Teaching Technical and Professional Communication

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Technical and professional communication involves the mediation of complex information between specialist and non-specialist audiences. It is often characterized by clear and concise writing designed to address particular readers and solve specific problems, and utilizes principles of design to increase readability, usability, and access. Teaching these complex processes to students is a difficult process—an effective teacher of technical communication needs to be versed in many different genres of professional writing, and conversant in editing, document design, and workplace practices. On top of all of this a good teacher of technical and professional communication must use best practices to connect with students in order to help them understand the thought processes that characterize good communication and design, as well as the skill sets needed to enact their knowledge. This course is designed to help future teachers of technical and professional communication refine—and in some cases develop—the skillsets they will need to be effective classroom educators.

Requirements

The student will be responsible for:

1. Bi-weekly meetings in the technical communication classroom where the student will serve as a Teaching Assistant
2. Dedicated lecture times (2-3) in the classroom where the student will be responsible for content and presentation
3. Light grading (facilitated by the instructor of record)
4. Assisting workshop facilitation
5. Weekly course readings (1-2 papers/week) designed to inform classroom activities/pedagogy
6. Précis of weekly readings
7. Weekly 1 hour meetings with the instructor of record to discuss readings and classroom activities
8. A final course paper on teaching and mentoring technical communication informed by classroom practices, readings, and discussion

Assessment

The student will be assessed on each aspect of the course—the teacher of record will discuss progress with the student and prepare a written assessment of their teaching strengths and weaknesses based on discussion and progress over the semester. Précis will be assessed on completeness and engagement with text. The final product of the class—a journal-quality paper (7,000-9,000 words) written with an eye toward publication—will be assessed on depth of thought, contribution to the field, and development of new knowledge.

Potential Readings

Book:

Dubinsky,J. (2004). *Teaching technical communication: Critical issues for the classroom*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Articles:

Allen, N. & Benninghoff, T. (2010). Tpc program snapshots: Developing curricula and addressing challenges. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 12(2), 157–185.

Barker, T., & Matveeva, N. (2009). Teaching intercultural communication in a technical writing service course: Real instructors' practices and suggestions for textbook selection. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 15(2), 191–214.

Blakeslee, A. (2009). The technical communication research landscape. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 23(129), 129–173.

Danniels, D. (2000). Learning to be professional: Technical classroom discourse, practice, and professional identity construction. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 14(5), 5–37.

Dubinsky, J. (2009). More than a knack: Techne & teaching technical communication. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 11(2), 129–145.

Matveeva, N. (2008). Teaching intercultural communication in a basic technical writing course: A survey of our current practices and methods. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 38(4), 387–410.

Russell, D. (2007). Rethinking the articulation between business and technical communication and writing in the disciplines: Useful avenues for teaching and research. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 21(3) 248–277.

Tillery, D. (2009). Power, language, and professional choices: A hermeneutic approach to teaching technical communication. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 10(1), 97–116.