

Toward an Expanded Concept of Rhetorical Delivery: The Uses of Reports in Public Policy Debates

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Preparing students for civic engagement requires new knowledge about the uses of documents for advocacy and social change. Substantial social change results from repeated rather than from single rhetorical acts. Reconsideration of the rhetorical canon of delivery suggests expanding the concept beyond its present connection to publication (visual design, medium) to a rhetorical situation comprehensively defined. Delivery may take place over time and embrace a web of activities including field work, updates, and interconnections with other publications.

The preparation of students in technical and professional communication for civic engagement presumes their participation in social action as citizens but also perhaps as professionals employed for their expertise in communication. Students can contribute their knowledge of rhetorical situations, audiences, genres, media, and language to the tasks that engage citizens in debate on policy. As volunteers and professionals, they can participate in the research, debate, and strategic action to promote policy changes determined to serve the public interest. Their understanding of rhetoric as skills but also as a means of reasoning about issues that shape society and as a means of persuading audiences to adopt positions may empower them for leadership as well as for participation and support roles.

Technical communication students are already prepared for support roles in civic settings as editors and grant writers, but these roles do not exhaust the potential of these students for the pursuit of effective public policy either as citizens or as professionals. Achieving that potential requires knowledge of the process of social change and understanding of how rhetoric may drive that process. Exploring their potential for civic engagement requires an examination of rhetoric in civic settings. Although discourse in corporate and academic settings has been well contextualized, the field of technical and professional communication knows less