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Technical Writing (English 393)  
Course Description  
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### **Course Overview**

Technical Writing focuses on the processes of written, oral, and visual technical communication in academic and professional settings. Students in this course study how technical professionals communicate to solve problems and answer questions, including conducting library research, creating proposals, and using collaboration to create written documents and oral presentations. Students are exposed to conventions of organization and style appropriate to academic writing in the sciences, including documentation, document design, and peer review. Students also learn about adapting their writing for various audiences and contexts they might encounter professionally.

Much of the course's work goes into the final project—a 20-30 page technical report or manual written for a specific, real-world audience and with a sustainability-related focus. Students work in groups of either two or three to create this project (duos write 20-page documents; trios write 30 pages). I encourage students to think about this project as a “problem / solution” situation in which they write the change they wish to see.

On the first day of class, I introduce students to sustainability as the genre for their final paper. I give a presentation that offers them definitions, key terms, and concepts pertinent to the discourse. I also acquaint students with the four pillars of sustainability. I do this via an on-screen presentation that allows the class an opportunity to discuss, question, share their own awareness of sustainability, and explain their familiarity of sustainability issues within their disciplines. I then present the class with potential sustainability research topics to consider.

Students complete several assignments related to this final paper: a library research tutorial and workshop session, an annotated bibliography, a proposal, an audience analysis, and several topic-relevant memos. Students additionally create a group oral presentation about their final paper. Because the final paper in my course has a sustainability focus, all of these assignments are related to their chosen topic within the conversation of sustainability.

### **Assignments**

#### *Topic Readings*

Because the discourse of my class is writing, not reading, I keep my assigned sustainability readings minimal and a one-time exercise. I choose one or two readings that give students a good overview of the conversation surrounding sustainability and also make it real to them, and we discuss them during class time. We do this within the first two weeks of the semester. This helps create the topical foundation for students' final projects.

#### *Topic Consultation*

Early in the semester, each student is required to consult in person with a professor from his or her major to discuss where the concept of sustainability intersects with their shared field of study. Students then write a two-page memo providing background on the professor they selected and a summary of the content of their consultation. I remind students that this consultation is often an entrée into an ongoing conversation that will prove valuable when they

do later research for our course; many students have commented that this consultation has also had successful repercussions outside of our course (i.e. research assistantships).

### *Topic Pitch*

Because the final project is a group assignment, I require students to pitch their idea to their peers. After hearing one another's ideas in class, students form groups based on expressed sustainability topic interest and select which topic the group will proceed with for the remainder of the semester. I remind students that because their focus areas differ, they need to consider the kind of holistic approach they can offer to a sustainability topic based on their previous experience and knowledge.

### *Topic Memo*

This assignment gives student groups the opportunity to organize their thoughts about their potential sustainability-related topic and project by explaining the following items:

- the problem and solution they will address
- the evidence they have (or intend to find) about this problem
- the *specific* primary audience they intend to address with this report as well as his or her relevance to the topic
- the importance of addressing this problem and who will benefit from the recommended solution
- the ideas the student has for research

I also ask students to provide some evidence of the feasibility of both their idea and their ability to create this project by considering things like each group member's relevance to this topic, group members' previous work with this idea, ways each group member is qualified to recommend this type of overall solution, and the research group members have found about this topic.

### *Audience Analysis*

Although they are now working in groups, this assignment asks students to individually consider and analyze the audience of their group's recommendation report. Students are required to illustrate their knowledge of specific aspects of their group's audience as they relate to the selected sustainability topic and explain the effects these aspects will have on the scope and shape of the group's final report.

### *Proposal*

This assignment is the group's official proposal for their final sustainability report. It requires them to create a clear problem statement, thesis, and a discussion and outline of their proposed project. Once the group receives my approval, they may begin drafting their final project.

### *Final Project*

As previously mentioned, the final project in this course asks students to research and write an extensive recommendation report or technical manual based on a sustainability-related topic that has relevance within their majors. Students select a specific, real-world audience and work in a group of either two or three students to create this "problem / solution" project (20-30 pages plus bibliography and front matter).