Syllabus: HU5003 (Technical Communication and Technology Studies)

Instructor: Jingfang Ren
Time: T TH 3:30-4:50 pm
Location: Walker 143
Office hours: T W TH 9:30-11:30 or by appointment
Class mailing list: HU5003SP11-L@MTU.EDU

Office: Walker 325
Phone: 487.3134
E-mail: jren1@mtu.edu

Course Information

Course description
HU5003 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 theoretical issues, the historical, pedagogical, and scholarly overlap between the two is considerable. Both, for example, study technology as a form of knowledge with social and cultural implications for human action rather than as mere instrument or static entity.

We will explore some central questions to STC and TS such as:

- What is STC? What is TS? Where/how do they intersect? Why has technology been an important issue of discussion for STC?
- What theories inform STC and TS?
- What do scholars in STC and TS study? What methods do they use?
- What do technical communicators do in various workplace contexts?
- What are salient characteristics of STC curricula and pedagogy?

Thematic units

Unit one: An historical introduction and theoretical examination
We will start by analyzing and discussing varying theoretical perspectives—some more humanistic, some more technological—on the history and development of STC and TS. The readings for this unit help us see both where we as scholars in these two related fields have been and where we might be headed.

Unit two: Practice and pedagogy
Building on what we learn from unit one and with an informed understanding of the past, we will explore contemporary issues central to effective practice and teaching of STC: What do technical communicators do in various workplace settings? What strategies do they use? How are students prepared to enter the profession of STC? In what ways does research inform, challenge, and complicate the practice of STC and vice versa?

Unit three: You and the Burkean parlor
In The Philosophy of Literary Form, Kenneth Burke uses “parlor” as a metaphor to characterize the way in which scholars engage in ongoing, heated discussions in and across socially constructed disciplinary spaces. In our version of the Burkean parlor, each of you will have an opportunity to explore issues that suit your own professional interests. Through self-selected readings, class discussions, and completion of
the final project (a 20-page scholarly piece targeted towards a peer-reviewed journal), you will be joining the ongoing discussions in a focused and situated manner.

Note: While the class is divided into three seemingly discrete units, I encourage you to conceptually see these units as a coherent whole and to consider how course readings from these units respond to, build on, and interanimate one another.

Required Texts
- *Centre Works in Technical Communication* (0-19-515705-2)
- *Spurious Coin: A History of Science, Management, and Technical Writing* (0-7914-4556-9)
- *User-Centered technology: A Rhetorical Theory for Computers and Other Mundane Artifacts* (0-7914-3932-1)
- Supplemental readings (book chapters, journal articles etc.) posted on Blackboard
- Student-selected readings based on individual interests

MTU Policies

**Academic Integrity**
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. For more information, see [http://www.studentaffairs.mtu.edu/dean/judicial/policies/academic_integrity.html](http://www.studentaffairs.mtu.edu/dean/judicial/policies/academic_integrity.html)

**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 Dean of Students (487-2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your academic advisor, department head, or the Affirmative Action Office at 487-3310. For more information, see [http://www.admin.mtu.edu/aao/](http://www.admin.mtu.edu/aao/)

**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., doctor’s note, conference itinerary). 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 without penalty.

Conferences

See me in my office—325 Walker—when you have questions about an assignment or when you would like to discuss the topics and issues covered in this class. 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 W TH 9:30-11:30), just email me to set up an appointment, and I’ll try my best to accommodate your schedule.

Summary of Major Projects and Assignments

I. Journal mapping (in pairs; 150pts/5%)
   - Pick a journal from the list provided by the instructor
   - Summarize prominent topics and issues addressed from 2006 to present
   - Prepare an oral report and a written summary of your findings

II. Curriculum analysis OR internship survey (individual; 150pts/15%)
   - Choose one of the above options that better suits your professional interests
   - Option A (curriculum analysis): analyze HU/3129 curriculum based on review of course materials, interviews with program directors and 3120 instructor(s), etc.; orally present analysis to class
   - Option B ( internship survey): select and read an STC internship report from the Miami University of Ohio ETD database (http://ed.ohiolink.edu/), conduct research into the author’s line of work, and orally present to class what you have learned

III. Self-selected reading and presentation (individual; 75pts/7.5%)
   - Choose your own reading on a topic that you would like to pursue for the final project and present it to class
   - Situate your presentation in both disciplinary and personal contexts

IV. Final project/seminar paper (individual; 400pts/40%)
   - Produce a piece of scholarly writing that connects in some way to the fields of STC and TS; target a specific peer-reviewed journal
   - Project phases/deliverables: project proposal, peer review on rough draft, one-on-one conference with instructor, conference-style panel presentation, final draft (20 pages, double-spaced)

Other assignments

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

- Lead class discussion on assigned readings (individual; 75pts/7.5%)
- Write one big and two small response papers (individual; 100pts/10%
  total: big paper 50 pts, small paper 25 pts each)
- Participation and in-class writing (holistic and cumulative; 50 pts/5%)
Grading

**Evaluation criteria**

Generally speaking, your work will be evaluated on your ability to develop coherent, researched arguments based on an informed understanding of relevant issues and topics central to STC and TS. 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 handout/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 course. Late assignments (except the one for which you used your “computer excuse”) lose 50pts for each day (anytime past 5:00pm) of the due day. Use the table below to convert points to letter grades.

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