HU470-01: Project Management

Room: 116 Walker
Time: 2:05-2:55 MWF
Term: Winter Quarter, 1999-2000

Instructor: Associate Prof. Craig Waddell
Office: Room 342 Walker
Office Hours: 1-2 p.m. MWF;
other times by appointment
Phone: 487-3261 (office); 482-1636 (home)
E-mail: cwaddell@mtu.edu

Optional Text

Course Goals
This course is designed to provide practical experience in project management for Scientific and Technical Communication majors who do not go on a co-op. A few years ago, in a memo to me about HU470, former MTU Career Center director Barbara Filer emphasized that recruiters consider "co-op or similar work experience absolutely essential." Recruiters consistently ask, "Have students done any technical writing for a client?" and "Do they have a tangible sample of their work?" Barbara noted that recruiters have told her that they consider projects done for HU470 to be just such practical work experience. She concluded her memo by saying, "I cannot emphasize strongly enough how important this course is for your students."

Project Management provides you with an opportunity to select a project that is of interest to you and to pursue that project through to a finished product that will be put to good use by someone on campus or out in the larger community.

Selecting a Client and a Project
The ideal client is someone who's willing and able to work closely with you at various stages in the development of your project. For example, early along in the project, your client should be willing to sit down and brainstorm with you in order to generate an initial pool of ideas for the project. Further along in the quarter, your client should also be willing to sit down with you and review your progress in order to help ensure that the final product will meet with his or her satisfaction. When you first negotiate a project with a client, you should make clear that to serve his or her needs effectively, you'll need a few hours of his or her time. You should also inform your client at the outset that he or she is responsible for providing me with an informal evaluation of your work. This evaluation will influence but not determine your final grade.

Another thing to consider when selecting a project is your career aspirations. If you want to work in the auto industry after graduation and you have the option of either working with MTU Sports Information on the hockey magazine or working for the Department of Mechanical Engineering on a manual for an experimental vehicle, your choice should be obvious.
In recent years, we've had requests for help on projects from many organizations and individuals, including (but not limited to) the following: Portage Township Library, the Humane Society, the League of Women Voters, WGGL, the AIDS Task Force, the MTU Career Center, MTU Counseling Services, the STC Committee, the Lode, the Gundlach Shelter for Abused Women, the Copper Country Arts Council, Keweenaw National Historical Park, the Van Pelt Library, and Educational Opportunity. (If you work for a student organization, your client must be the group's advisor, not another student.)

Bill Curnow, Executive Director of University Relations, informs me that “University Relations has been given the mandate to centralize and provide visual and content consistency to the University's undergraduate student recruiting materials as well as alumni communications. We have been asked to review and approve all publications for these two 'streams' prior to printing.” If you work with clients on materials that will be used either for undergraduate recruiting or alumni communications, do not assume that your clients are aware of this policy. Be sure that they understand that whatever you do can be no more than a draft, which must be cleared through University Relations.

If you choose to do a collaborative project, be sure to select as a collaborator someone you know you can work with and someone who you are confident will make a valuable contribution to the project.

How Many Credits is a Project Worth?

Whether or not a project is substantial enough to justify three credits depends on the nature of the project. Some three-fold brochures can be completed in a single afternoon and certainly aren't worth three credits. Other brochures require extensive research, consultation with clients, and design considerations. Such a brochure might be worth three credits. On the other hand, your final product might be a one-hundred-page document, but if all you've done is mechanically edit a previous edition of this document according to your client's specifications, you won't have exercised much creativity or gained much experience. Again, this wouldn't justify three credits. A twelve- or fifteen-page document that you start from scratch would be more appropriate. Roughly speaking, a three-credit project should entail 90 to 100 hours of your time over the course of the quarter (this time estimate assumes that you're working at an average rate of efficiency).

You cannot receive credit in this class for work you've done for another class.

Six Stages in Developing Your Project

Projects developed for HU470 will include at least the six following stages/components:

1. Oral Project Proposal

By the end of the second week of the quarter, you should have identified a client, negotiated the preliminary details of a project with this client, and met with me to propose a suitable HU470 project. During this brief individual conference, we will negotiate appropriate details and quickly develop the outlines of an acceptable project.

2. Written Project Prospectus

Once I've approved your oral project proposal, you'll describe your project in an approximately 750-word (three-page) prospectus. (If you're doing two projects during the same term, you'll need to submit two prospectuses.) The prospectus helps to ensure that you've planned your
project carefully, that you've discussed your project with both your client and me, and that you've had an opportunity to get feedback on your project from both of us. The prospectus also provides further practice in technical writing.

If problems become clear in the prospectus that were not apparent in your oral proposal, you'll have to renegotiate your project with me and with your client. If you don't have an approved project by the end of the second week of the quarter, you should withdraw from the class.

Your prospectus must include at least the following five components: (1) a description of your client and of the nature of your project (promotional materials, manual, videotape, informational brochure, newsletter, etc.); (2) a rhetorical analysis of your project; that is, a description of the audience for and purpose of your project and an explanation of how you'll appeal to this particular audience in order to achieve this particular purpose; (3) a description of your qualifications to undertake this project; (4) a timetable for completing the project by the end of the quarter; and (5) the approval and signature of your client. These various components of your prospectus should be separated by appropriate headings. Any document or software that provides instruction must be user tested; if you're developing such a document, be sure to include user testing in your timetable. If appropriate, your prospectus should also include a budget.

Your timetable (which you can present in either graphic or narrative form) must break your project down into component tasks (e.g., initial interview with client, preliminary research, first draft of text, selection or composition of graphics, rough layout of document, consultation with client, follow-up research, second draft of text, user testing, consultation with client, third draft of text, final approval by client, production of master copy, printing) and indicate when you expect to begin and complete each of these tasks.

Within approximately one week, I'll post prospectuses outside my office door. Pick them up there as soon as you can and consider the feedback I've provided. (If you don't want your prospectus left outside my office door, make a note to that effect on the first page of your prospectus.)

3. Progress Report

In week five, you'll submit a progress report (approximately 500-750 words). This report must describe work completed and work yet to be done. If your timetable has changed, your progress report must include a revised timetable. You must also briefly describe problems encountered or anticipated and how you've resolved or how you plan to resolve those problems. Your progress report must also include a draft version of all or part of your final project and the signature of your client, indicating that he or she is apprised of and (hopefully) satisfied with your progress to date.

Be sure to keep in regular contact with your client throughout the course of your project. Under no circumstances should you arouse anxiety in your client by leaving him or her unaware of your progress. Even delivering an otherwise acceptable product at the end of the term is inadequate compensation for arousing such stress.

4. Oral Presentation

During the final weeks of the quarter, you'll deliver an oral presentation (10-12 minutes, including questions) on your project. In this presentation, you should address questions such as the following: How and why did you choose this project? What is the intended audience of the project? What is its intended purpose? What problems did you encounter along the way, and how did you resolve these problems? This presentation should allow you to share ideas with other students in the class, practice your oral presentation skills, and conceptualize what you've learned.
in the process of completing your project. (This last point should prove valuable when discussing your project with recruiters.) When preparing for and delivering your presentation, be sure to stick closely to your time limit.

5. Letter of Transmittal

Also accompanying your final project should be a brief (one-page) cover letter or letter of transmittal, which you can present in either letter or memo form. A standard letter of transmittal (1) introduces the reader (often a client or employer) to the report or other document it accompanies with a brief description of the document's content and purpose; (2) describes any problems or recommendations relating to the document; and (3) invites the reader to contact the author with any questions. (Note that most of what you will need for a good letter of transmittal you will have already generated for your prospectus, progress report, and oral presentation.) The letter/memo should be addressed to your client and copied to me. If there is any additional information that you want to pass along to me, you can include that in a separate memo.

6. Final Project

The appropriate format of your final project depends upon the nature of your project itself. When you submit your final project, please submit along with it your prospectus and your progress report. Hence, be sure to safeguard these documents after I've returned them to you. If your project has involved the revision of older documents, also submit copies of these original documents.

Evaluation

Your final grade will be determined approximately as follows:

10% Prospectus
10% Progress report
10% Oral report
20% Participation in class and conferences
50% Final project and letter of transmittal

Your Client's Evaluation of Your Work

Toward the end of the term, I will ask your client to submit an evaluation of your work. This evaluation will influence, but not determine, your final grade. The evaluation consists of the following six questions:

1. Did your HU470 student accurately represent to you his or her qualifications for this project?
2. Did your student establish a reasonable timetable for completing this project and adhere to this timetable?
3. Did your student keep in regular contact with you about his or her progress and consult with you as necessary about drafts, problems, modifications, and design and production considerations?

4. Overall, were you satisfied with your student's skill, diligence, responsibility, and professionalism?

5. Are you satisfied with your student's progress toward or final completion of this project?

6. If you had a similar project in the future and you had the resources to hire someone to undertake this project, would you hire this student?

The Americans with Disabilities Act

MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Associate Dean of Students (2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, your department head, or the Affirmative Action Office (3310).

Schedule of Assignments and Class Activities

Your two individual conferences will be in my office (342 Walker); if I'm still meeting with the previous student when it's time for your conference, please knock to remind me that it's time for your meeting. Once we've scheduled your conferences, be sure to mark your calendar. Missed conferences will be difficult to reschedule and could affect your final grade.

Week 1: Overview of course and syllabus; collective brainstorming for project ideas.

Weeks 1-2: Meet individually to discuss project proposals.

Week 3: Submit written prospectuses to my office or mailbox.

Weeks 3-4: Work independently on your projects, and consult as necessary with me and with your client about your progress and about any problems you encounter. Check with me during my office hours, e-mail me, or call me at school or at home (see numbers on page 1) any time you have a question or a problem.

Tuesday, Week 5: Progress report and project draft due; meet as a class to discuss progress and problems and to sign up for conferences and oral presentations (if you will need a VHS and TV, let me know); bring name and mailing address of your client to class with you; tips on oral presentations; continue with independent work.

Week 6 or Week 7: Individual conferences to discuss progress reports; continue to work independently--and with your client--on your project.

Weeks 9 & 10: Oral reports on projects.

Last day of class: Oral reports on projects; final projects due; course evaluations (submit an SASE if you want your final project returned by mail).