INTRODUCTION TO COURSE

According to M. Jimmie Killingsworth, (series editor of ATTW Contemporary Studies in Technical Communication, an effort published in cooperation with the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing), technical communication is the process of accommodating technology to its users by means of language and other media.

It is the textualization of technical processes and objects. It is alternately viewed as the gray metal battleship of the literate world, as the instrumental counterpart of the poetic writing, as the human face of technology, as a way writers can make a mark in worlds otherwise closed to them.

Since Professor Killingsworth offered his definition, our understanding of technical communication has grown. I do not see technical communication as the “gray metal battleship of the literate world.” The 21st technical and professional communicators have extended their range of competencies and broadened their identities and perspectives in response to the demands of their jobs, employers, and audiences.

You and I will define the field.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

In this course we will begin with Professor Killingsworth's definition and expand it as we examine theoretical and pedagogical issues in the technical communication field and examine specific careers and proficiencies.

As you read the assigned readings, you will have questions for the class. We will also deal with the following key questions in a professional conversation about the field.
1. What is technical communication? (To build a comprehensive definition, we will look at where technical communication has been and where it is going [global, intercultural, multimedia].

2. How do we connect technical writing to humanistic ideas?

3. What do the study and the practice of technical writing have to do with rhetoric?

4. Why do we teach technical communication in departments of English?

5. How do we teach it in light of this department's emphases? (For instance, community literacy) Or in other contexts different from our own? (Where you may teach it?)

6. What are the theoretical and practical contexts of writing whose main aim is to direct and shape action in a technological world? (Another definition of technical communication)

7. How does our knowledge of theory (such as organizational theory) influence our classroom assignments?

8. How is technical writing pedagogy introduced to students?

9. How do we assess what and how we teach? (I have seen a course like this taught at another institution)

10. What resources are available to us for inquiry and research in technical communication?

11. What does it mean to be a technical communication professional who understands the global context of the field? What key elements or facets are involved?

Please add other questions that connect to your own scholarly, pedagogically, and professional interests in the technical communication field.

12.

13.

14.
STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will be able

- To articulate the historical and theoretical foundations for technical communication instruction

- To identify and explain pedagogy associated with technical communication instruction (specifically in an undergraduate course)

- To create criteria for evaluation of technical communication instruction

  To explore, observe, and evaluate technical writing pedagogical practices.

- To identify sources for research and to extend skills needed to explore research interests

- Participate in the ongoing conversation in technical writing theory and pedagogy.

- Understand the complexities inherent in defining and classifying “technical communication” as a term and as a field

- Develop each student’s technical communication skills

STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

English 5364 is organized mainly as a reading, writing, and discussion course whose aim is to prepare you for teaching and scholarship in the field of technical communication, with the understanding that you will discover connections to other areas. The course is divided into three parts:

Part 1 focuses on history and theory, using readings from our text and scholarly articles as points of departure to discuss key issues.

Part 2 focuses more on practice and pedagogy, with readings and works that apply theory and research to solving practical problems. Some researchers have used newly gained technical information to solve environmental/sustainability problems. In English 3301 Project 3 focuses on problem solving/ service learning in the community.

In Part 3 we will examine the specific portfolio assignments of an undergraduate technical writing class (and complete portfolio 3) and assess them to discover the principles/theory underlying pedagogy. Also, we will look at some of the documents produced within the contexts which students chose. I hope that the course readings, discussions, and the examination of the undergraduate course will help you identify a
specific topic that you can research for a semester project (described below under "Assignments and Grades") as another way to enter the conversation about technical communication.

CATALOG COURSE DESCRIPTION

From the catalog: "Exploration of theories and practice in technical and professional writing, with emphasis on analyzing documents and their contexts." As a field within English studies, technical communication is unique in that it has both an academic community and a fairly well-defined practitioner community outside of the university setting. This course will give you the opportunity to explore and practice in both aspects of the field.

TEXT


ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

1. Daily Responses & Discussion Leading (20%)
2. Class observation project (15%)
3. Proposal for university/community project (5%)
4. Technical document for university/community project (20%)
5. Final Research Project & Presentation (30%)
6. Evaluation of course activities (10%)

Each student will

create 2 questions for in-class written responses [to assigned readings] and will help guide the discussion

observe an undergraduate Technical and Professional Writing class and report on its approach and pedagogy

identify a community need, examine its elements, and create a Report on Options to address the need

undertake a research effort to examine an issue that attracts his/her attention or enhances his/her understanding of the field

produce a report to inform the class of research results
SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS

Your responses to the questions created by each of your fellow students for each reading may be submitted online. Always include your name, date, and the question to which you respond.

I prefer that you submit a hard copy of the observation report, the proposal, the technical university/community document, the semester research project, and the course activities evaluation. I have had many problems with lost emailed papers and the opening of documents.

GRADUATE STUDENT STANDARDS (adapted, with permission, from Dr. Etheridge)

The instructor assumes that seminar members are good-faith graduate students. Bona fide graduate school behavior is distinguished in at least four ways:

Students read all assignments on time and come to class with serious response and willingness to discuss

Students do not assume that an assignment is legitimate only if it will be "tested." The work is done for its intrinsic learning value. All work is completed on time with attention to quality and thoroughness.

Students expect that they will attend 100% of the time and not assume there are a certain number of allowable absences. Like readings and coursework, students attend and participate because the shared learning experience is the basis of graduate education.

Students assume that open and equitable discussion and critique is the soul of a graduate seminar. Everyone participates. Everyone is respectful of others' thoughts. Students don't put the burden on the teacher or on other students to originate and maintain discussion. They take on the responsibility to keep some seminar members from dominating others, and they do it by offering their share of talk.

A good graduate seminar on a daily basis is lively, engaging, and somewhat unpredictable. But it's up to each student to take part in creating this atmosphere.

INTELLECTUAL HONESTY/AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

The university will not tolerate plagiarism or any other form of intellectual/academic dishonesty. This course will abide by University policies in regard to academic conduct. Please refer to the current TAMU-CC Catalog for information.

DISABILITY SERVICES/ NOTICE TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. This legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment which provides reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you require an accommodation, please contact the Office for Students with Disabilities at 825-5816 or visit the office at Corpus Christi Hall 116.

ACADEMIC ADVISING

Upon entering the MA in the English Program or any other program in the College of Liberal Arts, each student is assigned a faculty mentor by the Graduate Coordinator. You should make an appointment to meet with your faculty mentor every semester to develop a degree plan and monitor your progress toward graduation. Your faculty mentor can also answer questions and provide valuable information about the comprehensive examination, other degree requirements, Ph.D. programs, and career opportunities. To finalize your degree plan and register for graduation, you must also meet with the Graduate Student Academic Advisor in the Academic Advising Center for the College of Liberal Arts. This office is located in Driftwood 203E and can be reached at (361) 825-3466.

INTERACTING WITH EACH OTHER/RESPONSIBILITIES

One goal of the class is to create and maintain a nurturing environment. One way we do this is by respecting one another in all that we do and say. Our words and actions affect others. Another element in constructing a nurturing environment is to share responsibility. I do not conduct a teacher-centered class in which I control all aspects of the class. Each of you brings to the class knowledge, experiences, and expertise on which we will build. Together we will establish the groundwork for critical thinking, discussion, reflection, and writing.

In this student-centered class, you will be responsible for introducing concepts from the readings and from the assignments we will do, and you will lead parts of the class. This class focuses on key questions that WE will strive to answer. I do not answer these questions alone. And, I do not make all the decisions. I would like each of you to take an active part in making the class activities meaningful. The type of learning paradigm that we construct together is the kind of paradigm I hope you will take with you into professional settings.

EVALUATION OF COURSE APPROACH/ACTIVITIES

As we move through the course, I would like you to suggest ways to revise this course and its activities. And, I want to make sure that your own goals for the class are met. Please make me aware of these goals. Because we want to model the kinds of learning behaviors we want for our undergraduate students, we will share most of our work-in-progress with the whole class.
CLASS ATTENDANCE

For our in-class writing responses and our class conversations, we need everyone to attend class.

LATE PAPERS

Papers must be submitted on the due date due. Late papers will be penalized. Please let me know if you have an emergency.

KEY JOURNALS

- Journal of Technical Writing and Communication
- Technical Communication Quarterly
- Technical Communication
- Journal of Writing and Communication
- Journal of Advanced Composition

ORGANIZATIONS

- Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW)
- Society for Technical Communication (STC)

ENGLISH 5364 TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Sept 5

Introductions, class orientation, go online to review syllabus and schedule. Today and next Thursday choose individual readings to lead class discussion/responses (found on schedule). Look at readings in the Bell Library reserve. Examine questions that will help us move through the course. Add questions that you would like the class to address. Talk about possible technical communication university and community needs to address. Discuss class observations. Discuss semester research project.

Select readings for the leading of class discussion. Please note that the first posting (by a peer) of 4 discussion questions is due by Sept. 4 at midnight.)
Assignment: Read handout, "Technical Communication and Rhetoric" by Cezar M. Ornatowski at San Diego State, and respond to the following ideas in one single-spaced page:

1. How do you understand the relationship between technical communication and classical rhetoric? 2. How are documents and genres within technical communication examples of rhetorical action in contexts? 3. How were decision-making processes, or rhetorical solutions, involved in promoting of the first bicycles?

Assignment: Read handout, "Social Construction Theory and Technical Communication" by Mahalingam Subbiah, and respond to the following ideas in one single-spaced page:

1. What is social constructionist theory? 2. Does the theory coincide with your understanding of knowledge and communication? 3. What is the connection between social constructionism and technical communication and a technical communicator?

Sept 12
Due: Bring to me a copy of the 2 page response.

Theory:
What is technical communication? Rhetoric and technical communication, social constructionism and technical communication. Discuss the questions assigned.

Examine syllabi and assignments for Engl 3301, 3375, 3379 (observation and assessment of a course).

Discuss possible semester research project issues, for example, student learning (effectiveness in technical communication and assessment).

Discuss possible university or community need or problem to address for the technical report.

Watch video of Harbor Bridge Project Engineer, Mr. Victor Vourcos: What is a technical communicator?

Begin identifying university/community need or actual needs in the College of Liberal Arts.

• Assignment
Student will post 4 questions for class discussion by Friday at midnight.
The class will respond (two pages single spaced) to these 4 discussion questions by Wednesday, Sept 9, at 5 pm. I print these responses at 5 pm. I cannot accept responses after 5 pm.

**Sept 19**

Discussion by peer leader
History
Rutter, "History, Rhetoric, and Humanism" 20-34
Thralls and Blyler, “The Social Perspective and Professional Communication” 124-145

Due: draft of proposal for university/community need

• Assignment

Student will post 4 questions for class discussion by Friday, Sept 11, at midnight.

The class will respond (two pages single spaced) to these 4 discussion questions by Wednesday, Sept 16, at 5 pm. I print these responses at 5.

**Sept 26**

Discussion by peer leader
History:
Conners, "The Rise of Technical Writing Instruction in America" 3-19
Durack, "Gender, Technology, and the History of Technical Communication" 35-43

Watch the video of acting Police Chief, Mike Walsh: What is a technical communicator?

**Oct 3**

Work in class:

Due: Complete and submit the proposal for university/community need project.

Due: Write a memo in which you identify what classes you will visit to conduct an observation and assess/evaluate the course. Include dates. Request permission from the professor.

Examine the course syllabus and schedule for the undergraduate class you will visit to determine the pedagogical framework for the class approach and assignments and student activities.

Due: Write a draft of ideas, issues, questions for semester research project.

Student will post 4 questions for class discussion by Friday, Sept 25, at midnight.

The class will respond (two pages single spaced) to these 4 discussion questions by Wednesday, Sept 30, at 5 pm. I print these responses at 5.

Oct 10
BEGIN CLASS VISITS: ENGL 3301, 3375, 3379

Discussion by peer leader
Research Methods/Topics:

Charney, "Empiricism Is not a Dirty Word" 282-299
Sullivan & Porter, "On Theory, Practice, and Method: Toward a Heuristic Research Methodology for Professional Writing" 300-313

Guest: Ms. Frances Johnson will talk about her research and her doctoral work in technical and professional communication.

Assignment

Student will post 4 questions for class discussion by Oct 2 at midnight.

The class will respond (two pages single spaced) to these 4 discussion questions by Wednesday, Oct 7, at 5 pm. I print these responses by 5 pm.

Oct 17
Discussion by peer leader
Workplace Writing:
Katz, "Writing Review as an Opportunity for Individuation" handout
Read Allen, Atkinson, Morgan, Moore, and Snow "What Experienced Collaborators Say about Collaborative Writing" 351-364

On site visit: FLINT HILLS REFINERY: TECHNICAL WRITER DANIEL VASQUEZ

Oct 24
Work on problem solving report
Work on semester research project

Due: What is your specific research question, issue?
Turn in a list of sources for research project.

The Workplace
Responses to visit with Daniel Vasquez, technical communicator at Flint Hills, Harbor Bridge Project Engineer, Victor Vourcos.

How to Write the Class Observation Report: create criteria collaboratively.

• Assignment

Student will post 4 questions for class discussion by Oct 16 at midnight.

The class will respond (two pages single spaced) to these 4 discussion questions by Wednesday, Oct 21, at midnight.

Oct 31
Discussion by peer leader
Pedagogy
Bosley, "Cross-Cultural Communication: Whose Culture Is It Anyway? 466-474
Cardenas: “The Challenges and Rewards of Teaching Intercultural Communication in a Technical Writing Class: A Case Study”

Conferences: Work on classroom observation; plan the organization for the semester research paper. Identify sources for research project

• Assignment

Student will post 4 questions for class discussion by Nov 3 at midnight.

The class will respond (two pages single spaced) to these 4 discussion questions by Wednesday, Oct 28, at midnight.

Nov 7
Discussion by peer leader
Pedagogy:
Selber, "Beyond Skill Building: Challenges Facing Technical Communication Teachers in the Computer Age" 449-465
Sapp & Crabtree, "A Laboratory in Citizenship: Service Learning in the Technical Communication Classroom, handout

- Assignment

Student will post 4 questions for class discussion by Oct 30 at midnight.

The class will respond (two pages single spaced) to these 4 discussion questions by Wednesday, Nov 4, at midnight.

"Inventory: What is working? What is not working? What are you doing to be successful? What do you need from me?"

Nov 14

- Assignment

Student will post 4 questions for class discussion by Nov 6 at midnight.

Nov 21

- Assignment

Student will post 4 questions for class discussion by Nov 6 at midnight.

The class will respond (two pages single spaced) to these 4 discussion questions by Wednesday, Nov 11, at midnight.

Nov 28

NO CLASS

HAVE A NICE HOLIDAY.

DEC 5
Oral presentations

Due: Technical document for University/Community Project

Discussion by peer leader
Ethics:

DEC 13

Research paper due