English 292

Contemporary Issues in Language, Writing and Rhetoric

- Fall 1995 -

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Office Hrs: Tues. 2-4:30 pm.

Course Description: Rhetoric, the study of suasion, is a complex topic. This course is a practical overview of that topic, with particular emphases on one of its aspects, professional writing, and on its principal material, language. These three subjects - language, writing and rhetoric - are central concerns of the Rhetoric and Professional Writing Program, and this course serves as an introduction to that program.

Course Goals: 1. to engage some of the central principles of language analysis and rhetoric;
              2. to explore some of social, ethical and technological issues in professional writing;
              3. to apply key principles of language and rhetoric to issues in professional writing.

Required Texts:
Hauser, G. A. Introduction to Rhetorical Theory

Evaluation:
1. STC Project (total 30%)
2. Position Statement (20%)
3. Document Analysis (20%)
4. Final exam (30%)

Course Policies: 1. This course advocates a social constructivist’s approach to learning. Consequently, students are expected to prepare the required readings and participate in discussions and workshops.
                   2. Late assignments will be penalized 5% per day late.
Schedule

Week 1. Sept. 11 or 13 depending on seminar scheduling
   Introduction to course
   Introduction to first unit "Meeting the Profession"

Week 2. Sept. 18 or 20
   Designing the survey
   Creating the process report

   Reading: Grice "Document Development in Industry" (in Fearing and Sparrow)
   Debs "Collaborative Writing in Industry" (in Fearing and Sparrow)

Week 3. Sept. 25 or 27
   Interviewing techniques for Professional Communicators
   Interviews begin

   Reading: Selzer "Composing Processes for Technical Discourse"
   Due: Group process report

Week 4. Oct. 2 or 4
   Interviews continue
   Group reports drafted
   Introduction to second unit "Researching the Profession"

Week 5. Oct. 11 or 16
   Discussion and working groups established for researching the profession.
   Workshop on using ERIC

   Reading: Tebeaux "The High-Tech Workplace: Implications for Technical Communication
   Instruction"
   Due: Group reports

Week 6. Oct 18 or 23
   Case study workshop on issues in the profession

   Reading: Mitchell and Smith "The Prescriptive versus the Heuristic Approach in Teaching
   Technical Communication"
   Due: Individual reports
Week 7 Oct. 25 or 30
  Group discussion on issues in the profession
  Introduction to third unit "Analysis in the profession"

  Reading: Hauser, Chapter 1

Week 8. Nov. 1 or 6
  Group presentation on issues in the profession (5%)
  Due: Position statements (15%)

Week 9. Nov. 8 or 13
  Rhetorical terms and concepts
  Workshop on applying rhetorical terms
  Group presentations might continue

  Reading: Hauser, Chapters 2, 3, 4

Week 10. Nov. 15 or 20
  Classical Rhetoric: the Basics
  Workshop on classical rhetoric

  Reading: Hauser, Chapters 5, 6

Week 11. Nov. 22 or 27
  Classical Rhetoric continued
  Workshop on classical rhetoric

  Reading: Hauser, Chapters 7, 8, 9

Week 12. Nov. 29 or Dec. 4
  Modern Rhetoric
  Workshop on modern rhetoric

  Reading: Hauser, to end.
  Due: Rhetorical analysis
Assignment 1

The STC Resource Catalogue assignment

(Total 30%)

Background
The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is providing students of English 292 with a unique opportunity to interview technical communicators and employers of technical communicators. In return, we will providing the STC with information that they require for developing a Resource Catalogue, a catalogue that also might assist graduates of the RPW to find employment.

The Resource Catalogue will not only list contracting, consulting and full-time technical communicators in the Southwestern Ontario region but will also describe each communicator's skill set in detail. This catalogue will be distributed to employers of professional and technical communicators.

At the same time, the STC has indicated interest in a parallel project that would ask both communicators and employers their views on issues of importance to professional and technical communication.

Tasks
1. A set of survey questions for both communicators and employers that gathers the information that the STC requires for its Catalogue and an additional set of questions related to issues of importance to professional and technical communication.

2. Interviews (phone, email, or in person) with 30 communicators and 30 employers (one interview per student). These interviews will not only gather the information needed by the STC but will also test the value of the survey itself. The survey questions will be used to create a form that will be sent to all STC members. This form will then be used to create the data base of the catalogue. So the STC needs to know if the questions elicit useful data for both communicators and employers.

3. Group report on the data gathered, on the usability of the survey questions and the form, and on issues of importance to communicators and employers. (20%, 5-6 pages)

4. Individual reports on the process of being involved in this group project. (10%, 3 pages)

Process

1. Creation of working teams (4)

2. Consultation with STC executive (class)

3. Creation of survey questions and form (class)
   - proposals from teams
-development of survey form (class)

4. In-process work report (teams)
   This report will provide a specific time-table as to how and when the interviews and group report will be completed. I need to know when the interviews will be conducted, how the data will be correlated, and how the report will be drafted and edited. (2 pages approx.)

5. Data gathering (teams)
   -each group will be provided with 6 contact names and will be expected to contact 4 out of the 6 names.
   -groups will fill in the survey forms during the individual interviews and will record reactions to the questions as well as any additional information provided.

6. Group Report (teams) (20%)
   The report has two main purposes: (1) to report on the usability of the survey questions and form and to recommend any needed changes; and (2) to report on issues of importance to professional and technical communicators or their employers that the STC might consider as topics of future meetings or workshops. (5-6 pages, not including appendices).

7. Individual report (10%)
   In this report comment on what you learned as a result of your involvement in this project, on problems that you encountered, and on solutions that you developed. Recommendations for future assignments of this type would also be appreciated. (3 pages approx)

Schedule for STC project

Week 1. (Sept. 11 - 15)

Introduction to course, introduction to assignment, creation of teams (4 in each), consultation with STC executive
   - groups work on proposed questions

Week 2. (Sept 18 - Sept 22)

Development of draft survey, review of interview techniques (role-playing)
   -in-class development of process report
   -set up of interviews

Week 3. (Sept 25-Oct 1)
Finalizing of survey form, interviews to take place

Week 4. (Oct 2 - Oct 6)
Interviews continue, reports drafted

Week 5 (Oct 9 - Oct 13)
Group reports prepared for Friday, October 13.
Individual reports prepared for Monday, October 16
Assignment 2

Position Statement

(Total 20%)

Purpose: to allow students an opportunity to explore research on complex issues in professional and technical communication; and to acquaint students with on-line research techniques.

Process
- Select an issue of relevance to you from the list of issues identified through the STC project or through class discussion.
  - Create a group (3 or 4) with other students interested in the same issue
  - Conduct an ERIC search and construct a group bibliography
  - Each member shall develop summaries and commentary on TWO articles found in journals such as Technical Communication, Journal of Business and Technical Communication etc.
  - Conduct a group discussion on your issue and prepare a short oral summary for the class.

Products
1. A brief oral discussion of the group's findings (5%, 5-7 minutes). Due according to course schedule.
2. A written position statement in which you define and explore your issue and its implications for professional and technical communicators. Be sure to use your sources to support your analysis. Also be sure to state where you stand on the issue. This assignment can be done either individually (5 pages) or as a group assignment. If handed in as a group assignment, then the page count should fall to 3 or 4 pages per contributor. (15%) Due week of group presentation.

Assignment 3

Rhetorical Analysis (20%)

Select either a brief technical/professional document or a relevant section of a larger document. In an essay, analyze your document from either a classical or modern rhetorical perspective. Be sure to define and use your terms carefully. In your conclusion assess what your perspective has allowed you to analyze and prevented you from analyzing. In your appendix please include a copy of the document that you analyzed. (1000 words approximately). Due Dec. 5.