HU 5003: Fall Semester 2004

**Technical Communication and Technology Studies**

Ann Brady, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Scientific & Technical Communication
mabrady@mtu.edu
Office: 329A Walker
Extension: 7-2066
Office hours: W 9:30-10:30 am; R 3:30-4:30 pm
Course hours: R 10:00 am-12:20 pm in Walker 139
Class list: 5003-1

**Course description and goals:**

HU 5003 offers a critical perspective on key issues in scientific and technical communication (stc) and technology studies (ts). While stc deals more with practical concerns and ts more with the theoretical, the historical, pedagogical, and scholarly overlap between the two is considerable. Both, for instance, study the implications of technology as a form of knowledge and a social construct as well as a product or static entity.

Part 1 of this course thus offers an historical introduction to technology studies in order to become familiar with the basic questions raised by this area of study, among them what constitutes technology and how it affects material cultures, who produces it, benefits from it, and is marginalized by it. Part 2 explores scientific and technical communication, how it is practiced in workplace settings, how students are prepared to produce it, research on how it is produced, and the theoretical and practical implications of this work. Part 3 takes up several especially important contemporary issues discussed in technical communication and technology studies and asks you to enter into these discussions—or others of your own choosing. Regardless of where we are in the semester, think of the reading and writing that you do here as the foundation for work you might do in the future: a Master's thesis, a Ph.D. comprehensive exam question, or a publishable article.

**Course questions:**

What is technical communication? Technology studies?
When and why did technology become an issue of discussion for rhetoric? Philosophy?
Gender Studies? Environmental Studies? Cultural Studies?
What theories inform stc and ts?
Why do people refer to stc and ts as interdisciplinary?
What do stc and ts scholars study? What methods do they use?
What are salient characteristics of stc curricula and pedagogy?
What do workplace communicators do?
**Required texts:**

Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground*
Johnson-Eilola & Selber, *Central Works in Technical Communication*
Staples & Ornatowski, *Foundations for Teaching Technical Communication*
Wajcman, *Feminism Confronts Technology*
Winner, *Autonomous Technology*

**Additional readings**

**Projects**

**Reading Journals:**

These notes are intended to help you to reflect on the assigned readings and make connections to earlier readings and discussions.

After reading the assignments, write a response to what you have read. Use these notes as a way to explore issues. I will collect these three times during the semester. Bring the journal with you to class and use it in discussions.

**Response Papers:**

The purpose of this assignment is to give you practice in close, critical reading and response. By the end of the term, you should be able to evaluate a range of arguments about technology, rhetoric, and society and use your work to advance your plans for a thesis, dissertation, or publishable article.

Identify a particular reading from the syllabus that interests you and write a four to five page paper responding to it. Distributed in class and read aloud, this paper is not so much a statement of personal likes or dislikes as it is an intellectually engaged exploration of concepts considered in the reading and of interest to you. It should offer definitions of key words and questions for discussion, including your specific reflections on particular passages.

**Journal Maps:**

The purpose of this exercise is to help you secure an overview of the STC field, and to imagine how you might locate yourself in it.

Choose one of the following journals, all of which are in the MTU library:

- *Computers and Composition (C&C)*
- *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication (IEEE/TPC)*
- *Journal of Business Communication (JBC)*
Read through the journal issues from 1999 to the present. For each article, write a one-sentence description of the article's main concern or question. You don't need to read in depth to do this. Read the abstract and/or the introduction and discussion sections—more, if you're interested. After you have read and summarized, look back over your summaries for the topics, concerns, and questions that repeat. In class, you'll work with someone else who read the same journal to build a map of the concerns that have shaped the technical communication field in the last five years.

Internship Surveys:
The purpose of this assignment is to give you insight into what STC communicators do in the workplace.

From the list of those available at www.ohiolink.edu/etd/ (see attached screen shots), select an electronic internship report that focuses on an area of interest to you. Internships were carried out at a wide range of sites: environmental agencies, health institutes, consulting consortiums, web design and e-publishing organizations, and software development companies. Read the report, conduct research into the context of your communicator's line of work (see professional websites, the STC national organization website, and books like Lutz and Storms' The Practice of Technical and Scientific Communication), and present to the class what you have learned.

Seminar projects and roundtables:
The purpose of this assignment is to give you the opportunity to develop a self-selected topic relevant to the issues and ideas covered in the course. Ideally, this paper will lead to a conference presentation or published journal article.

To get you started thinking about the paper, a proposal will be due on November 4th. Similar to proposals for conferences sponsored by the Council for Programs of Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC), the Society of Technical Communicators (STC), College Composition and Communication (CCCC) or the Modern Language Association (MLA), these proposals will be short (two pages at most), but focused. They will give me the opportunity to give you some feedback on your ideas and you the opportunity to get started in plenty of time to develop them.
The last two days of class, you will present your projects as you would at a professional conference: each of you will have from ten to fifteen minutes for your presentation and after each presentation, there will be time for discussion. These presentations are intended to be a bridge to your final papers, a time to ask for feedback and work through ideas.

Grades

To determine your final grade, I’ll assess your written work and your participation in class discussions. All assignments must be completed to pass the class. I will not accept late papers without prior arrangement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response papers</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal maps</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship surveys</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar projects and roundtables</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading journals</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is a course about making connections, seeing intersections, watching how different disciplines and the questions emerging from those disciplines begin to inform each other, even reshape each other. To a large extent, this is a course that cannot begin to cover all that is promised in the three subjects joined in its title. And, yet, as a seminar that introduces you to some of the work of this department, it is one that suggests particular relationships.

To get at some of these relationships, you will need to read, reflect on, and then make your own connections among the readings and the talking in the course.

**Texts**
- Stephen Scully, *Plato’s Phaedrus: Translation with notes, glossary, etc.* Focus Philosophical Library.
- Charles Paine, *The Resistant Writer: Rhetoric as Immunity, 1850-Present* (pp. 3-18, and 179-201).
- Art Young, “Writing Across and Against the Curriculum,” *CCC* 54:3 (Feb 2003).

**Assignments**
- A reading notebook in which you reflect upon the readings of the day and make connections to readings and discussions from previous classes. You should bring your notebook to every class and be prepared to draw on it for our discussions.
- Three 5-7 page papers which you will present to the class as assigned.
- A New Literacy Project presented to the class in a modified poster session.
- A final project determined by your work and your interests in the course. It should draw directly from the reading in this course and will be presented (15 minutes) to the seminar at the end of the term. At the core of the project is a 15 page paper, but the project might well draw on your knowledge of multiliteracy or new literacy forms.

**Schedule of Assignments**
- Aug. 31 Introduction to Course
- Sept. 2 Cindy Selfe in class for consultation on your first assignment
- Sept. 7 Selfe & Hawisher – *Oral Reports and Interview summaries (co-authored) due*
- Sept. 9 Selfe & Hawisher, continue discussion
- Sept. 14 Brandt, introduction and chapters 1 & 2
Sept. 16 Brandt, chapters 3 & 4
Sept. 21 Brandt, chapters 5, 6, & conclusion
Sept. 23 Oral Reports and Paper 1 Due
Sept. 28 Lankshear, Part I
Sept. 30 Lankshear, Part II
Oct. 5 Lankshear, Part III
Oct. 7 New Literacy Project Due and presented to class in a modified poster session
Oct. 12 Paine (intro and chapter 7)
Oct. 14 Harris
Oct. 19 Harris; and Young
Oct. 21 Reichert Powell and Horner & Trimbur
Oct. 26 Paper and Report 3
Oct. 28 Paper and Report 3
Nov. 2 Plato
Nov. 4 Plato
Nov. 9 Plato
Nov. 11 Eldred and Mortensen
Nov. 16 Eldred and Mortensen
Nov. 18 Eldred and Mortensen
Nov. 30 Final Presentations
Dec. 2 Final Presentation
Dec. 7 Final Presentation
Dec. 9 Final Presentation – Final Project Paper Due