparent feminist approach in this DE course. In fact, the only significant student resistance to the pedagogical approach or setup of this class was a reluctance to engage on the public website. Although students seemed to agree on the importance of public intellectualism, not every class member was able or willing to translate this to the sort of immediate action I was encouraging. While I continued to urge public engagement, I also understood that in the context of a public space, students might be less likely or able to engage in the sort of reflective work that requires vulnerability; this was a pedagogical trade-off I was willing to accept in order to emphasize the importance—and the risks—of public intellectualism as a bridge to activism.

I believe the lack of resistance in this course was due to a number of factors. I had already taught four of these students in other courses, so they came into the class aware of my theoretical tendencies. One of these students had even expressed some disagreement with me during our previous class, although this situation ended productively as a theoretical disagreement over the efficacy of feminisms rather than as actual resistance to engagement in the course. It's also likely that graduate students are better prepared to deal with the theoretical and applied complexities of culture and practice. In addition, I suspect that DE courses are less likely to force students to a point of frustration when they are struggling with a concept that asks them to see the world differently. In other words, a face-to-face student might express resistance in the context of the classroom, whereas a DE student can separate self from the screen for a while in order to process new information.

However, with all these factors taken into consideration, I am still very aware that student resistance to my teaching in this course was less frequent and less forceful than in other DE courses where I have represented my embodiedment in an effort to connect to students. It was certainly less frequent and less forceful than resistance and critiques encountered in face-to-face courses (Frost, 2014). In fact, the only pushback I received during this course came from a student who was fearful of revealing his or her identity in a public online forum. We discussed alternatives including using pseudonyms, and I also agreed to accept work done in conversation with other students within the private space of Blackboard (that is, this student could follow the public conversations and respond to just the class). Meanwhile, critiques lodged in my teaching evaluations focused mostly on the heavy reading load. I received five suggestions for changes to the course organization (e.g. altered due dates, order of readings, order of assignments), one note about the difficulties of public intellectual work, and one request for me to engage more in discussion board conversations in the future. In short, students offered engaged and useful feedback—and little to no hostile resistance to the apparent feminist approach to the course.

I also found that students' positive assessments of my teaching included many of the affirmations I usually see (e.g. the instructor was "kind," "enthusiastic," "helpful," "nice") as well as some that have not been so common in my past evaluations. These largely focused on my knowledge of the content area, my ability to make theory relevant, and my engagement in the course:

- Dr. Frost holds high expectations but provides clear instructions.
- The instructor takes a difficult topic and makes it accessible! I learned a lot despite my initial disinterest in the subject matter.
- The professor, she was very insightful.
- Dr. Frost is an excellent professor, and ECU is very lucky to have her. She is so smart and caring. She has both a superior theoretical command of the technical and professional communication field, but she also has relevant "real world" experience under her belt as well.
- Dr. Frost was a very committed and dedicated instructor.
- Dr. Frost exposed us to relevant theoretical models, and more specifically to "real world" examples of failures and success in risk communication. I honestly feel that I could assist an organization or governmental entity in preparing and analyzing risk communication products for almost any given event or problem.
- Dr. Frost was highly engaged and enthusiastic about the subject matter.
- Dr. Frost is really a great teacher. She's collaborative, and encourages connections between students and with herself.
- The professor's responsiveness and dedication.

It seems that my approach to this course (perhaps especially including my efforts toward significant one-on-one engagement) made students feel as if I were present in the online space—but for the first time since I began teaching online, I did not use my body to do the work of presence. In other words, I conveyed my presence in an online space through engagement with students on Blackboard, on a public website, and via email to the exclusion of media that would have made my body visible or apparent to them. This difference is, of course, one of the major distinctions in teaching in a face-to-face versus an online environment.

Apparent feminism works in digital contexts. I cannot say that it is more or less effective in digital environments than in face-to-face classrooms, but I can surmise that the apparency of a female instructor's literal body affects the way students receive this theoretical approach to teaching. In other words, apparent feminism works differently without an unavoidably apparent female body delivering it. This is because embodiment (specifically, instructor embodiment) can and should work differently in online spaces than it does in face-to-face environments. I found, at least

in this case, that while some media do allow for me to "put a face on feminism" for students, electing not to take steps to make my body apparent in digital spaces appeared to mean that students were more likely to focus on other things—such as the efficacy of ideas (including feminist ideas), the content of the class, my mastery of the content area, and my ability to teach.

Although I am in many ways disappointed with this finding—how else might one feel to discover that her physical presence can be a detriment to student learning?—I also think it's worthy of continued study. This article is the beginning of additional work,which will include reflection on face-to-face graduate and DE undergraduate courses, I plan on the subject, rather than the end of a simple comparison. A major limitation of my comparative analysis here is that the face-to-face course featured in the Spring 2014 Curriculum Showcase was comprised of undergraduate students while the class I examine in this article was entirely graduate students. Thus, some differences might have to do with students' differing perceptions based on their own academic backgrounds and levels of preparation. Graduate students—particularly those who've already had critical coursework in technical and professional communication—might be more likely to arrive in class already thinking of the terms *feminism*, *technical*, *efficient*, and *objective* as similarly situated and mutually contextual, whereas this may be a new idea for undergraduate students. Having taken more classes, graduate students might also have encountered a greater diversity of instructors and recognized that embodiedment is not an indicator of skill. Thus, a question for future examination is this: How might perceptions of instructor embodiment and related evaluations of teaching efficacy differ between graduate and undergraduate students?

I continue to use apparent feminist pedagogies both despite and because of some of its obvious limitations. This means:

- I identify as a feminist to students and discuss what that means and why it's relevant near the beginning of each class I teach
- I infuse my teaching with specific concerns about the status of women, feminist identification, and rhetorics of efficiency
- I encourage students to recognize social injustice without asking them to take on any particular labels as identifiers
- I help students to produce work that disrupts the hegemonic rhetorics and systems that matter to them individually

I use apparent feminism because of the many benefits such approaches offer technical communication as a field, including attention to the fallacy

of pedagogical/curricular/personal objectivity in technical realms and the shifting embodied risks run by both instructors and students. The great strength of such apparent feminisms as a pedagogical approach lies in encouraging students to think about their own subjectivities and the subjectivities of technical documents, textual production, and embodiment. I have found that supporting such awareness often helps students to reach a productive level of confidence in their own abilities to critique work that they might previously have felt was out of their reach. The results of this reflection remind me how important students' perceptions of instructor embodiment are to their learning in both face-to-face and digital contexts, and I offer apparent feminist pedagogies as one way to mitigate and call attention to these perceptions.

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## Author information

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# Appendix: Syllabus for English 7765: Risk Communication

## Required Materials

### *Texts*

Glickman, T. S., & Gough, M. (1990). *Readings in Risk*. Washington, D.C.: Resources for the Future.

LaDuke, W. (1999). *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*. Cambridge, MA: South End.

Lundgren, R. E., & McMakin, A. H. (2013). *Risk Communication: A Handbook for Communicating Environmental, Safety, and Health Risks*. Wiley-IEEE Press.

Sauer, B. A. (2003). *The Rhetoric of Risk: Technical Documentation in Hazardous Environments*. Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.

Scott, J. B. (2003). *Risky Rhetoric: AIDS and the Cultural Practices of HIV Testing*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP.

Smith, A. (2005). *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*. Cambridge, MA: South End.

Wildcat, D. R. (2009). *Red Alert!: Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum.

Woods, C. A. (2010). *In the Wake of Hurricane Katrina: New Paradigms and Social Visions*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

### *Other Materials*

- Internet access, including access to our course site at ‹http://riskcomm7765.wordpress.com›
- Ability to read additional readings provided as PDF and Word documents
- Word-processing capability
- Digital storage capability

## Introduction and the Goals of the Course

This course will bring together current understandings of risk communication—its theories, methodologies, and ideologies—with the gendered realities that both support and contradict particular understandings of risk. Beginning with popular risk communication staples such as Readings in Risk and The Peter M. Sandman Risk Communication Website, this course will then move into interrogating constructions of risk that are situated historiographically and culturally, including Beverly A. Sauer's The Rhetoric of Risk, J. Blake Scott's Risky Rhetoric, and articles that highlight the processes of risk construction (Bowdon; Grabill and Simmons). Further, participants

in this study will work to understand how constructions of risk that hegemonic forces frame as neutral are anything but for indigenous populations (LaDuke; Smith; Wildcat) and other marginalized peoples (Woods). Finally, participants will theorize ways to intervene in constructions of risk that do not take into account the ethical effects on those who speak from the margins.

In order to accomplish this work, you will be expected to do a substantial amount of reading, produce several different kinds of work, analyze the products you create, and be an active participant in our learning community. This means working in a variety of individual and group activities. Further, you are expected to come (digitally) to class having thoroughly prepared the readings. Notice this does not say you must have read every word on every page. Rather, I hope you will read for content and themes, taking main ideas and significant occurrences from the texts we cover and critically examining them. You should always be prepared to offer notes, questions, and ideas about the readings. Active reading and thorough preparation will be critical to your success in the course.

## Objectives

At the conclusion of this course, students will have:

- Defined the field of professional communication and its intersections with risk communication
- Researched the connections between methods and methodologies in risk communication
- Researched the importance of cultural studies to work in risk and technical and professional communication
- Learned about publications (such as proceedings, peer reviewed journals, and books) especially relevant to the risk communication
- Gained an understanding of what disciplines aside from technical and professional communication are concerned with risk communication
- Reviewed strategies for evaluating both print and digital publications/presentations in risk communication
- Increased your ability to use electronic resources provided, as well as Library Services offered by ECU's Joyner Library
- Acquired an understanding of research strategies you can use to find secondary research about risk communication

- Prepared an annotated bibliography for a relevant topic of your choice related to risk communication
- Reflected upon research needed and possible methods of gathering data for that research

## Class Communication

I communicate class updates and announcements through email, in our Blackboard space, and on our website at ‹http://riskcomm7765.wordpress.com›.

## Assignments

Please note that this class weights weekly conversations heavily. I designed the course this way because the major project is a research paper and the vast majority of the work to prepare the research paper actually comes from participation activities. Further, this course is intended to prepare you for participation in scholarly communities, where discussion and collaboration are among the most important activities you will engage in. The following components of the class will contribute to student grades:

- Weekly Conversations - 30 points: Weekly reflections and conversations will happen mostly on our class blog/discussion board at ‹http://riskcomm7765.wordpress.com/discussions›, which means that you must utilize that site in a way that allows me to know your identity. This is a public space, meaning you will be required to constantly think about your audience(s) and the risks associated with online identity. Responding in this forum means that you should thoroughly prepare all readings, thoughtfully engage with others' writings, offer well-researched insights and questions, contribute resources from time to time, and in general do smart and careful work. During each week with a discussion board prompt (Weeks 1-8, 11, and 13), you should post an original reflection on the readings of about 400 words by 5 p.m. Wednesday. You should also post a minimum of two substantial responses (probably in the 300-word range) to others' ideas by 5 p.m. Saturday. Note that you are welcome to subvert the traditional text-based discussion thread; if you would rather post video or audio responses, for example, I am supportive of that and can help you with the technology if necessary.
- Discussion Leader Assignment – 10 points: You will be responsible for setting up our discussion of one week's material to the

class. This means you should compose a short prompt that puts the readings in conversation with each other. This prompt should include citation information for at least three scholarly articles related to the week's reading as well as some information about why you think those articles are important for someone interested in the topic. You also should provide a list of discussion questions as part of your prompt. Your prompt is due to me via email by 5 p.m. Monday of the week you are to present. (This gives me time to post it to the Wordpress site.) Y*ou should send me a list of your preferred presentation weeks as soon as possible. Available weeks are Weeks 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, and 13. I will assign Discussion Leader Weeks early in the second week of class.* (Note that there may be weeks when we have multiple discussion leaders; this is fine as it simply invites multiple perspectives. I will let you know, however, if you are sharing a week so that you can collaborate with your partner/group should you so desire.)

- Research Proposal – 10 points: In about one page, propose a research project of narrow enough scope that you can complete it by the end of the semester. This means you should 1) describe a research area you would like to pursue and explicitly articulate a succinct research question; 2) cite at least three relevant sources; 3) outline your approach and describe your research plans; and 4) identify a potential conference and journal venue for this project. (You are not required to actually submit/present in these venues.) We will discuss potential venues at greater length as needed. You should turn in your research proposal as soon as you possibly can, and no later than the end of Week 8. I would recommend completing the proposal between Weeks 5 and 6 for best results. *Turn in the proposal via email*.

- Annotated Bibliography – 15 points: Compose an annotated bibliography with at least five detailed entries. A useful annotated bibliography will summarize each source, analyze its credibility, and reflect on its usefulness to your specific project. You should provide some means of contextualizing the discourses you include in the bibliography. (That is, write a very short introduction to the bibliography reminding me of or updating me on your research proposal topic.) I am happy to look at drafts of annotated bibliographies if they are provided to me well in advance

of the due date. *Turn in the annotated bibliography by posting it to the discussion board in Blackboard provided for that purpose*. (This allows your peers to see and learn from your work without requiring you to expose it to the whole world.) The Annotated Bibliography can be turned in anytime after Spring Break and before the end of Week 11.

- Final Project Presentation – 15 points: Develop a presentation (following the conventions for a presentation at an academic conference) that can be delivered in a digital format. (This may mean that you simply video yourself giving the paper, but you should also consider the possibility of incorporating other digital technologies to facilitate your presentation.) This presentation should be between 15 and 20 minutes in length and should synthesize the work you are doing in your Final Paper. *You may turn in the presentation either by posting it to the discussion board in Blackboard provided for that purpose OR by emailing it to me to post to the Wordpress page*. Consider, before you choose, the relative advantages and risks of either option.
- Final Paper – 20 points: Write an article-length research project that is appropriate for an academic journal. You also will conduct a peer response to a peer's Final Project Presentation that will be worth 5 of these 20 points, and you may (and perhaps should) cite peers' presentations in your paper. Although I am happy to read sections of and answer questions about final papers in advance of the due date, I cannot read entire drafts unless you turn one in very early. *Turn in the Final Paper in by posting it to the discussion board in Blackboard provided for that purpose*. (You may also email it directly to me if you prefer, though I hope that you might be willing to share with your classmates.)

## Tentative Course Calender

A tentative but up-to-date course calendar will always be available to you via Blackboard.

**Table 1. Weekly Schedule for English 7765: Risk Communication**

| Week | Activities and Preparation |
|---|---|
| Week 1 | Read the syllabus, procure the textbooks, and familiarize yourself with the course. Read all main pages and at least a dozen blog posts on the *Peter Sandman Risk Communication Website* at ‹http://www.psandman.com›. Discussion Board: Introduce yourself, including especially the kind of research you're interested in within technical and professional communication and why a course on risk communication is attractive to you. Drawing on the reading, suggest some possible reasons why this course will be useful to you given your interests and career trajectory. |
| Week 2 | Read Grabill & Simmons and Frost. Discussion Board: Reflect on how Grabill & Simmons may have changed your perception or risk and offer also any reflections you have on how they might have changed the field with this article. Based on what you know now about my work in risk communication, what conclusions might you draw about the framing of this course? What might this mean you need to do on your own to get the maximum benefit?<br>Frost E.A. (2013). Transcultural risk communication on Dauphin Island: An analysis of ironically located responses to the Deepwater Horizon disaster. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 22(1), 50-66.<br>Grabill, J. T., & Simmons, W. M. (1998). Toward a Critical Rhetoric of Risk Communication: Producing Citizens and the Role of Technical Communicators. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 7(4), 415-441. |
| Week 3 | Read Bowdon, Scott, Hynds & Martin.<br>Bowdon, M. (2004). Technical Communication and the Role of the Public Intellectual: A Community HIV-Prevention Case Study. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 13(3), 325-40.<br>Hynds, P. & Martin, W. (1995). Atrisco Well #5: A Case Study of Failure in Professional Communication. *IEEE Transactions of Professional Communication* 38(3), 139-45.<br>Scott, J. B. (2004). Tracking Rapid HIV Testing Through the Cultural Circuit: Implications for Technical Communication. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 18(2), 198-219. |
| Week 4 | Read Glickman & Gough (Readings in Risk) |
| Week 5 | Read Sauer (*The Rhetoric of Risk: Technical Documentation in Hazardous Environments*) |
| Week 6 | Read Woods (*In the Wake of Hurricane Katrina: New Paradigms and Social Visions*) |
| Week 7 | Read LaDuke (*All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*) |
| Week 8 | Read Scott (*Risky Rhetoric: AIDS and the Cultural Practices of HIV Testing*)<br>Research Proposal due by 5 p.m. Saturday. |
| Week 9 | Happy Spring Break! |
| Week 10 | Read Smith (*Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*)<br>Annotated Bibliography due by 5 p.m. Saturday. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Week 11 | Resource exchange: Find an article from a technical and professional communication journal (for example, perhaps *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*) that relates to your research. Discussion Board: Persuade your fellow students that they should read the article you read from one of the above journals. Provide a detailed outline of the article including a summary of main ideas, reflect on the credibility of the piece (citing at least three other sources), and explain why this article should be important to classmates. |
| Week 12 | Read selections from Lundgren & McMakin (*Risk Communication: A Handbook for Communicating Environmental, Safety, and Health Risks*) |
| Week 13 | Read selections from Lundgren & McMakin (*Risk Communication: A Handbook for Communicating Environmental, Safety, and Health Risks*) |
| Week 14 | Take a break from reading and work on preparing your Final Project and Presentation. |
| Week 15 | Final project presentations AND Final Project rough drafts due by 5 p.m. Wednesday. Peer responses to rough drafts due by 5 p.m. Saturday. |
| Week 16 (Finals) | Final project due by 5 p.m. Friday. |