HU4634: Advanced Practicum in Scientific and Technical Communication

Instructor: Jingfang Ren  
Office: Walker 335
Time: T TH 9.35-10.50 am  
Phone: 487-3134
Location: Walker 134  
E-mail: jren1@mtu.edu
Office hours: T TH 2.00-3.00pm, W 9.00-12.00, or by appointment
Class mailing list: HU4634FA08-L@MTU.EDU

Course Description

The purpose of Advanced Practicum in Scientific and Technical Communication is threefold. First, this class is aimed at preparing you to think like a professional in your chosen area of specialty, as well as the profession of Technical, Professional, and Scientific Communication (TPSC) as a whole. Second, we will probe on a deeper level the historical and theoretical threads that help to constitute the fabric of TPSC. Finally, you will engage in the practice and production of TPSC through the making of a variety of communication documents and related products. Toward this end, we will explore a number of salient issues in the following thematic units:

Unit I
Build Identity  
(Re)locate Value

In this unit, we'll engage in a retrospective/prospective contemplation of the field and profession of TPSC. We'll start by reading and discussing a few landmark essays that map out the history and development of the field as well as offer varying theoretical perspectives—some more humanistic, some more technological—on our professional identity. These pieces help us see both where we have been and where we might be headed. With this informed understanding of the past and speculation on the future, we'll develop strategies for collectively relocating the value of our work in a fast-changing world that offers new opportunities but also poses new challenges. Each of you will then use your knowledge about our disciplinary identity to help you explore and articulate your own professional identity and interests.

Unit II
Manage Projects  
Negotiate  
Relationships

This unit introduces you to a rich body of research on two of the most challenging aspects of the practice of TPSC: working on multiple projects with/for various stakeholder groups. More specifically, we'll address such issues as project management, primary and secondary research (particularly usability and working with SMEs), teamwork, ethics, and reflection. You are expected to bring this research to bear on your practices, which typically entail the following:

- Schedule and manage more than one project at one time
- Understand, develop and deploy various strategies for planning, researching, drafting, revising, and other pertinent activities throughout the document cycle
- Work with actual clients and users of the products you are creating
- Work with colleagues in F2F and networked environments to determine roles, assign tasks, as well as manage team conflicts
- Build professional ethos through documentation and accountability
Like any human act, the practice of TPSC is always situated in an intricate network of contexts that imposes constraints on what can/should be done. In this unit, we’ll examine the ways in which particular rhetorical, organizational, social, and cultural contexts impact the decisions we make about technology, genre, visual design and so forth in the process of developing usable products and documents. While for many of us, production in context may have become an internalized process, in this class, I’ll ask you to make this process more explicit through the following activities:

- Conduct research on organizational (e.g., by reading in-house literature) and cultural contexts to determine how they shape the various purposes and forms of particular products and documents that you are creating
- Conduct user analysis, design and carry out user evaluations and tests, incorporate user feedback in revision
- Write various documents (reports, proposals, memos) and use appropriate technologies that effectively address the communication situation at hand
- Make design decisions that ensure both technical accuracy of visual content and effectiveness of arguments adapted to the different levels of technical expertise of a range of audiences and stakeholders

Course Materials

Supplemental readings and handouts (print or PDF) provided by instructor.

MTU Policies

Academic Dishonesty
Plagiarism and cheating are serious academic offenses. MTU’s Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as “knowingly copying another’s work or ideas and calling them one’s own or not giving proper credit or citation,” and the policy covers copying sections or entire papers from printed or electronic sources as well as handing in papers written by students for other classes or purchasing academic papers. Plagiarism and cheating are not only dishonest but they cheat you out of learning. If you ever have any questions about this issue, or about how to cite someone else’s work properly, please talk with me or consult a coach in the Writing Center.

Discrimination
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, Dean of Students, 487-2212. For other concerns about
discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department chair, or the Affirmative Action Office at 487-3310.

Class Policies and Requirements

Attendance
You are expected to attend all class meetings and to be in class and ready to contribute to the discussion at the beginning of class. You may have two (2) absences for any reason during the semester. Documented, excused absences will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and require written explanation of the circumstances with supporting documents when applicable (e.g., letter from your coach, doctor’s note, invitation for on-site job-interview). For each unexcused absence after the first two (2), you will lose 50 points of your final grade. Even when absent, you are responsible for completing and turning in assignments when they are due. You may contact another student about in-class work missed when you are absent or come to see me during my office hours.

Late Work
All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the dates indicated on the course calendar. Late papers and assignments are generally NOT accepted, however, personal emergencies will be taken into consideration as long as you discuss your situation with me in person, by phone, or via email at least 24 hours ahead of time. In addition, you may use up to one (1) “computer excuse”, regardless of the situation, to turn in late work.

The late work policy does apply even if you lose your work due to technological failures. You are responsible for keeping complete copies of your work for the semester. In team writing situations, make sure that all team members always have the most current version of the document that the team is working on at any stage of the project cycle.

Collaboration
Collaborative work is a required component of the course. You and your project team members are responsible for updating one another and me about assignment development and progress. In addition, you are also responsible for negotiating together all aspects of your work, including planning, drafting, revising, file managing, and record-keeping. At the end of the team project cycle, I will ask individual members to complete a Peer Collaboration Evaluation Form, which will be used to help determine your collaboration score for a particular team document.

Revision
You are encouraged to revise and resubmit your work for further evaluation or grade change. I may also revise the syllabus and course calendar throughout the semester to better serve your needs.

Conferences
See me in my office—335 Walker—when you have questions about an assignment or when you would like to try out some ideas before a document is due. You should also see me to get help with particular writing problems, to resolve differences about grades, or to suggest ways to improve the course. If you can’t make my regularly scheduled
office hours (T TH 2.00-3.00pm, W 9.00-12.00), just email me to set up an appointment, and I’ll try my best to accommodate your schedule.

Summary of Major Projects and Assignments

**Major Projects**

I. Client Project (team; 300 pts)
   - work through a client and with relevant users on a “real world” project
   - conduct research relevant to the product you are developing
   - write a “cycle” of documents that manage and document the project
   - present your product to the class and to the client

II. Professional Interests Project (individual; 350 pts)
   - choose an appropriate and significant project that focuses on your professional interests
   - write a “cycle” of documents that manage and document the project
   - conduct relevant research throughout the project
   - Produce a final deliverable and present to the class

III. Portfolio Design and Presentation Project (individual; 150 pts)
   - prepare a visual mock-up and produce the content of the portfolio
   - prepare the portfolio for professional quality presentations to the Director of STC and potential employers

**Other Assignments**

In addition to the major document cycles, you will also complete some smaller assignments throughout the semester, including the following:

- Lead one discussion session (in pairs) on one of the “common” readings on the theory and practice of TPSC (50 pts)
- Participation and in-class writing (holistic and cumulative; 100 pts)
- Reading response (50 pts)

Extra credit assignments: lead an additional discussion session (individually or in pairs) (50 pts); write a professional development memo (50 pts)

**Grading**

**Evaluation Criteria**

Generally speaking, audience, purpose, communication context, design, clarity, and professional ethos are some of the major factors that I take into consideration when grading your documents. For each assignment, I’ll use a specific set of criteria that highlight the objectives or goals of that particular assignment, which can be found in the assignment description/prompt.

**Grade Conversion**

The assignments are “worth” the above indicated amounts. In addition, you must complete all assignments to receive a passing grade in this