discourse communities (such as management or law). And Karper argues the significance of determining how novice Web designers portray their expertise (or lack of expertise) as producers of effective pages when dealing with the unique rhetorical demands of writing on the Web. The work produced by each of these scholars urges us to consider the many underlying factors that determine how professionals (both current and future) perceive their ability to create meaning in particular contexts.

Overviews of both projects are organized around the central questions on which the particular study was based, the researcher's approach to collecting data, findings, and a discussion of the significance of the scholar's work in relation to prevailing issues/concerns in the field of professional communication. The dissertation projects featured in this column were selected from nominations by faculty in doctoral programs. Faculty who are working with promising new scholars whose research would be of interest to readers of the journal are welcome to nominate these individuals for inclusion in a future issue. Please contact the editor of this column at the listed address.

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WRITING AT RIVERSIDE HEALTH SERVICES: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY IN ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNICATION

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RESEARCHERS HAVE OFTEN limited their focus to professionals writing within their own discourse community. For example, Dautermann (1997) researched nurses writing a procedure manual, and Smart (1997) studied bankers writing for the banking community. Relatively few ethnographic projects have researched writing as a means and a requirement to interact with different and possibly conflicting communities. My dissertation project investigates the relationships that evolve when professional nurses who own a home health care agency write for multiple, conflicting corporate discourse communi-

ties, including their lawyers, management consultants, and marketing professionals.

These entrepreneurial nurses eventually chose to limit the role of their business consultants by learning to not only modify but also write corporate genres to meet their own needs as health care professionals. Experimenting with business genres on paper encouraged them to manage their home health agency with greater independence. They either rejected or revised corporate requirements implicit in the genres of other discourse communities. Often, these other discourse communities focused on financial and legal matters while the nurses chose instead to write a discourse consistent with their professional identity, based on prioritizing the interests of their patients above financial motives and legal concerns.

Research Questions

To investigate the evolving relationship between these nurses and their business consultants, I focused on the following research questions:

1. How do the entrepreneurial nurses and their administrative staff use writing to communicate with multiple, conflicting discourse communities?
2. How does this entrepreneurial organization use writing to create its corporate or professional identity?

Approach

Using an ethnographic approach, I spent more than two years at the research site. I recorded hundreds of hours of audiotapes and collected thousands of pages of work samples. To collect the data, I used two main research methods: (a) interviewing all participants in both a structured and unstructured format and (b) participant observation. To a lesser extent, I collected additional data by audiotaping "think-aloud" protocols when participants revised boilerplates, which they labeled "factory templates." Furthermore, I occasionally attended informal social gatherings as well as formal meetings, such as public relations events, so that I could observe group dynamics and collaborative efforts in a variety of circumstances and settings.

Findings

In my study, I found that conflicting values and agendas led the professional nurses to disagree with their corporate consultants. As the

entrepreneurs learned to write their own professional versions of business genres, they gained confidence in their ability to make business decisions independently. When the president revised the employee handbook, this organization's first significant business writing project, she made inconsequential word- and sentence-level changes to the lawyer's draft because she respected his authority even though she objected to his "factory template" version of their handbook. Next, the nurses substantially revised a business plan originally authored by a management consultants. I argue that the president, collaborating with a new employee, used her experience of writing the employee handbook as a basis for the second writing project. Although the nurses paid the consultants, the entrepreneurs never used the consultants' business plan because, again, it did not meet the needs of a *professional* agency. Finally, I studied the nurses writing for the marketing community and particularly their own clients. I argue that, having learned to revise the business plan and its marketing component, the nurses recognized and addressed the need to construct a more appropriate, focused professional identity in their marketing communications to increase the number of patients referred to them. I found that the nurses learned collaborative techniques to manage their professional agency with minimal guidance from consultants. However, I also observed their ineffective attempts to resolve problems caused by nurses unsuccessfully applying what they learned on paper to situations occurring in the real world.

My findings are consistent with those of Doheny-Farina (1991), who found that the Microware entrepreneurs could write a good business plan, but they lacked the business expertise to develop the product described in that plan. Similarly, the nurses in this study could surf the Internet and find models of marketing materials, for example, but they lacked the business expertise to modify those models satisfactorily. I thus conclude that these nurses incurred significant costs because they chose to solve business problems by collaborating with peers rather than consultants. Although the collaboration leads to independent decision making, the quality of those decisions is often questionable given the nurses' lack of business expertise in areas such as target marketing and strategic planning.

The issue of corporate versus professional identities also involves a clash between the professional nurses and their corporate consultants. The president's revisions to the employee handbook could often be traced to her perception that the attorney's version of that handbook was merely a "factory template" representing the attitudes, values, and practices of a corporation rather than a professional agency. In her

study of nurses preparing a procedure manual allegedly for themselves, Dautermann (1997) also discussed the conflict between professional and corporate identities. She stated that

> the pressures the writing group felt to organize the [manual] for the convenience of administrators suggested that the documents' actual primary audiences were not clinical personnel at all, but the administrators, regulators, legal departments, and insurance companies who demanded that they exist. (p. 120)

Because the entrepreneurs chose to modify rather than accept the genres of conflicting discourse communities, their behavior exemplifies the following claim made by Rist (1994) and cited by Winsor (1996) in her study of engineering interns:

> Socialization is not a one-way process in which apprentices subject themselves to the new discourse. It is more an active construction, a discourse invented over and over again by individuals balancing the roles offered by the discourse they perceive . . . and the process/ product conflicts in their text-making. (p. 41)

Whereas Winsor's engineers were novices not only in an engineering environment but also in the workplace, these nurses brought with them their professional experiences, values, attitudes, and code of professional rather than corporate ethics. Thus, although both Winsor and I studied novices in the business world, our research results were not consistent because, for example, in my study the economic interests of the consultants and their entrepreneurial clients are diametrically opposed. When these clients learn to write business genres proficiently, the consultants find that their billable hours are reduced for that account. Therefore, whereas business advisors may want their clients to succeed in writing corporate genres and developing an appropriate identity, consultants would necessarily be conflicted not only with respect to the specific characteristics of that identity but also the goal of teaching entrepreneurs to succeed without guidance.

Significance

Ethnographers such as Smart (1997), Beaufort (1999), Winsor (1996, 2003), Cross (2001), Dautermann (1997), and Doheny-Farina (1991) focus primarily on issues unrelated to consulting, either academic or corporate. My study differs substantially from other ethnographic research in the workplace because I analyze evolving relationships devel-

oping between professional entrepreneurs and their corporate consultants. Furthermore, I argue that these business owners may be less likely to learn from their *corporate* consultants because of conflicting agendas and values. It could be beneficial for *academic* consultants to help business owners learn to communicate effectively with conflicting discourse communities. Bosley (2002) argued that academic researchers should conduct studies and distribute findings to practitioners who would benefit from them. She stated, "Academics tend to underestimate the value of their research as an aid to practitioners. As a result, they inadvertently keep such research results within the academic community instead of disseminating them to practitioners" (p. 27). Finally, I suggest that more studies are needed in the area of *entrepreneurial* communication because many entrepreneurs possess skills related to their own professions but lack the business communication expertise required for corporate success in a competitive marketplace.

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