THE COMPUTER IN TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION (TC310)
Autumn 2001
http://faculty.washington.edu/jturns/tc310

Instructor: Dr. Jennifer Turns
Office: 242 Engineering Annex
Phone: 206-221-3650
E-mail: jturns@engr.washington.edu
Office Hours: Monday, 1:00-3:00 or By Appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
Professionals in technical communications use a wide variety of software tools to accomplish their goals. Knowledge of such software tools makes TC graduates very competitive. In this course, we will focus on a sample of these tools (e.g., InDesign, Visio, Robohelp), specifically looking at the functionality of the tools, the types of activity the tools support, and how to create quality solutions with the tools.

OBJECTIVES:
As a result of participation in this course, students will be able to:

- Use Software Tools. Use modern software tools to accomplish common TC activities including presentation management, word processing, graphics design, diagram design, page layout, web development, and online help development.
- Learn Software Tools. Learn to use new software tools that support common TC activities, by building on an understanding of the underlying functionality provided in new/existing software tools.
- Connect TC Quality Issues to TC Products. Identify issues in technical communications associated with quality and describe how these issues are instantiated in different TC products.
- Identify TC Learning Issues. Identify TC related issues that the student wishes to learn more about and the place in the TC curriculum where such learning issues will be addressed.
- Link to Job Possibilities. Describe a range of activities common to TC professionals and the job contexts in which such activities may occur.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS:
There are no required textbooks for this course. There are, however, some required materials and information. These include

- Access to TC Computer Lab. The computers in the TC computer lab will provide you with access to the software tools for the class. Please speak to Jesse Bangs or Jeff Baubauta to get your personal code to get into the lab. Please speak to Paul Nortrom to get your computer network logon code.
- Access to Web (for assignments and supplemental information). You will be required to submit your assignments through the Web. As a result, you will need web access (which can be gained via the TC computer lab).

TOPICS, SCHEDULE, ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING:

Assignment	Week	Tool	Points	Due Date
#1 Presentations 1	1	PowerPoint	5	Tuesday, 10/2
#2: Presentations 2	2	PowerPoint	10	Tuesday, 10/9
#3: Word Processing	3	Word	10	Tuesday, 10/16
#4: Graphics	4	Photoshop	15	Tuesday, 10/23
#5: Diagrams	5	Visio	15	Tuesday, 10/30
#6: Page Layout	6	InDesign	15	Tuesday, 11/6
#7: Web Design 1	7	TBD	5	Tuesday, 11/13
#8: Web Design 2	8	TBD	15	Tuesday, 11/20
#9: Online Help 1	9	RoboHelp	5	Tuesday, 11/27
#10: Online Help 2	10	RoboHelp	15	Tuesday, 12/4
#11: Portfolios	11	N/a	25	Tuesday, 12/11
#12: Self Evaluation	11	N/a	15	Tuesday, 12/11
Total			150	

ASSIGNMENT STRUCTURE AND CONTEXT

The assignments in this course are all embedded in an overall context – that you are part of a team within a newly organized TC department for a company that thinks they see the importance of a TC department.

- In the first ten assignments, you will be asked to use a particular software tool to accomplish a stated goal. While some of these assignments will be team-based, all assignments will require individual effort. For each of these assignments, you will be required to submit the requested product as well as some reflections on the assignment.
- In the final two assignments, you will be reflecting back on the activities you have completed. In one assignment (assignment 11), you and your team will prepare a portfolio documenting the types of work your TC team can do for the company. In the other assignment (assignment 12), you will prepare a self-evaluation, critically evaluating your existing knowledge and setting learning goals.

Because the team and the company are critical elements of most of the assignments, you will become part of a team and select a company early in the term.

CLASS STRUCTURE –

In this class, we will cover a great deal of material. In order to keep things somewhat simple, we will use the class periods in a very consistent way (starting in week 2). This structure is discussed below:

- Tuesday – Transition between assignments…
  Tuesdays will be a day of transition. Because all assignments are due on Tuesday, the first half of Tuesday class will be used to **debrief from the assignment**. This will vary depending on the assignment, but may include activities such as (a) sharing the products of the assignment with the rest of the class and (b) discussing the software just used and other similar software tools. The second half of class will be used to **discuss the next assignment**. The assignment will be distributed. In addition, the time may be used for (a) an initial demonstration of the software, (b) critical discussion of examples, (c) discussion of grading of the assignment, and (d) identification of in-class experts.

- Thursday – Deeper discussions of current assignment
  Thursday will be used primarily to discuss the **software** tools. This may involve additional demonstrations of the software, completing small activities to illustrate features of the software, and discussion of common challenges associated with the software. In addition, we may use Thursday to address additional issues associated with the particular assignment.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY AND STYLE

The design of this section of TC 310 is a reflection of my teaching philosophy and style. In designing a class, I strive to create a successful learning experience for the students. I make choices in class design based on my philosophy of teaching, which is tied to my knowledge about how learning occurs. In this course, I rely heavily on the following elements of my teaching philosophy.

1. Articulate expectations. Learning is facilitated when learners have clarity about what is to be accomplished and what is required of them. As a result, I try to be clear about my expectations, to discuss expectations openly, and to provide of examples (where possible). In addition, I strive to create a learning environment that has regularity, so everyone knows what is going on at any given time.
2. Create a learning community. People learn from each other. Students learn from other students as well as teachers. Anyone with knowledge can represent a teacher. Further, as students become more advanced, they often have knowledge that is relevant to other students. Given these issues, I actively try to transform a group of students into a learning community – a group of people who learn from each other, who are willing to turn to one another with questions, who feel comfortable contributing their knowledge, and who do not fear knowledge sharing.
3. Use a variety of learning and assessment activities. Learning is an active process and also an individual process. In order to learn, students need to be engaged in activities. Yet, different learners benefit from different types of activities. Thus, I strive to use a variety of activity types in my teaching, in order to provide many different opportunities for students to test and demonstrate their understanding. I consider lecturing to be one type of activity, and one that I prefer to not use exclusively. Rather, I prefer to stimulate a topic with some other type of activity and then use lecture and discussion to bring out important elements of activity.
4. Relate topics to a broader knowledge context. Learning of one topic is facilitated when one understands how the topic relates to a wide variety of other topics. In other words, making connections is important for learning. In the context of professional education, I work to help students relate specific class topics to (a) other topics in the professional curriculum, (b) the practice of a particular professional (e.g., Technical Communications) and (c) issues of professional practice in general (e.g., to ethical issues, to teamwork issues).