HU 333, Scientific and Technical Writing: Reading and Writing about Technical Environmental Information

We will be working with a broad set of issues relating to the Torch Lake Waterways Area of Concern -- a local Superfund site that is currently undergoing remediation. There is an enormous amount of material related to the Torch Lake investigation and remediation effort that is in four file drawers at the local Houghton Library -- Portage Lake Library (PLL). But there is also a fair amount of material in the MTU Archives on the 2nd floor at the van Pelt Library and the Lake Linden School Library. The material at the Portage Lake and Lake Linden Libraries has not been indexed other than chronologically, so your search will be messy in the sense that you will have to spend quite a bit of time burrowing through a lot of material, looking for what you want. Additionally, material has arrived at PLL: a set of large black binders that contain the Remediation Plan for the various Areas of Concern; and a set of plastic covered reports covering the years 1990-1992 that was recently found by one of the librarians. These are not in the file cabinet, but are on a set of shelves that is at a right angle to the file cabinet.

Portage Lake and Lake Linden Libraries (PLL and LLL) contain EPA Depositories of public information on the Torch Lake/Keweenaw Waterway remediation site. (PLL has most of the documents, however) For the first three weeks, you will spend your time becoming oriented to the many issues surrounding the Torch Lake remediation effort in order to identify the focus of your investigation. To do this you will need to spend several hours at PLL reading the various reports, letters, and other documents, learning as much as you can about the history and background of Torch Lake's contamination and the environmental hazards it poses, as well as the remediation efforts that have already occurred. This material has been inventoried and is located in file cabinet in the upstairs reading room. The Federal EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) has judged the Torch Lake Remediation Area to be an environmental, but not a human health hazard. Some local scientists in this area are not so sure; however this stage of the remediation is proceeding on the basis of the EPA designation.

In addition to using the resources at the various libraries mentioned above, please browse the Web for sites, such as the EPA webpage for information and updates about the Portage Lake Remediation Plan, or specifically the problems in the Keweenaw Waterway. It would also be a good idea to interview key local figures whom you will read about in various newspaper articles during the initial orientation period. A Political Action Committee (PAC) has formed in the last few years. This group holds meeting once a month. PAC meetings are great places for picking up information of the successes and failures of the remediation efforts at the local level.

Textbooks:


General Course Requirements and Recommendations:
1. Field Work at Local Public Library, MTU Archive

This section of 333 requires that you spend about 4 hours a week outside of class at the Portage Lake Library, 105 Huron Street in downtown Houghton, just off of Montezuma Avenue. The Library hours are:
Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday: 10 am - 9 p.m.
Wednesday, Friday; 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Saturday: 12 noon - 5 p.m.
Closed Sunday

Because research at the EPA Depository is a required part of the course you must be able to spend several hours a week at the PLL site

2. Attending meetings (1 time a month) of the PAC.

To better understand community action you will need to attend the Public Action Council meetings. These meetings are between 7-9 p.m. one time each month (usually the last Wednesday of the month) at Lake Linden High School. Contact me if you are having trouble finding a ride.

Numbers #1 and #2 are course requirements.

3. Attending 333 Supplemental Sessions: Strongly Recommended!!!

Tuesday, 9/28 (7-10 pm): Resume Writing: Tips/Formatting Resumes in Microsoft Word
Thursday, 10/14 (7-10 pm) Creating Graphic in Microsoft Word and Novell Wordperfect
Thursday, 10/27 (7-10 pm) Tips for Presentations Using Microsoft PowerPoint

Course Policies

Attendance Policy:

If you know ahead of time that you will be absent, e-mail the members of your group and make arrangements to bring or pick-up any materials you will need.

If your absence is unplanned, e-mail a group member and arrange with him or her to get daily handouts, in-class notes, or assignments that you might have missed.

In either case, you are responsible for getting the information you miss from a classmate or group member. Please use e-mail communication toward this end.

Assignment Policy

All assignments must be turned in the day that they are listed on the syllabus.

Computers: Our class e-mail list will provide you the opportunity to get in touch with other students in the class. (If you do not have one, please set up an e-mail account in the computer center or lab of your choice so that you can communicate with me and other class members.) Also use e-mail to let the other group members know when you cannot make it to class and please make arrangements for someone to take your place, if a presentation assignment is due-- or make arrangements for them to bring to class material that you have worked on.

All assignments should be written on the computer using a letter or laser quality printer.
Grading Policy:

- Literature Review 9/24 20%
- Research Proposal: containing description of the study, goals of research, and specific plans for conducting search, plus timeline 10/1 20%
- Presentation #1: proposal (oral with graphics) 10/4-10/6 15%
- Presentation #2 findings, research report 11/1,11/5, 11/8 (oral with graphics) 15%
- Research Report 11/17 30%

TOTAL 100%

Assignment Schedule (subject to change when necessary)

Week Date:

1 9/8 Introduction to course. What is environmental information? How are we consumers of environmental information? What responsibilities can we take producing (or reproducing) environmental information? Role of technical communication in making environmental information accessible to the public.

Assignment:
- Spend 2-3 hours at Portage Lake Library reading material at the repository. (It's in a file cabinet in the middle of the upstairs reading room.) Read as much as you can about Torch Lake, the history of its problems and the remediation effort. Be prepared to discuss what you've read at Friday's meeting.
- Read Chapter 1, TSW.

9/10 Discuss what you learned about Torch Lake Superfund project and Remediation effort. Discuss Chapter 1 materials, in TSW

Assignment
- Spend another 2-3 hours reading at PLL. In write a one page description of the Torch Lake Remediation Area problems as you understand them at this point. Plan to present your description orally (as a brief report) in class Wednesday of Week 2 (9/15). You may bring overheads (transparencies) to show graphic information

2 9/13 Class meets at PLL at 4:05 p.m. instead of classroom (I am coming directly from a 3 o'clock class so may be five minutes late.) Discuss search strategies

9/15 Meet in our classroom at MTU. Discuss history of problems of Torch Lake Remediation Area, both before and after it became an EPA Superfund Site. Use overheads to show your representation of the problem.

Assignment:
Spend 3 or more hours (as time permits) at PLL; check the MTU archives and the Web for information about Torch Lake.
9/17 Organize by interest into small groups (no larger than 3 students per group) to plan a research project. What kinds of documents will be most relevant to what you are doing? How can you organize the labor of the group most effectively so that everyone has an equal responsibility? How can you juggle schedule conflicts so that everyone can meet at least once a week for the next 4 weeks? Make up a task and meeting schedule that everyone can stick to. Sign your schedule.

Assignment: Go over section 2.3 TSW on literature reviews

3 9/20 Discuss writing a literature review; summarizing, and quoting sources citation formats.

Assignment: PLL: Select the materials you are going to use for your Literature Review. Develop a problem statement.

9/22 Writing literature reviews, cont. Writing a problem statement; when to quote directly, when to paraphrase or summarize.

9/24 Meet in class. Turn in literature reviews. These should be written individually and not in groups.

4 9/27 Resume writing. Bring 4 copies of your resume to class

Assignment: Tuesday 9/28, 7-10: Resume writing workshop; please attend.

9/29: Meet in Portage Lake Library. In groups using library resources, groups plan oral and written problem proposal following formats in TSW (use Chapter 2, sections 2.6 and 2.9.2 as guide to conventions and appropriate content).

Assignment: Work on research proposal

10/1 Meet at the Archives in the Van Pelt Library. Presentations by archivist and by Dave Bizotte.

Assignment: Read Chapter 4 (Graphs and Figures) TSW. Doing this will help you prepare for oral presentation. Prepare group presentation on Research Proposal. Do a dry run of the oral presentation: 10 minutes per group presentation with 10 minutes for discussion afterward.

5 10/4 Oral/Visual Presentations (preferably using Power Point) on Research Proposal by groups.

10/6 Oral Presentations with graphics on Research Proposal, cont. Groups hand in written Research Proposals, provide one copy for each of the other groups

/\ 10/8- Homecoming, No class

Assignment: Conduct research in MTU Archives, PLL and Lake Linden Libraries. Also consider driving to Torch Lake to view the site and to take picture for slides for next presentation.
6  10/11. Meet in Portage Lake Library. Read, photocopy materials, use laptops to take notes, meet with other group members.

Assignment: Read Chapter 10, *TSW* "Citing Sources and Listing References." Also look at 2.4.2: General instructions about conventions of Research Reports. (Note: The examples in this book are not going to be very useful because they are from object oriented technical report in engineering; however, the general information page 57 will be useful to you.)

10/13 Meet in classroom. Discuss citing sources of the archival material in PLL, the MTU Archive, and LLL. Evaluating and citing sources on the Web. Also we'll discuss the best ways of handling contradictory and inconsistent information.


10/15 Class visit by _______ (TBA); presentations will take up the whole class meeting.

7  10/18 Class visit by _______ (TBA)


8  10/25 Class visit by _______ (TBA)

Assignment: Work on research report.

10/27 Guest Instructor. Bring 4 copies of draft of research report to class. Groups read and peer review each other's reports. Make suggestions for revising

Assignment: Thursday, Oct. 27, 7-10 pm. Tips for Presentations/ Using Microsoft PowerPoint. Please attend.

10/29 No class. I am out of town.

Assignment: Read (skim) information in *TSW*, Chapters 5-9, as needed.

9  11/1 Oral presentations

Assignment: Read (skim) information in *TSW*, Chapters 5-9, as needed.

11/3 Guest Instructor. Bring revised research reports to class (4 copies). Exchange reports in groups. Using the information in *TSW*, Chapters 5-9 make editing and proofreading suggestions.

11/5 Oral presentations, cont.
10 11/8 - 11/12 Taking care of unfinished work; community service projects, Web page work, course evaluations, last minute details, etc.

Finals week 11/15 Research reports due.