HU 5080 Computer Applications in Technical Communication

(9:30-11:00 T & Th. in WAHC 134 or CCLI)
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Texts, Notes, & Course Summary

Texts
Notes

• If you have any disabilities under the ADA, please let me know about them by the end of the first week of class.
• I may modify the syllabus and policy statement for this class in light of changing student needs and the changing circumstances of this class.

Course Summary—HU 5080, Computer Applications in Technical Communication, is a new course designed for masters and Ph.D. RTC students who are planning to teach technical communication in an academic setting or who are intent on finding a position in a work place setting. There are two primary goals for this course: 1) to provide RTC students with practical technology-rich experiences and 2) to ground those experiences in intellectual discussions of social and conceptual issues associated with technologies and their application in educational and work-place settings.

1) Technology-rich experiences: Some of these will be planned for the entire class and others contract driven. Julia Jasken has graciously agreed to provide us access to the technology modules developed for HU 2644, our undergraduate applications course. You will choose a number of these modules to complete based on your own background and interests. (See the Technology Assignment for more details.) In addition to the 2644 modules, a number of other communication-related systems will be part of our explorations. They include but are not limited to the work-place and educational uses of
• annotation and commenting with MS Word and Adobe Acrobat
• an assessment, online portfolio system (Learning Record Online, LRO: lro.cwrl.utexas.edu)
• asynchronous threaded discussion system (WebBoard, skipper.hu.mtu.edu/~rselpe)
• CCLI web tools and web space
• email and email listserv software (majordomo.mtu.edu)
• “free” web space (Tripod, lycos.tripod.com)
• online class management tools (Freeware, Nicenet’s Internet Classroom Assistant www.nicenet.org and the proprietary system, WebCT www.it.mtu.edu/dcs/webct/)
• RoboHELP
• synchronous discussion systems or chat system (Northwoods MOO, www.hu.mtu.edu:8000)

2) Social and conceptual issues: The social and conceptual issues include (but are not necessarily limited to) concerns about the sustainability of technological systems, user-centered design, the social elements of information and knowledge management, the complications of “access,” the social challenges brought on by technological change, and the implications of Web-based, database driven systems that employ XML, PHP, MySQL, and others.
Assignments:
1) Technology & Technical Communication Autobiography (TTCA)
2) Completing HU 2644 Technology Modules
3) Technology Experiences in HU 5080
4) Creating Technology Module for a HU 2644 Audience
5) Final Paper

1) Overview: Technology & Technical Communication Autobiography (TTCA)
The TTCA assignment is made up of several sub-assignments that will be due over the first few weeks of the term. Those sub-assignments include:
• An autobiographical reflection on your past experiences with technology and technical communication.
• A report on the patterns you saw and the insights you came to as you read your classmates’ TTCAs.
• An interview report detailing the discussion you have with a trusted person (a mentor) who knows you well. The interview will center around the short autobiographical reflection mentioned above.
• A visual representation of your relationship to technology and technical communication.
• A final compilation of your TTCA sub-assignments

The TTCA Assignments serve several purposes.
• Because learning technologies requires an on-going effort that will not conclude with this class, one of the purposes of this assignment is to introduce you to your colleagues who, I hope, will continue to collaborate with you and support you in the months and years to come. The Technology and Technical Communication Autobiography will help class members and myself better understand your past experiences with technology and TC, your expectations for the near future, and your strengths and weaknesses as a technology user.
• This will allow us to set up and maintain a class "expertise grid." The grid will allow people to know what you know well, what applications or systems you know well enough to use, or what you don't know at all. We all need to be part of a collective support staff for the projects we take on in this class.
• We will all learn a great deal about how people learn new technologies (life-long learning strategies).

TTCA Sub-assignment 1: An Autobiographical Reflection
Due Thursday, noon eastern time of the first week of class.

These two pieces of writing are meant to be fun and interesting for you to write and fun for the rest of us to read.

What to do?
In the next couple of days, please write a technological autobiography and a technical communication autobiography (TICA) and then post them to our class email list by Friday noon of the first week of class (5080-I@mtu.edu). You classmates and I will then have several days to read autobiographies before meeting in person for our first technology workshop. It’s a lot of reading, but this will help us all know a little about each other as technical communicators and a little about our collective technology experiences/ambitions. These TTCAs will NOT be graded (other than to note that you handed them in) at this time. You will have time later to revised and add to them.

I suggest you write your TICA in MS Word. Save this somewhere on your home drive in a directory or folder set aside for files from this class. While the Word document is still open, open your email program as well. In the Word document, Select All by going to the Edit menu and selecting that option. Now copy your text by choosing Copy under the Edit menu. <p>

In your email package, open a new message and address it to 5080-I@mtu.edu. In the Subject line, please use this naming convention: (First_name Last_name's TICA1). Mine would read "Dickie Selfe's TICA1."

To complete the assignment, respond to a selection of the following prompts. Reply to all the comments and questions marked with **. The others are optional

Technology Autobiography Questions and Comments

** Write an autobiographical reflection in which you recall your earliest experiences with technological devices or artifacts.
- What were those early devices?
- What do you remember about using them?
- What were the popular gadgets in your house while growing up?

** Who do you identify as being a technologically "literate" person in your current or past life?

** Were there other people who influenced your attitudes toward technology (positively, negatively)?

** How do you learn new technologies?

** How do you expect to keep up with new technologies in the future? Do you have a plan or strategies?

** What technologies (relevant to this class) do you know very well? well enough to use? not well at all?
- What technologies do you need to learn in the near future?

Technical Communication Autobiography, Questions and Comments

** What experiences in your past have gotten you excited about technical communication? Why were you excited?

** If you aren't interested in TC, to what use will you put this class and the technologies we investigate?
• ** What specific areas of TC are you interested in? If you are planning on teaching TC at the high school or college level, tell us about the kind of institution in which you imagine working.
• ** What specific TC expertise do you bring into this class?
• What sort of TC experiences do you hope to have in the future? In other words, imagine yourself working for the ideal institution or organization. Describe it.

Write the 'TTCA with your classmates' interests in mind. What kind of examples would be most interesting to these folks? How much time do they have to read? What do they need to know about you and your abilities?
In the next assignment, read your classmates' TTCAs for insight into their interests, attitudes, and abilities.

**TTCA Sub-assignment 2: Learning about you classmates**
Now that you've written your own TTCA, read the TTCAs of others in the class. Don't read them passively though. Take notes online (in an MS Word document, for instance) on the patterns you saw as people answered the main questions. What insights did you come to as you read? What did you learn about their attitudes or approaches to technology? What did you learn about TC? We will discuss these patterns, insights and other observations when we meet in class (using an electronic system of course). Be kind and supportive when we do.

**TTCA Sub-assignment 3: An interview report.**
Interview a trusted person (a mentor) who knows you well. Center the interview around your own TTCA and the patterns, insights and observations you made when you read other peoples' TTCAs. What does your friend/mentor think about the main questions? Would they add or modify anything in the TTCA you wrote?

Write up a report of your interview/conversation. Submit it as an attachment to the appropriate WebBoard topic (skipper.hu.mtu.edu/~rselte Choose the conference called HU5080). Make sure you use this naming convention for your MS Word document:

lastnameTTCA3

My file name would be "selfeTTCA3".

If your last name is long, use the first "unique" (to the class) letters of your last name. For instance, someone named Fitzgerald might use FitzTTCA3. Make sense?

**TTCA Sub-assignment 4: A Visual Representation**
Start collecting images that represent your enthusiasms, frustrations, and concerns about technology and technical communication. What is your relationship to these two areas of expertise? How might you represent them visually?
Collect images for this assignment by either:

- copying them off the WWW after doing web searches for key terms and concepts (with appropriate citation information of course :-).
- taking digital images (with a digital camera or your own or checked out from the CCLI).
- taking images (with a regular camera) of appropriate representations of your relationship to TC and technology. Get them developed and scan them using a flatbed scanner in the CCLI or
- create a collage out of magazine images and scan that in using the scanner in the CCLI.

Collect these images and create a simple web page (or pages) using these images. Add some textual explanation of what they represent: a description of how they represent your enthusiasms, frustrations, or concerns about technology or TC.

(Optional) If you have the expertise, use a photomanipulation program like Adobe Photoshop or Adobe Elements to make a collage. Save this one image for the web, put it on a web page with an explanation, and let us know where to look to see it (Give us the URL.)

**TTCA Sub-assignment 5: A Final Reflection**

Now combine all your TTCA materials into a single a web site that includes:

1. your original technological and TC autobiography, edited and cleaned up, with additions from your interview with a trusted mentor.
2. the most important patterns, insights, or observations you came to as you read your classmates' TTCAs and discussed them in class,
3. your visual representation of your relationship to technology and teaching, and
4. a final reflection: a description of the implications that these TTCAs have for work-place and academic settings.

2) **Completing HU 2644 Technology Modules**<www.hu.mtu.edu/~jijasken/2644/schedule.html>

Choose at least five modules from those available on Julia Jasken's HU 2644 syllabus page. Write a short proposal/contract for me indicating which you want to complete and why. Also include a schedule of completion in the proposal/contract. Complete them on that schedule. You may attend the 8-9:30 demonstration of the module as scheduled for HU 2644. With the completed materials for each module, include a short review of the module and how you would like to see it improved.

3) **Technology Experiences in HU 5080**
These "experiences" will be largely completed (or at least begun) in class. We will explore relevant technologies together and participating in events that illustrate how they might be used in professional or academic settings. They include technologies or systems not available, yet, in HU 2644:

- annotation and commenting with MS Word and Adobe Acrobat
- an assessment, online portfolio system (Learning Record Online, LRO: lro.cwrl.utexas.edu)
- asynchronous threaded discussion system (WebBoard, skipper.hu.mtu.edu/~rselfe)
- CCLl web tools and web space
- email and email listserv software (majordomo.mtu.edu)
- "free" web space (Tripod, lycos.tripod.com)
- online class management tools (Freeware, Nicenet’s Internet Classroom Assistant www.nicenet.org and the proprietary system, WebCT www.it.mtu.edu/dcs/webct/)
- RoboHELP
- synchronous discussion systems or chat system (Northwoods MOO, www.hu.mtu.edu:8000)

See the HU 5080 schedule on the class web site for specific dates <www.hu.mtu.edu/~rselfe/5080>.

4) Creating Technology Module for a HU 2644 Audience

This assignment is based on the old truism, "You learn best when you teach others." As you complete the five modules from the HU 2644 collection and attend the HU 5080 technology experiences, define a technology space to develop with a HU 2644 audience in mind: STC students who are preparing for the rest of the curriculum and for professional life. This assignment consists of a Proposal, the Technology Module, an Interview/Review Report, and a final, online Technology Module.

**A Proposal**

Include a description of what the module will include: the scope of the work, activities, and resources. Also provide a short justification/theory section (written for 2644 students) that indicates how it will help STC students develop a more critical attitude toward technology and how the module will help them become more professional. You are encouraged to discuss your ideas with STC students (senior and entering students) at this stage of the design process.

**The Technology Module**

The technology module will consist of a web document that includes several components.

- an activity that allows students to "explore" the soft/hard/netware you have chosen.
- a step-by-step instructions that walk more tentative learners through your chosen technology.

and finally,

- a "critical" component that encourages learners to think more carefully about social, ethical, or legal issue that accompanies the technology in question.

**An Interview/Review Report**
Julia Jasken has graciously agreed to give us a period during her class during which you can interview the HU 2644 students who have read through and attempted some portion of your technology module. The schedule for these interviews looks like this:

1. Monday 12/2, modules completed and linked to Julia's site: <www.hu.mtu.edu/~jjjasken/2644> (This is right after thanksgiving break). Send your module as an attachment or a URL to it to Julia (jjjasken@mtu.edu) before noon on that Monday.
2. Tuesday 12/3, 2644 students will look at modules in class
3. Thursday 12/5, 2644 and 5080 students will meet to talk about the modules.

The Final Technology Module
Revisit the module based on feedback from me and the 2644 students. Combine it with the justification portion of the proposal (if you haven't already), and provide us with a digital copy of the final draft.

5) Final Paper: Critical Approaches to TC and/or Technology
Describe and justify your "critical" approach to technology and/or technical communication. All of our readings this term have been examples of attempts to develop a more nuanced or critical approach to design, information management, technology-rich environments, or communication systems. Define a "critical" approach to technology that you hope to sustain in the work place or in an academic setting. Justify your approach using our readings or others you can bring to bear.

Readings
See class schedule at www.hu.mtu.edu/~rselfe/5080/schedule.html for the most up-to-date listing.
<www.hu.mtu.edu/~rselfe/5080/schedule.html

Grading
Grading in graduate courses is weird. You either do excellent, thoughtful work and hand everything in for an A. Or you get almost all of it done and have to rush through some of the projects and writing for a B. Or you miss several assignments and end up with an X (a conditional grade which allows you to complete that work within one term before it turns to an F). People who are failing or who can't find the time to keep up, drop. I encourage that.

What grading SHOULD be is is a formative process that allows us to interact on a regular basis about the class goals, your observations about your own learning, and about the course itself. That's why I use the Learning Record Online system (LRO <lro.cwrl.utexas.edu>). It allows for all of the above and more. As you can see in the Assignments section, there are scheduled activities, projects and papers in this class. I will keep track of whether you complete them in a timely manner and the quality of each. I'll "grade" those using the scale roughly outlined in the paragraph above. That's what I will bring to the grading table other than my observations about your willingness to participate in class activities. You, on the other hand, will have a say
in your own grade by entering (twice per week) "observations" about the course "strands" (course goals, see below). Each observation can have two sections:

1. (Not optional) Objective observations about a specific class activity and how that activity is related to one or more of the class strands (goals). These observations should not be based on your feelings (exhilaration, frustration) about the activity, but what is actually occurring (reality).

   Yes, I do know how ridiculous words like "objective" and "reality" can sound in a post-modern context. We should talk about this and this type of assessment system in class. This sort of conversation would be interesting (an instance of what I would call a "critical" approach to technology) especially in light of the fact that the LRO is supposed to be adaptable to learning situations from primary schools to graduate schools.

2. (Optional) Feeling-based comments about how you are dealing with the technologies, the assignments, the readings, . . . . I find these kinds of comments particularly useful in the ongoing usability process of redesigning this class.

I suggest that you number the parts of your twice-weekly observations on the LRO.

**Class Strands (Goals)**

Class members should be able to

- consider the social, institutional, fiscal, ethical, . . . issues related to technology use in Technical Communication settings: work-place or academic.
- learn new technologies that can be applied to work-place and academic settings
- better prepare learning materials for colleagues, peers, and young professionals
- reform theories in light of practice, and judge practice from theoretical perspectives.
- discuss trends in the TC community with some fluency: user- or learner-centered design, information and knowledge management, database-driven web systems, etc.
- participate in the forming of support communities that help us all manage our day-to-day lives in a technologically overdetermined world.