

Technical Communication and Technology Studies

HU 5003: Spring Semester 2006

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Course hours: T/Th 9:35-10:50 am in Walker 139

Class list: 5003-1

Course Description

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 theoretical, the historical, pedagogical, and scholarly overlap between the two is considerable. Both, for instance, study technology as a form of knowledge and a social construct rather than 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.

Questions:

- What is Technical Communication? Technology Studies?
- Why is technology 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?

Texts

- Dubinsky, *Teaching Technical Communication*
- Johnson, *User Centered Technology*
- Johnson-Eilola & Selber, *Central Works in Technical Communication*
- Williams, *Retooling*
- Winner, *The Whale and the Reactor*
- Additional readings

Projects

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 a statement of personal likes or dislikes. It is an intellectually engaged exploration of concepts considered in the reading and of interest to you, perhaps because you agree or disagree with them or because they offer you new lines of inquiry. Your response paper should offer definitions of key word and questions for discussion, including your specific reflections on particular passages (approximately 10 minutes).

Journal mapping:

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

Choose one of the following journals, all of which are available in, or through, MTU's library:

Computers and Composition (C&C); available on line, no; in library, yes (1983 - 1998); call number PE1001 .C67 (located in the archives only)

IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication (IEEETPC); available on line, yes (1988 - present); in library, yes (1972 - 2003); call number PE1475 .I5

Journal of Business Communication (JBC); available on line, no; in library, yes (1985 - 1988) ; call number HF5718 .J6

Journal of Business and Technical Communication (JBTC); available on line, yes (1999 - present); in library, yes; call number HF5717 .I595

Journal of Technical Writing and Communication (JTWC); available on line, yes(2002 - 2003); in library, yes (1984 - present); call number T11 .J66

Rhetoric Review (RR); available on line, yes (2001 - present); in library, yes (1984 - present); call number PN1714.4 .R44

Technology and Culture (T&C); available on line, no; in library, yes (1964 - present); call number T1 .T27

Technical Communication Quarterly (TCQ); available on line, no; in library, yes (1992 - present); call number T11 .T434

Written Communication (WC); available on line, yes (1999 - present); in Library, yes (1984 - present); call number P211 .W74

Read through the journal issues from 2000 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. You'll work with someone else who reads the same journal to build, together, a map of the concerns that have shaped the technical communication field in the last five years. You'll present and lead a discussion of your map at a seminar (approximately 20 minutes).

Internship surveys:

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

Take a look at the list of available electronic internships at www.ohiolink.edu/etd/, (Miami University → Technical and Scientific Communication).

Students in Miami University's Masters of Technical and Scientific Communication (MTSC) Program carried out these internships after completing three semesters of classes. They located to a wide range of sites—environmental agencies, health institutes, e-publishing organizations, and marine laboratories—and worked on many types of projects—establishing standards in web software documentation, developing online courses in geology, and producing online help systems.

Select an internship that interests you, either because of its topic (web-based learning, software development, technical editing, among others) or where it was carried out (National Cancer Institute, Compaq Computer Corporation, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, for example).

Read the report. Contextualize your communicator's line of work by browsing professional websites, the STC National Organization's website, and/or reviewing books like Lutz and Storms' *The Practice of Technical and Scientific Communication*. Identify intersections and/or disjunctions between what you find reported and an essay or two we've read about professional communicators (see Bob Johnson, Cindy Selfe, Jennifer Slack, for instance). What do these relationships suggest about workplace practice? Report your findings to the seminar (approximately 20 minutes) to spark discussion.

Seminar papers 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.

There are three parts to this project, described below:

1-Proposals

To get you started thinking about the paper, a proposal will be due. Similar to proposals for conferences sponsored by the Council for Programs of Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC), the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW), College Composition and Communication (CCCC), or the Modern Language Association (MLA), these proposals will be short (one page at most), but focused. They will give me the opportunity to offer you

suggestions about your ideas and you the opportunity to get started in plenty to develop them.

2-Roundtables

The last weeks of the semester will be devoted to roundtables, where you present your projects as you would at a professional conference. You'll have five or six minutes to summarize and contextualize your purpose and major lines of inquiry; following, there'll be time for brief responses and discussion. These presentations are intended to be a bridge to your final papers, a time to elicit comments and work through ideas.

3-Seminar Papers

Ranging from ten to twelve pages, seminar papers are due the last day of finals. While not necessarily ready to submit for review by a professional journal, these papers should demonstrate your thinking about an issue, question, or line of inquiry relevant to STC or TS. Either MLA or APA documentation style is acceptable.

Grades

To determine your final grade, I'll assess your writing and your participation in class discussions and presentations. All assignments must be finished to complete the class. I will not accept late work without prior arrangement.

Response papers:	20%
Journal maps:	20%
Internship surveys:	20%
Seminar papers and roundtables:	40%