theory & research in technical communication | english 700
fall 2014

INSTRUCTOR CONTACT

NAME: Mitch Ogden, PhD
EMAIL: ogdenm@uwstout.edu
OFFICE: Callahan Hall 216
☎ 715.232.1307

FACE-TO-FACE OFFICE HOURS:
M 12:00 - 2:00 PM
TH: 8:45 - 10:45 AM

ONLINE OFFICE HOURS*:
M: 2:30 - 4:00 PM
AND BY APPOINTMENT

*I will be online and accessible via email, Skype (mitchell.ogden), and telephone (715.232.1307). It is helpful to let me know in advance if you are planning to contact me during online office hours.

COURSE OVERVIEW

As one of four core courses in the MS in Technical and Professional Communication (MSTPC) program, this course is designed to lay a two-part foundation for your future work and study in the field: theory and research.

First we will explore the theoretical foundations of the field through critical academic essays and articles. Those theoretical considerations provide us an opportunity to contemplate the field from rhetorical, philosophical, cultural, and social vantage points. Appreciating and engaging the theoretical foundations of technical and professional communication, we become better citizens of the field—better prepared to participate in the discourse and practice of the community. This theoretical survey grounds us in principles that transcend practices, preparing us for the inevitable changes we will encounter in the future.

As an introduction to research, this course frames the methodologies most commonly deployed in academic and professional research in the field. This survey of methodologies will help us engage as critical researchers, bringing our questions and interests to a rigorous investigation of the field. The familiarity with research methodologies helps us to appreciate the discipline of this discourse community, understanding the process of knowledge production.

The course is designed with a variety of assignments and activities that I hope will engage and interest you. You should find ample latitude in what you pursue, so that your work will reflect your own interests, experience, and goals. I encourage you to seek out examples and applications that are meaningful or relevant to you. Because technical and communication has such a far reach, it is possible to find applications in a wide variety of contexts. Whether these relate to your current employment, your future goals, or your intellectual interests, I believe that you’ll benefit most—and do your best work—when you find meaningful connections to things you care about.

As an online course, we’ll strive to create a level of community and presence that helps us all feel like we are creating collegial relationships in virtual spaces. As graduate students in a program, you can benefit...
immensely from the camaraderie and collegiality of your fellows. You can build relationships in graduate school that will carry with you—personally and professionally—through the rest of your life.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
The MSTPC program objectives are listed below. Primary objectives for this course are marked with a double asterisk. Secondary objectives are marked with a single asterisk. The other objectives may be in play depending upon your interests and the projects you pursue.

1. **Survey and synthesize theoretical concepts and principles about major issues in technical and professional communication.
2. **Select and apply theoretical concepts and principles to the interpretation of technical and professional communication phenomenon.
3. **Evaluate relevant scholarship as a means of informing inquiry in technical and professional communication.
4. **Select, design and conduct research, using proper methods and methodology, making sound recommendations and drawing logical conclusions.
5. *Compose texts, designs and other deliverables, demonstrating ethical, rhetorical, and user-centered strategies.
6. Assess documentation for accuracy, adequacy, correctness, accessibility and usability.
7. Appraise international and intercultural issues in technical and professional communication, recommending strategies for addressing these issues.
8. Evaluate the ways emerging media and digital technologies impact technical and professional communication.
9. Plan a documentation schedule and monitor project progress against that schedule.
10. Evaluate and execute team-building and interpersonal communication strategies.

COURSE LOGISTICS
Schedule. Each academic week will start Wednesday morning and end on Tuesday night, which puts the weekend in the middle of the class week instead of at the end. If weekends are your primary work time, you will have a few days to finish if you can’t get everything by the end of Sunday night. I hope this arrangement allows your weekends to serve a variety of purposes in your life without weekend deadlines always breathing down your neck.

Course Management System. Our course management system is the nerve center of our course. Please note that it has several names. Learn@UW–STout (L@UWS for short) is our campus’s name for our Brightspace integrated learning platform, which is a product of Desire2Learn (D2L). You might hear it referred to by any of these names. Whatever we call it, L@UWS will be the nexus of our work in this class. Information about the class readings and assignments, discussion boards, and dropboxes for completed assignments will all be accessible there.

Webinars. This semester we will hold three live webinars. Participation is required. Synchronous participation is preferred, but the webinars will be archived for those not able to participate in the live session. Class members will be polled for your schedules to accommodate as many live participants as possible. I hope that these webinars will allow us to enjoy the give-and-take of synchronous discussion and learning.
Communication. Email will be a vital communication link throughout the semester. Please be sure to keep tabs on your UW Stout email account. If you prefer to receive communication through a different email account, please let me know. Email is the best way to contact me throughout the week. I will respond as quickly as possible, usually within 24 hours during the week. I may be slower to respond over the weekend. My office hours are for you! In addition to my regular, face-to-face office hours (when you can reach me by phone), I have online office hours set aside especially for this class. If you are not available during my office hour—and you would like some synchronous communication—please contact me to set an appointment to talk. A voice-to-voice conversation or synchronous chat is often an efficient way to get information or solve a problem. So please don’t hesitate to request and appointment!

Technology. Broadband internet access is a practical necessity for this course and the MSTPC program as all of our information and communication moves through the internet. If you have disruption to or concerns about your internet access, please contact me immediately, by telephone if necessary (see Instructor Contact above). Our assignments and activities are built with the assumption that you are equipped according to the Online Learning Agreement. You can reference that document here: http://www.uwstout.edu/programs/mstpc/upload/mstpc_ola.pdf

COURSE TEXTS
As a UW Stout student, you are served by Instructional Resources Service (IRS), one of the oldest textbook rental systems in the country. You pay a modest fee that gives you access to your textbooks without additional, out-of-pocket expenses. You can check out your books directly from IRS (located in the Swanson Learning Center), or if you live more than 30 miles from Menomonie, IRS will send your textbooks by mail.

IRS website: http://www.uwstout.edu/textbooks/
Distance education textbook request form: http://www2.uwstout.edu/lib/irs/textbookrequest/

We will use the following books this semester. These are all available through IRS.


Additional texts will be posted to L@UWS as PDFs.
**PARTICIPATION, PROJECTS, & ASSIGNMENTS**
A variety of assignments will contribute to your final grade in this course. Participation includes basic involvement in the course—contributing to online discussions, submitting informal assignments, and participating in webinars (live or archived). Participation is essential to giving you opportunities to engage with class material and exchange ideas with class members. Projects and assignments are designed to give you substantive opportunities to think about, synthesize, and apply your learning in the course. Here is a summary of the projects throughout the semester:

- Informal writing & discussion participation: throughout term, 15%
- Introduction video presentation with narration: 9/9, 5%
- Synthesis of Most Important Points (w2): 9/16, 5%
- Critical Response paper #1: 10/7, 10%
- Critical Response paper #2: 10/28, 15%
- Literature review: 11/18, 20%
- Research Project Proposal & Defense Presentation: 12/17 (Wednesday), 30%

**Grading.** Grades will be recorded in L@UWS. In general terms, I see grades as a crude way to communicate success. As I evaluate your work, I will keep this general framework in mind:

- A = 95% = Excellent
- B = 85% = Good
- C = 75% = Acceptable
- D = 65% = Unacceptable
- F < 60% = Failing

There is a possibility for major projects (Critical Response Papers, Literature Review, Project Proposal) to be revised and subsequently re-graded by arrangement. If you would like to improve or expand a particular project, please let me know your intentions, and we will come to an agreement and arrange a timeline.

**RESOURCES & POLICIES**

**Deadlines.** In general, deadlines are your friend. They bring a necessary end to an undertaking that could continue in perpetuity. Every project and discussion this semester could be further refined, improved, expanded, or focused. That is simply the nature of the complex academic work at hand. In general, I am confident that you will be able to meet the deadlines set for you. But my approach to graduate education recognizes the realities of complex adult lives. I treat a graduate seminar with more flexibility than an undergraduate class. You have real lives with real demands. I know that your education is important to you, but there are many important things in your life that might compromise your ability to meet a deadline or two. If you see yourself getting behind a deadline, just contact me. We should be able to work something out. In my mind, this is one privilege you earn by pursuing graduate education.

**Library.** Through the research section of this course, the UW Stout library will be especially important to you. One major aim of this course is to help you become a versatile and competent library user. Research in this class and throughout the MSTPC program will depend heavily upon your ability to navigate the online library databases and catalogs to access the information you want and need. The more time you can spend accessing the library system throughout the semester—especially the first half—the more prepared you will be for the intensive use of the library system during the research units during the second half of the semester. I expect that you will make regular use of our library resources.
during our course and throughout your work in the MSTPC program. University librarian Ann Vogl is assigned as the resource librarian for the MSTPC program. Ann is here to help you with research for classes and for your future thesis/field project. You will find Ann knowledgeable and helpful, just like all of her colleagues in the library. Feel free to contact her with research and resource questions.

Main Library Page:
http://www.uwstout.edu/lib/

Technical & Professional Communication Resource Guide:
http://libguides.uwstout.edu/tpc

Ann Vogl, Reference/Distance Learning Librarian:
voglan@uwstout.edu 715.232.1553 RSSLC 112

**Academic & Professional Integrity.** The University expects that all work submitted by its students will be their own—personally and honestly produced. As you continue to professionalize through graduate education, the expectations for integrity increase. Graduate courses are good places to practice and demonstrate what you can and cannot do—in the supportive and coaching context of an educational enterprise. In graduate school, we grapple with difficult concepts, muddle through opaque texts, and write complex documents. These challenges should drive us to try, to learn, and to do. Taking unethical shortcuts compromises your learning. Academic dishonesty can be grounds to fail a course or be excused from a program.

**Citation.** The incorrect, incomplete, or nonexistent citation of sources can often be interpreted as a lack of integrity. A theory and research course such as ours should help to strengthen reliable citation as a core professional practice. To stay above reproach, we will follow the American Psychological Association’s (APA) guidelines. There are many resources readily available to support APA documentation and style, including the *APA Style Manual* provided to you by the program. I expect that you will be able to successfully cite sources throughout your work (formal and informal) using whatever tools and resources necessary. I do not intend to spend much time addressing citation and style issues, but please contact me if you have concerns.
Please note that deliverables are due via L@UWS at the end of the week in which they are listed, unless otherwise noted. *(SYNCHRONOUS WEBINARS will be scheduled after polling students’ schedules)*

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic/Theme</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Activities/Deliverables</th>
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| W1     | Introductions, Definitions, Boundaries, Histories | 1. What are the Boundaries, Artifacts, and Identities of Technical Communication? (Selfe/Selfe) SPTC 1  
2. History, Rhetoric, & Humanism: Towards a More Comprehensive Definition of Technical Communication (Rutter) CWTC 2  
3. How Can Technical Communicators Develop as Both Students and Professionals? (Selfe/Selfe) SPTC 4 | PowerPoint Introduction  
Discussion Board                                                                                     |
2. Technical Communication and Rhetoric (Ornatowski) PDF  
3. The Report for Decision Making: Genre and Inquiry (Rude) CWTC 6  
4. Rhetorical vs. Instrumental Approaches to Teaching Technical Communication (Moore) PDF | Synthesis of Most Important Points  
Small Group Discussion Board                                                                         |
| W3     | Social Theory                      | 1. Understanding People: The Relevance of Cognitive Psychology to Technical Communication (Redish) PDF  
2. Social Construction Theory and Technical Communication (Subbiah) PDF  
3. The Social Perspective and Professional Communication: Diversity and Directions in Research (Thralls/Blyler) CWTC 9  
4. Relocating the Value of Work: Technical Communication in a Post-Industrial Age (Johnson-Eilola) CWTC 12 | Discussion Board                                                                                   |
2. Feminist Theory and the Redefinition of Technical Communication (Lay) CWTC 10  
3. Early Cold War Professional Communication: A Rationale for Progressive Posthumanism (Brooks) PDF | SYNCHRONOUS WEBINAR  
Post-Webinar Discussion Board                                                                         |
| W5     | Writers, Audience, & Users         | 1. The Implied Author in Technical Discourse (Conen) PDF  
2. The Technical Communicator as Author: Meaning, Power, Authority (Slack/Miller/Doak) CWTC 11  
3. The Writer’s Audience Is Always a Fiction (Ong) PDF  
Discussion Board                                                                                        |
| W6     | Visual Rhetoric & Design           | 1. Ideology and the Map: Toward a Postmodern Visual Design Practice (Barton/Barton) CWTC 16  
2. Technical Rhetoricians and the Art of Configuring Images (Salinas) PDF  
| W7     | Information Design & Technology    | 1. What Do Technical Communicators Need to Know about Information Design? (Schriger) SPTC 16  
2. What Do Technical Communicators Need to Know about New Media? (Wysocki) SPTC 17  
3. The Shape of Text to Come: The Texture of Print on Screens (Bernhardt) CWTC 28  
4. The Politics of Interface: Power and Its Exercise in Electronic Contact Zones (Selfe/Selfe) CWTC 29 | Discussion Board                                                                          |
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<td>W8</td>
<td>10/22 – 10/28</td>
<td>Research Overview &amp; Reviewing the Literature</td>
<td>1. Research: Why We Do It and Why We Need It (Hughes/Hayhoe) RPTC 1</td>
<td>1. Conducting a Quantitative Study (Hughes/Hayhoe) RPTC 4</td>
<td>1. Conducting a Qualitative Study (Hughes/Hayhoe) RPTC 5</td>
<td>1. Technical Communication Research in Cyberspace (Gurak/Silker) PDF</td>
<td>1. Identifying and Accommodating Audiences for Technical and Professional Communications Research (Allen/Southard) PDF</td>
<td>Review previous readings and browse unassigned chapters from CWTC and SPTC, as appropriate.</td>
<td>Review previous readings and browse unassigned chapters from CWTC and SPTC, as appropriate.</td>
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<td>W12</td>
<td>11/19 – 11/25</td>
<td>Designing a Research Study</td>
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<td>5. Conducting a Qualitative Study (Hughes/Hayhoe) RPTC 5</td>
<td>5. Analyzing a Qualitative Research Report (Hughes/Hayhoe) RPTC 9</td>
<td>5. Ethnographic Research (Katz) PDF</td>
<td>5. Identifying and Accommodating Audiences for Technical and Professional Communications Research (Allen/Southard) PDF</td>
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