Technical Communication Website

Content Strategy Recommendation Report

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TECM 3550: Content Strategy

November 24, 2022

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Introduction

Overview

The website for the University of North Texas Department of Technical Communication (UNT Tech Comm) informs current and prospective students about the field of technical communication and UNT's respective programs. We exercised several research methods to evaluate how well *techcomm.unt.edu* is meeting the department's goals and recommend changes to the site content strategy.

The purpose of this report is to detail our research, findings, and recommendations regarding UNT Tech Comm's approach to its web content strategy. Our proposals aim to strengthen the content and structure of *techcomm.unt.edu* to more effectively support the department's goal of increasing enrollment in its undergraduate programs. Table 1 summarizes the central deficiencies and recommendations outlined in this report.

Site Deficiencies	Content Strategy Recommendations
Not reaching target audience, who is unfamiliar with technical communication	Thoroughly define technical communication, particularly on a dedicated web page
Content focused on undergraduate recruitment, while most site visitors are prospective graduate students	Incorporate prospective graduate students into site content strategy by developing content catered to their needs
Outdated, wordy, and disorganized content throughout the site	Develop a system for regularly updating the site and write according to plain language conventions
Low website and social media engagement	Craft an informed social media strategy and consistently execute it

Table 1: Deficiencies of techcomm.unt.edu and our corresponding recommendations

Current Site

The tech comm site provides department, program, and career information to current and prospective students of the technical communication program at UNT. Overall, the website writes to an audience looking to choose tech comm as an undergraduate major; the BA and BS programs are heavily advertised, and a sitewide banner in the footer invites users to apply to UNT.

However, much of the site content, navigation, and design ineffectively compel users to act; missing information, outdated statistics, and inconsistent organization contribute to a muddled user experience. Moreover, because technical communication curriculum teaches writing, managing, and designing content for websites, the deficiencies of the UNT Tech Comm website poorly reflect the esteem of the department's programs.

Methods

We practiced several research methods to collect empirical data on the users of *techcomm.unt.edu* and their respective needs. We aimed to assess how effectively the current web content is reaching its intended audience to determine which content is inadequately meeting user needs.

Content Audit

We each independently conducted a content audit of over 200 web pages within *techcomm.unt.edu*. This process included recording metadata (title, meta description, headings, links, broken links) and determining the audience, message, and call to action for each page or content chunk. Based on that information, we formulated basic recommendations for how each page could specifically better reach and communicate with its evident audience.

Stakeholder Interview

To gain further insight into the department's goals for the website, we interviewed a former Chair of the Department of Technical Communication, Dr. Kim Sydow Campbell. Dr. Kim informed our research concerning the department staff's current approach to the website's content strategy and development and some obstacles they face in implementing their goals.

Google Analytics

We examined back-end data from the Google Analytics portal for *techcomm.unt.edu* to determine who the current site visitors are, what source referred them, and what pages they interacted with once on the site. User age, location, and language described the current audience demographic; social media referrals, external referrals, and visited webpages indicated user interests; and behavior-specific information, such as number of sessions, session length, and user path, demonstrated what users might have been seeking and whether the department has been meeting its conversion goals.

User Interviews

We conducted six think-aloud user protocols, where we asked users to take on the perspective of a high school student considering pursuing an undergraduate degree related to technical writing and observed each user research contending programs. No participants were technical communication students.

SEO Analysis

To inspect the site's search engine optimization (SEO), we conducted context inquiries to determine what keywords generated search results with web pages within *techcomm.unt.edu* and what keywords warranted websites that linked to the tech comm site.

Results

Deficiencies

Upon conducting our research studies and evaluating the efficacy of the UNT Tech Comm website, we distilled our findings into four deficiencies, outlined below.

Defining Technical Communication

During the user tests, we observed that upon receiving the prompt, users' first reaction was to ask what technical communication is. The current content is written for someone already familiar with technical communication, which may prevent unfamiliar readers from connecting with the content. "Why Tech Comm?" is designed to educate users about tech comm, but rather than defining the profession, it capitalizes on employment statistics to persuade readers to pursue tech comm. Students in our user tests expressed it would be difficult to decide whether they wanted to pursue a degree in technical communication if they didn't know what technical communication was.

Catering to Multiple Audiences

Google Analytics revealed that the largest demographic of users were 25–30 in the United States, and most navigated to the graduate programs and Scholarships pages. Although the UNT Technical Communication Graduate Studies LinkedIn effectively guides grad students to the tech comm site, the only web page dedicated to graduate enrollment is "Master's Degree: MA." Both undergraduate and graduate students seek financial and career-related information (such as types of careers, job duties, and salary statistics); however, almost all of such content currently on the site is specific to undergraduate students.

Outdated and Ineffective Content

Through the content audits, we found outdated news articles, syllabi, scholarship forms, and links. When we mentioned this to Dr. Kim during the stakeholder interview, she said that it's "unfortunately common," as there is no schedule, delegation, or budget for updating content.
    Similarly, external links became an evident issue when some statistics cited in "Why Tech Comm?" had lowered—according to the URLs linked by them. Internal information, such as the tech lab hours, was also outdated, offering no help to students. Outdated references can diminish users' credibility in a source; in this case, fewer tech comm students might turn to the tech comm site if they perceive it as inaccurate.
    Poor organization is also an apparent factor in lowering the site content efficacy. For example, during the user tests, users skimmed through pages like "Why Tech Comm?" "Scholarships," and "Employment." Margin-to-margin stretches of text, having several headers per page, and a lack of compelling visuals likely contributed to this behavior.

Social Media Presence

Lastly, the department's social media presence is struggling. During the content audit, we found that the Contact Us page has a link to an inactive LinkedIn page from before the tech comm

department split from English. On the other hand, Google Analytics revealed that the most social media referrals come from Reddit, which the department doesn't have an account on.

      UNT Tech Comm's social media profiles include Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, but the content strategy behind them is ineffective, considering how few interactions their posts receive. UNT Tech Comm's Twitter profile (@UNT_TECM) has been inactive since 2020 and has not since contributed to the traffic of *techcomm.unt.edu*. UNT Tech Comm's Facebook page has 1,300 followers, but only two posts have been made in 2022, receiving a total of 4 interactions. UNT Tech Comm's Instagram profile (@unttechcomm) has increased in engagement in the past year (average of 4 likes per post, increased to 9 likes per post). Still, as only three people attended the game night advertised recently, it's not advertising events as effectively as it aims to.

Discussion

Recommendations

Before exploring our final recommendations, it's important to note that our stakeholder interview revealed that a lack of financial resources is the root of most problems with the website. The department can't afford to hire someone to create and maintain its content, so various authors update or write for the site, depending on who has time. Hence, our recommendations are limited by expense, so we understand that implementing them may be impractical.

Defining Technical Communication

      Rewrite "Why Tech Comm?" To resolve the deficiency of students not learning of UNT Tech Comm's programs, we recommend transforming the "Why Tech Comm" page into one titled "What is Technical Communication?".[1] This page would explicitly define technical communication, the career paths associated, and its employment outlook. Not only would this minimize confusion for prospective students, but the page would serve as a significant opportunity to house relevant keywords like technical writer, UX design, proposal writing, and more, which would improve the SEO of the site as a whole.[2] Additionally, we recommend adding a call-to-action button on the landing page of *techcomm.unt.edu* that reads "What is Tech Comm?" to immediately catch the eye of unfamiliar users.

Catering to Multiple Audiences

      In addition to conducting outreach toward the target audience, create content to meet the needs of the current audience. *techcomm.unt.edu* accurately reflects that prospective undergraduate students are the department's primary target audience. However, as described in the Deficiencies section, most of the website's current traffic is from prospective graduate students. Therefore, we suggest that UNT Tech Comm further develop and distinguish resource

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[1] See the Appendix of this report for a sample rewrite of the content of "Why Tech Comm?"

[2] Another SEO recommendation we have is retitling the "Bachelor's Degrees: BA & BS" page to "Bachelor's Degrees: BA & BS in Professional and Technical Communication." From a search-results perspective, "Bachelor's Degrees: BA & BS" doesn't inform a user what degrees the page describes, beyond them being undergraduate. Our proposed title would resolve that and also clearly communicate to prospective students viewing the site what degree they would be earning.

page(s) for their graduate students and programs. This could be as simple as retitling "Master's Degree: MA" as "Graduate Degree: MA in Professional and Technical Communication" or something more extensive like having a graduate-specific alumni testimonial video or article. Another solution could be revising pages like "Why Tech Comm?" to include information relevant to the MA students, such as a table of starting salaries for tech comm pros with graduate degrees.

Replace external links with supplemental content. The fewer external links, the better; external links navigate users away from the site, and external content can change or invalidate over time. Where external links are currently used, summarize the referenced content and cite the page as a source instead. This change would support the credibility of the tech comm site and retain users longer.

Outdated and Ineffective Content

Develop a system of regularly creating and updating content, whether that be through staff, student, or volunteer positions. Dr. Kim said such a system does not exist within the department but would be critical to the site's success. Systematically creating, updating, and reviewing content would ensure routine checks for outdated information and create more unity in voice across the site.

Follow plain language guidelines or similarly defined technical writing conventions. As our users in the interviews scrolled through text-heavy pages, we believe that writing with more clarity and concision would more effectively communicate messages to users. Moreover, as UNT tech comm coursework teaches plain language writing, following such conventions would better reflect what the program teaches. Additionally, with several authors writing site content over the past few years (as Dr. Kim said), some pages are written with more elevated language than others. Following a style guide would allow for a more consistent voice across pages, regardless of how many authors contribute.

Encourage student contributions. Having a management system presents opportunities for increasing student involvement by encouraging student contributions to the website. For example, students could write news stories, report on recent happenings, or showcase their portfolios. Such active involvement would consequently contribute to a more frequently updated site.

Ensure that content is organized effectively and consistently. While bodies of text can be informational, their presentation detracts from the site's readability. A solution for text-heavy pages like "Student Employment Opportunities" and "Scholarships" could be to categorize information and shorten pages with a side panel navigation system similar to the current Academic Programs pages.[3]

Social Media Presence

Create an undergraduate LinkedIn page. According to the Google Analytics data, Dr. Erin Friess's UNT Tech Comm Graduate Studies LinkedIn page is one of the primary contributors to the tech comm site traffic—and it has the highest post engagement rate of the department's social pages (approximately 10%). An undergraduate LinkedIn page would have the potential to reach and engage current students, current faculty, alumni, prospective students,

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[3] See the Appendix for an example re-design of the Scholarships page.

and even prospective faculty. For example, posts like the one shown in Figure 1 could advertise courses or programs and directly channel student inquiries or enrollment. Running the undergraduate LinkedIn page could be delegated to the tech comm faculty member directing outreach, the Department Chair, or even a student employee. Nonetheless, like other forms of content strategy, social media must always be approached with an audience, message, and goal in mind.
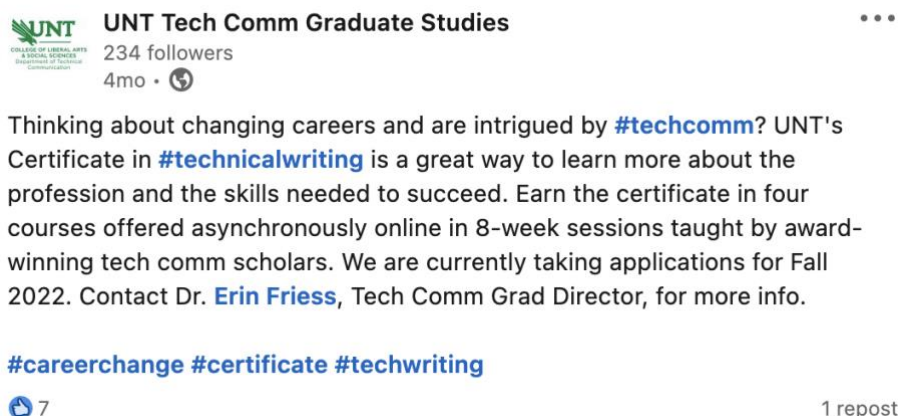

Figure 1: A LinkedIn post made by the UNT Tech Comm Graduate Studies page in July 2022

Create a UNT tech comm subreddit. Google Analytics demonstrated that Reddit is the number-one social media platform directing traffic to *techcomm.unt.edu*. However, we don't know which subreddit this activity is sourced from, so we might not be able to figure out what the common interest or goal is that calls these users to the site. Regardless, UNT Tech Comm may want to consider starting a subreddit because of how effective Reddit has been in bringing in users. This subreddit could be hosted by staff or (trustworthy) students, but it could function as a community for prospective, current, and former majors to ask about the programs or offer career advice.

Evaluate and re-define current social media strategies. With the proposals of creating an undergraduate-focused LinkedIn and hosting a subreddit community, we recommend that UNT Tech Comm delete Twitter and maybe one other social profile it holds. Additionally, as budget and staff within the department are limited, we encourage UNT Tech Comm to allocate resources toward what has potential to offer the most value to the department in the shortest amount of time. Re-structuring the social media strategy for the department is beyond the scope of this project, but we recommend UNT Tech Comm start by defining a goal and purpose for each social profile and deactivating profiles they no longer have a strategy for.

Conclusion

This report details our methods, findings, and recommendations from our comprehensive evaluation of the efficacy of UNT Tech Comm's content strategy for *techcomm.unt.edu*. Should our recommendations be implemented, we hope they help UNT Tech Comm's website reflect the excellence of the program and better meet the needs of prospective and current undergraduate and graduate majors. Moreover, we hope our social media insights contribute to the department's ultimate goal of increasing enrollment in the undergraduate tech comm program.

We appreciate the opportunity to channel our technical communication skills toward a product for an organization with personal significance to us. We are happy to offer further insight on our recommendations, should the department consider implementing them.
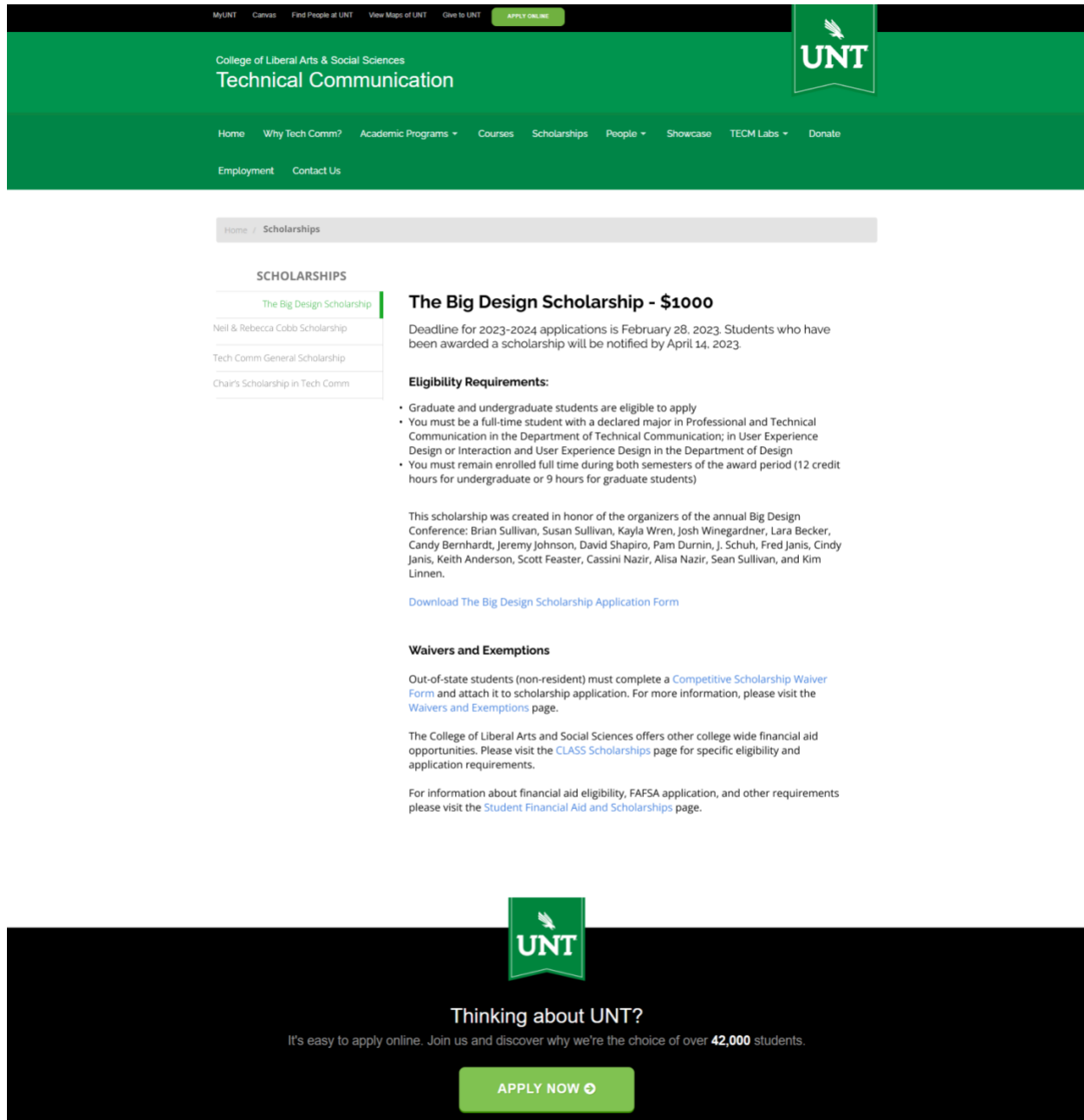
Appendix

Additional Figures

Figure 2: A proposed re-design of the Scholarships page, by Caitlin Cao

What is Technical Communication ("Tech Comm")?

Technical Communication Defined

Technical Communication is a multidisciplinary profession based on the principle of making technical content understandable.

Technical communicators:

- Write about technical topics
- Design web pages and instructional documents
- Code websites with optimal user experience

...and more.

Some job titles within technical communication include:

- Technical writer
- Technical editor
- Proposal writer
- Content strategist
- Content analyst
- UX writer
- UX designer
- UX researcher
- Web designer
- Visual designer

Employment Outlook for Technical Communication Professionals

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (last updated May 2021), Texas is among the top states for job placement for technical writers and web and UI interface designers.
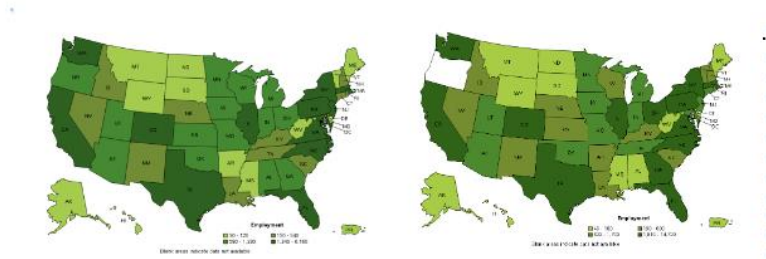

Figure 1: Technical writer employment outlook by state (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).   Figure 2: Web and digital interface designer employment outlook by state (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

Below are median salary estimates for different levels of experience of tech comm pros in the United States, according to Glassdoor (2022):

Position	Entry-Level Median Salary Estimate	Senior Median Salary Estimate	
Technical Writer	$60,137	$100,810	
Technical Editor	$54,834	$84,933	
UX Designer	$80,754	$138,170	
UX Researcher	$93,898	$154,212	
Content Strategist	$59,494	$115,154	
Proposal Writer	$63,780	$109,032	

Why Tech Comm at UNT?

The Department of Technical Communication at UNT emphasizes evidence-based approaches to equipping students with technical communication skills required in modern workplaces, namely *writing*, *designing*, and *coding*.

We offer graduate degrees (M.A.), undergraduate degrees (B.A. and B.S.), minors, and certificates. Courses are taught by an internationally recognized faculty whose research and experience are at the forefront of the field. Within our department, students have access to leadership and employment opportunities through teaching assistant (TA) positions, lab tutor positions in our TECM Labs, involvement in our student organization (ETC), and professional mentorship through our collaboration with our local chapter of Society for Technical Communication. Furthermore, we facilitate connections among faculty, students, and practitioners through client-sponsored course projects, internships, regular networking events, and our industry-led Advisory Board.

Hear our alumni describe what they loved about UNT Tech Comm below:

Figure 3: A sample content rewrite for "Why Tech Comm?" by Ashley Miller