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COM 295.01: Advanced Technical Writing

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Course Description and Objectives:

The main purpose of this course is to build on WTC 115 and examine and apply written technical text, graphic conventions, and document design to documents in a given technical writing situation. Writing is not just one thing, and within technical writing situations, the writing varies in form, structure, and production process according to its audience and purpose. Students can expand their knowledge of technical writing situations and develop their ability to analyze communication situations.

Because writing and reading are related, students will read and analyze technical documents in order to enhance their own understanding of themselves as both readers and writers. Also important is becoming familiar with current critical issues in technical writing. Students will read articles about writing across cultures, digital environments, ethics, and future issues as they arise and come to the literature about technical communication.

Because readers expect writing to conform to their expectations of finished and edited texts and to match the conventions generally established for public texts, students will expand their knowledge and ability to edit technical content.

Required Materials:

The main text for this course is Dynamics in Document Design: Creating Texts for Readers by Karen A. Schriver. The focus of this text is audience, and it will be read in its entirety and used throughout the semester.

The second text has two components How to Edit Technical Documents and How to Edit Technical Documents Workbook by Bush and Campbell. These texts are used for the technical editing piece of this course. Bush and Campbell’s focus is on editing technical content and these books were chosen to also become permanent resources for you.

Workload and Expectations:

A good place to begin understanding what makes a document effective is by analyzing other technical documents according to specific guidelines and drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of the text, the graphics, and the design. There will be both teacher and student chosen documents to analyze.

Students will add to their knowledge base information concerning design, graphics, and writing. Shorter assignments--job description, workplace reports, non-fiction--will be the first documents we produce in this course.

Technical editing is a focus in this class. We will concentrate on the difficult problem of editing technical content using the Bush and Campbell books that advocate learning to give shape and solidity to technical information. We will begin practicing in the workbook and apply these principles in student written papers.

The Schriver text gives a brief history of the field of document design that give a sense of the field and how it came to be. Current issues then propel readers forward into
what concerns technical writers now and where the critical issues of today are within the field. There will be several summaries required from both reading and discussing critical issues.

There will be two semester long projects, one student chosen and one that is based within the College of Technology and school based. Because knowledge of audience is paramount in technical documents, we will build a knowledge base from the Schriver text and apply our knowledge in this school chosen project, seeking student input from Tech Writing 115 students and compiled by Tech Writing 215 students. The student chosen project will be shaped by the instructor and students throughout the course with writing and design discussions and plans for each project.

The beginnings of a professional portfolio will be the outcome of this course and your final assignment will be to pull your work into a portfolio with extensive analysis. You will prepare a portfolio with six sections:

1. Self-reflective position paper—where are you with technical writing? Both in how you read it and in how you write it?


3. Critical issues summaries: reflection on critical issues summaries

4. Audience based school project: reflection on audience and what you came to within this project.

5. Personal choice project: reflection on your project—will this work for you? Can you use this piece or site or brochure as you expected you would? What did you learn in the class that makes this project better?

6. Analysis of writing improvement in the areas of written text, design, graphics, and technical editing through your projects, summaries, and shorter pieces. Where do you need to work next?

Applied Arts and Sciences writing curriculum is in transition. The COT is part of the UM system and the student populations attending all the campuses are diverse and dynamic. As UM at large and COT specifically continue to grow, the faculty must address the needs of these varied populations. COT’s Department of Applied Arts and Sciences and the writing curriculum in particular are facing exciting and varied curricula and pedagogical challenges. The changes reflect current research and conversation going on in the discipline of rhetoric and composition as well as an evolving ‘answer’ to the needs of the COT students. Students are invited to participate in the ongoing course development and to assess changes in the writing curriculum and instruction.
Course Assignments and Evaluation:

Analysis of technical documents 100 points
Shorter assignments with attention to guidelines of technical writing text, graphic placement conventions, and design conventions to include job descriptions, workplace reports, and a non fiction piece. Other shorter pieces will evolve. 300 points
Critical issue summaries 100 points
Technical editing exercises 100 points
School chosen project with emphasis on audience 200 points
Student chosen project 200 points
Accumulative portfolio with extensive analysis 200 points

94-100 A  87-89 B+  77-79 C+
92-90 A-  86-83 B  76-73 C
82-80 B-  72-70 C-

Course Policies
Rewrites are accepted expected on major projects. Students receive half the points gained in the rewrite. Rewrites must be substantial and not just a fixing of editing issues. Students must give their paper more depth and detail to earn rewrite points.
There will be no opportunity to “make-up” tests, quizzes or in-class assignments that are not turned-in during the designated class period. This make-up policy is applied at the discretion of the Instructor.
Attendance is an expectation. Students who do not attend class do not perform as well as students who do attend class.
Format of all works produced will depend upon the specific assignment. All final drafts must be word processed. Do not put writing assignments in folders or binders; staple them in the upper, left hand corner. Save everything to disc for your own protection.
Plagiarism of any sort will result in a course grade of F. The U of M’s student Conduct Code defines plagiarism as “representing another person’s words, ideas, data, or materials as one’s own.”
Students may be asked for their research or sources at any time.

Disability Services: I am willing to provide accommodations for students with disabilities with the proper verification. Come see me.