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# THE VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS IN THE TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION CLASSROOM: REINFORCING THE UNIVERSITY'S INTERNAL COMMUNITY LITERACY VIA SERVICE- LEARNING

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THE VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS IN THE TECHNICAL  
COMMUNICATION CLASSROOM: REINFORCING THE UNIVERSITY'S  
INTERNAL COMMUNITY LITERACY VIA SERVICE-LEARNING

By

Richard L. Ward

A REPORT

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

In Rhetoric, Theory and Culture

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This report has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of MASTER OF SCIENCE in Rhetoric, Theory and Culture.

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Finally, I must thank the ones most responsible—my wife Kerrie and my children Bobby, Grace, and Connor. There's no way this could have happened without your support, your love, and your knack for helping to pick me up when I felt so very low. The sacrifices that each of you have made over these past few years are appreciated, and I hope to make you proud.

**Abstract:**

This report details a class taught that was an exploration into the value of STEAM or science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics within the confines of Technical Communication as it applies to the business and industry of theatre. It was an experiment in service learning as it could be tied into the Arts via differing technai, as described by John Wild in “Plato’s Theory of Technai a Phenomenological Interpretation,” demonstrating a necessity for Arts as they pertain to STEM-centric universities. This report discusses a section of Technical and Professional Communication taught at Michigan Technological University that consisted of twenty-five students investigating theatre as an industry and business and applying the theory and practice of Technical Communication, specifically in the context of Kelli Cargile Cook’s *Layered Literacies* to bridge STEM, the humanities, and the Arts. The theatre with which students collaborated worked closely with faculty and staff within various areas of that department. The students in the Technical Communication classroom were predominantly STEM majors. This offered a unique opportunity to demonstrate the potential for the Arts to cross academic disciplines at a STEM-focused university and emphasize the importance of interdisciplinarity through a better community literacy.

## Introduction:

When reading Robert Johnson’s guest editorial, “Balancing Acts: A Case for Confronting the Tyranny of STEM,” from a humanities or arts perspective, it’s easy to see that the need for collaboration between the arts and technical communication has never been more urgent. The difference in funding between STEM and the humanities is astounding, as can be seen in 2015 with the National Science Foundation taking in over 7 billion dollars and the National Endowment for the Humanities<sup>1</sup> and the National Endowment for the Arts<sup>2</sup> taking in well under 300 million dollars combined.<sup>3</sup> In fact, federal funding to the arts alone has decreased significantly over the past decade, and much of the funding comes from “composite support” or funding sources outside of a federal budget that takes the work of very talented arts administrators.<sup>4</sup> This imbalance between the sciences, the humanities and the arts is evidence of the warped social perception of the humanities and the arts, that there is too little value placed upon them as disciplines. Johnson claims that there are two reasons for this inequity: “(a) The desire for the U.S. to be the world superpower, and (b) the consistent argument by the sciences that we are continually lacking in youth who pursue careers in the sciences and related fields like engineering and technology.”<sup>5</sup>

This disparity is not a new condition, running for more than half a century, and was made ever wider by things such as the space program, the nuclear program, educational programming and curricula; “the effort to engage youth in STEM has been intense.”<sup>6</sup> While Robert Johnson advocates for the country to “reset our bearings”<sup>7</sup> with governmental funding being redistributed more equitably, technical communication has the unique potential to serve as a bridge between the arts, the humanities, and STEM. For example, Professional and Technical Communication is a required course for many engineering students at Michigan Technological University. It is by requirements such as this that instructors might demonstrate through service-learning just how important the arts and humanities are, that enacting a program such as this brings to bear the four potential categories for *techné*, as outlined by John Wild.<sup>8</sup> This program could further support services to the student body by encouraging student activities and more social investment in the university, as well as encourage students to think more critically not only about and within the arts, but also about and within their own specific fields.

In the interest of showcasing the value of a program entrenched within the service-learning of the Visual and Performing Arts (VPA), I undertook this project,

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<sup>1</sup> “Budget / Performance / Legal Documents | National Endowment for the Humanities,” accessed December 7, 2016, <https://www.neh.gov/about/legal/reports>.

<sup>2</sup> “National Endowment for the Arts Appropriations History | NEA,” accessed December 7, 2016, <https://www.arts.gov/open-government/national-endowment-arts-appropriations-history>.

<sup>3</sup> Robert R. Johnson, “Balancing Acts: A Case for Confronting the Tyranny of STEM,” *Programmatic Perspectives* 2, no. 1 (2010): 87–88.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Dewey, “From Arts Management to Cultural Administration,” *International Journal of Arts Management* 6, no. 3 (2004): 18.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, “Balancing Acts.”, 88.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> John Wild, “Plato’s Theory of *Techné* a Phenomenological Interpretation,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 1, no. 3 (March 1941): 255, doi:10.2307/2102759.

teaching a class in technical communication that worked collaboratively with the VPA department, as an exploration into the value of STEAM or science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics within the confines of technical communication as it applies to the business and industrial aspects of the arts. This was an experiment in service-learning, reinforcing the notion of techné as it dwells within engineering, the VPA, and technical communication. In this instance, the VPA acted as the vessel, demonstrating the value of VPA as it might pertain to STEM-centric universities. In the spring 2017 semester, I taught a section of Technical and Professional Communication (HU 3120) at Michigan Technological University. My class consisted of twenty-five students that investigated the arts as industry and applied the theory and practice of technical communication toward the arts via needed analog or digital advertising efforts, manuals of instruction for equipment or processes, or even standard operating procedures (SOP) within specific areas.

My students worked with department leaders in the VPA, and engaged in usability testing with the students, faculty, and staff. It must be understood that my students predominantly consisted of STEM majors, affording them an experience in the arts where they might not have occasion to otherwise, but they also brought with them certain means for discovery and thinking from their respective majors, basically bringing with them their own techné. My hope was that they might not only find value in the arts in general, creating or igniting some passion within them, but I hoped that this exposure might have taught my students that the arts are able “to stretch across divides, to instill empathy, to educate about new experiences, to encourage creative and critical thought, to transform relationships.”<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, this study looked at how we, as instructors, might cross academic cultures, to collaborate and improve educational practice. In what ways can a collaboration between technical communication, the VPA, and the sciences benefit all of the disciplines, and how might this collaboration serve students by providing them with real-world, practical experience? And, can we establish a more fluid and efficient academic community within a STEM-centric university via an interdepartmental service-learning pedagogy? It could certainly be argued that the university may begin to establish a stronger community literacy, an ideal that “seeks to restructure the conversation itself into a collaboration in which individuals share expertise and experience through the act of planning and writing about problems they jointly define.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, how are we expected to efficiently communicate and work with the community outside of the institution if we cannot work together inside it? After all, there exists within a university its own community made up of diverse cultures and disciplines taking on similarities of a micro-society. In the words of my father, “It might be best that we get or own house in order before showing others ‘the right way.’”

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<sup>9</sup> Clayton Lord, “Sowing New Beans: The Making of Memory and the Measuring of Impact,” in *Counting New Beans: Intrinsic Impact and the Value of Art*, ed. Clayton Lord (San Francisco: Theatre Bay Area, 2012), 25.

<sup>10</sup> Wayne Campbell Peck, Linda Flower, and Lorraine Higgins, “Community Literacy,” in *The Norton Book of Composition Studies*, ed. Susan Miller (New York: Norton, 2009), 1102.



## Literature Review:

It's important here to acknowledge the relevance of the intersection of differing technai, as defined by John Wild in his paper "Plato's Theory of Techné a Phenomenological Interpretation." Wild breaks techné into four separate categories:

- "Knowledge for its own sake" is scientific knowledge and is "acquisitive rather than productive in character." This knowledge is acquisitive in that it seeks to work toward its own end, that is a biologist might seek answers in biology if only to further his or her discipline.<sup>11</sup>
- Scientific knowledge that is also "the arts of possession or conquest." It is this knowledge that delves into the realm of power struggles both political and economic, lending itself to a potential for great gain or great ruin, since man cannot exist "without at least a degree of power over the natural environment," now can man "exist without the power of acquiring certain inorganic substances." Wild discusses how rudimentary crafts like "digging, quarrying, damming, and diving" have evolved into arts like "mining, excavation, irrigation, deep-sea diving, etc."<sup>12</sup>
- Knowledge that includes the production or making of synthetic things or nurtures synthetic or natural things so as to "bring *further* existence into being."<sup>13</sup> A plant cannot be created by man from nothingness; however, a seed may be nurtured skillfully so as to bring it forth.
- A more Sophistical knowledge that brings forth "the useful educational function of eliciting insight into reality."<sup>14</sup> It is a knowledge that commands, that teaches, that directs.

These categories are paramount when thinking of interdisciplinary collaboration in technical communication. They can be seen as a guide, a map of interconnectivity that will allow all of the engaging fields to achieve specific, measurable gains throughout this service learning experience, as well as to demonstrate the fluidity of a community literacy at the university level, an internal community literacy, if you will.

It's well known that STEM has a history of advancing knowledge for its own sake or simply for the sake of mankind, and has indeed worked diligently to perpetuate this aspect of techné, perhaps even unknowingly. Evidence might be found when looking to president John F. Kennedy, in his speech at Rice Stadium, where he claimed that "The greater our knowledge increases, the greater our ignorance unfolds."<sup>15</sup> Media is saturated by propaganda (and, I'm not using this word to denote a negative connotation) eliciting the young to serve the STEM cause for the sake of the sciences and mankind, and federally funded youth programs are practically everywhere.<sup>16</sup> For that matter, both the

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<sup>11</sup> Wild, "Plato's Theory of Techné a Phenomenological Interpretation," 278.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 269.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 271.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> "JFK RICE MOON SPEECH," accessed April 7, 2017, <https://er.jsc.nasa.gov/seh/ricetalk.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, "Balancing Acts," 89.

arts and the humanities have managed to do much the same, often championing morality for sciences, claiming that they might keep the sciences morally “good sciences.”<sup>17</sup>

What’s more is that STEM gains more focus as John F. Kennedy also emphasizes the notion of knowledge for conquest, stating that “no nation which expects to be the leader of other nations can expect to stay behind in the race for space.”<sup>18</sup> More recently, in 2017, knowledge for conquest has also been reaffirmed when Donald Trump signed a bill increasing funding to NASA by \$19.5 billion, noting that “this nation is ready to be the first in space once again.”<sup>19</sup> Playing to this sense of knowledge for adventure or as a challenge to win out over other countries or competitors is a substantial driving force in a capitalistic culture and can be found in almost every discipline.

A major problem arises in STEM, the humanities, and the arts when communicating effectively outside of their respective departments or with each other. In these instances, it’s important to note how effective techné from an aspect of knowledge of production or making can be effective. Communicating with the outside public or across disciplines can certainly be seen as a *furthering* existence into being. It’s an understanding about taking something that is communicated in field-specific terms and altering or adapting it in such a way that increases audience interpretation while maintaining the literal sense.

As instructors, it is we that must move our students into an understanding that bridges these disciplines, and we must do so using a method demonstrating a Sophistical knowledge. It is my hope that through my insight, this working together through service-learning, that we might begin to see a new reality, that we might change our often seemingly conflicting objectives into a genuinely constructive community literacy at the college level. The first step to this is to acknowledge profound changes or needs for changes current within disciplines that are too often dismissed.

While many avenues for teaching technical communication through the collaboration of service learning exist, I chose to focus my research on a collaboration that encompassed the Arts, engineering, and technical communication. I felt that by using such extreme ends of an academic and professional spectrum, I might show that anything really could be possible in terms of a combination of collaborators. In order to see this through, aspects of arts administration took precedence in my research, since arts administrators are typically the glue that binds theatre and the public, and they are quite often technical communicators already. Patricia Dewey says that arts management has arisen as a very serious “academic field and profession” recently and has proliferated “in North America and Europe.”<sup>20</sup> Now more than ever there exists a need for management within the arts to provide business acumen and work as a liaison for the arts within the public sector. This integration has already begun to take shape as can be seen by the collaboration underway between the Visual and Performing Arts and Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire (CERN), the European Organization for Nuclear Research, through a program called the Arts at CERN. According to their website, this program “is

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 90-91.

<sup>18</sup> “JFK RICE MOON SPEECH.”

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/sarah.kaplan.31>, “Trump Signs NASA Bill Aimed at Sending People to Mars,” *Washington Post*, accessed April 7, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2017/03/21/trump-signs-nasa-bill-aimed-at-landing-on-mars/>.

<sup>20</sup> Dewey, “From Arts Management to Cultural Administration,” 13.

the leading art and science programme promoting the dialog between artists and particle physics.”<sup>21</sup> The arts move to facilitate dialogue between scientific discovery and the general public in an effort to create a better public understanding of science, a movement gaining great steam in other areas as well.

Patricia Dewey, Assistant Professor of Arts Administration at University of Oregon, argues that the arts are more representative of a cultural sector and that this sector “is being affected by changes that suggest an urgent need for new skills in cultural administration.”<sup>22</sup> According to Dewey, arts administration is faced with four paradigm shifts within the arts:

First, the *world system* is shifting due to the force of globalization; local adaptation through *global interculturalism*, or “glocalism” – a process by which the influences and impact of global forces are filtered locally – may be the preferred response. Second, a shift in the *arts system* is taking place as boundaries blur among the fine, commercial, applied, unincorporated and heritage arts; the sector’s scope is broadening, from a concern with the fine arts to a more interest in *culture*, consisting of all five areas of artistic activity. Third, a shift in the *cultural policy system* is occurring as a result of a growing awareness that national and international policy constraints, incentives and assistance strongly affect the administration of arts organizations; thus the cultural sector’s *sphere of activity* is expanding, to include national and international policy as well as organizations. Fourth, changes in economic assumptions and resources are causing a shift the *arts funding system*; new funding models reflect *changes in the mix of public/private and earned/contributed income*.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, arts administration pedagogy still focuses primarily on the opposite of what is needed. Patricia Dewey argues that swift change is needed, and Clayton Lord equates this dilemma of continuing to use old tools for arts administration to “trying to ride a rocking horse even when it has turned into something else.”<sup>24</sup> We might see some proof here through experience that technical communication offers valuable incentive to the arts, and indeed, this project that I have undertaken. By working closely together, all parties are exposed to a shared technai and can lead to benefits for all involved. Furthermore, providing an avenue for service-learning to be implemented within the scheme of arts administration could even help to facilitate these changes, especially when considering the potential for audience analysis and intercommunication between the arts and the public. Technical communication teaches a deep understanding and hyperactivity in rhetorical considerations for audience, a feat that dates back to the 1950s.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> “ARTS AT CERN | Arts@CERN,” accessed December 16, 2016, <http://arts.cern/>.

<sup>22</sup> Dewey, “From Arts Management to Cultural Administration,” 13.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Lord, “Sowing New Beans: The Making of Memory and the Measuring of Impact,” 24.

<sup>25</sup> Robert R. Johnson, “Audience Involved: Toward a Participatory Model of Writing,” in *Central Works in Technical Communication*, ed. Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart Selber (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 92.

Patricia Dewey declares that one of the major areas that change must be addressed falls within the scope of “promoting cultural innovative methods of audience development.”<sup>26</sup> The audience with which VPA interacts is ever changing, evolving, shifting from demographic to demographic. Dewey suggests there’s a need to include within arts administration a better awareness of differing audience, an aspect with which technical communication is deeply intimate. Through collaboration, an opportunity presents itself for the development of “metaskills” as proposed by Dewey, where students and faculty in all of the collaborating departments might garner experience in areas of overarching functions, obtaining skills such as “strategic leadership, audience development and revenue generation capacities.”<sup>27</sup>

These “metaskills,” as outlined by Patricia Dewey, are elaborated on quite extensively in technical communication; albeit, it is broken into two distinct camps. On one hand can be found practical skills, that is, according to Sally Henschel and Lisa Meloncon, skills that speak to “audience analysis, writing, editing, information and document design, and technology/tool knowledge.”<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, conceptual knowledge is more concerned with what Henschel and Meloncon call “critical thinking and problem solving, the high-order knowledge and literacies a technical communicator needs to be successful and remain flexible in the ever-changing workplace.”<sup>29</sup> The goals for pedagogy within arts administration are closely tied to that of technical communication, demonstrating that, instead of working separately, much more collaboration should be taking place. As Patricia Dewey argues, having these skills will make better professionals within arts administration; however, Henschel, Meloncon, and I would posit that holding these skills are essential for any student entering the professional world, as they will be “better prepared to succeed in the workplace.”<sup>30</sup>

What’s more is that working alongside the VPA, particularly with equipment and processes with which they might not be familiar, offers students the rare opportunity within an academic setting to work in an environment that may at first appear completely foreign to them. This has a major potential benefit, as I see it. Students will be taken far outside of their comfort zones and forced to think through the problem. They’ll be expected to work, as can often be found in real-world, professional settings, on projects that they have very little knowledge of, or perhaps even interest in. This has the potential to provide an environment to nurture adaptation, investigation, and critical thinking. Henschel and Meloncon say that students in technical communication will “need to ‘rearticulate’ their value, by shifting the emphasis from their practical, immediately useful skill set to an emphasis on their broader analytical and communication skills,”<sup>31</sup> where they will be communicating with faculty and students not in their specific fields.

Experiential learning complements the acquisition of these “metaskills.” Patrick Heelan and Jay Schulkin argue that “experience is active, embodied, and engaged with

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<sup>26</sup> Dewey, “From Arts Management to Cultural Administration,” 19.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>28</sup> Sally Henschel and Lisa Meloncon, “Of Horsemen and Layered Literacies: Assessment Instruments for Aligning Technical and Professional Communication Undergraduate Curricula with Professional Expectations,” *Programmatic Perspectives* 6, no. 1 (2014): 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

public cultural realities,” and experience isn’t simply “passive, nor merely the content of individual minds.”<sup>32</sup> Experience is about how people adapt to an evolving environment, and, in this case, it is about adapting to what Patricia Dewey has claimed is an everchanging administration of the VPA. My students stand to benefit from transferring this very notion of adaptation into the fields they pursue, especially within engineering. Heelan and Schulkin argue that this is a sharing of a very specific “contemporary lifeworld we all actively share.”<sup>33</sup>

This project relied foremost on service learning. Often, instructors seek certain outside companies, especially non-profits with which to collaborate and offer some real-world experience that students might face. There’s nothing wrong with doing this, and quite often community services that need it the most profit deservingly and it emphasizes to students a sense of social action, something very near and dear to me. According to Thomas Huckin, since its introduction into the field in 1997, service-learning has become an integral tool for technical communication pedagogy.<sup>34</sup> Service-learning is a pragmatic pedagogical exercise where students might use their academic skills outside of the classroom in ways that most simulate workplace experiences. Beyond that, service-learning is instrumental in strengthening technical communication, or as Kelli Cargile Cook states when speaking on the matter:

It provides students with opportunities to write for actual clients (or community partners) who need their assistance, yet this writing takes place with the assistance and supervision found within a university setting. It can broaden students’ understanding of the locales of technical communication by asking them to consider workplaces other than corporations as potential sites for technical communication practice. Service-learning can also provide students with a deeper understanding of their communities, the possible roles they may play in their communities, and the impact of their services within those roles. Consequently, service-learning not only benefits the students who engage in it, but it also benefits the communities that it serves.<sup>35</sup>

Cook states that instructors of technical communication, like those in composition, speech, and so on, face the very common obstacle of pseudotransactionality, or a production of assigned texts by the students meant only to please the teacher or fulfill the parameters of a given assignment. The crux of the problem, Cook claims, is that students succumbing to this pseudotransactionality often produce inferior final products that fall rhetorically short of what they might be expected to produce in the workplace.<sup>36</sup> Without real-world exposure to audiences, purposes, conventions, and contexts, there exists a gap in pedagogy that service-learning is more

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<sup>32</sup> Patrick Heelan and Jay Schulkin, “Hermeneutical Philosophy and Pragmatism: A Philosophy of Science,” in *Philosophy of Technology: The Technological Condition: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Scharff and Val Dusek, 2nd ed. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 132.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Huckin, “Technical Writing and Community Service,” *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 11, no. 1 (January 1997): 49–59.

<sup>35</sup> Kelli Cargile Cook, “Service-learning and Undergraduate Research in Technical Communication Programs,” *Programmatic Perspectives* 6, no. 1 (2014): 28.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

than able to fill. Kelli Cargile-Cook and I agree in that service-learning is important in that it allows higher education to “strengthen local connections and support communities.”<sup>37</sup> I can detail a number of accounts where certain non-profit, volunteer programs would have little to nothing in the way of handouts, pamphlets, websites, etc. without the collaboration that comes from service-learning. However, in the case of this project, higher education will be working to strengthen and support those local connections from an interdepartmental perspective, connections that can be strengthened between disciplines, allowing for interdisciplinary collaboration like never before. The goal here is to show the potential for strengthening the community *within* the university, to improve upon our own internal community literacy. And, technical communication and the humanities, as a whole, stand to gain quite a bit in this study such as a more efficient community outreach, better advocates for social action in our students, and new avenues for research.<sup>38</sup>

To tie this project together, it was important to center on what could make a better internal community literacy within the university. In their essay, “Community Literacy,” Wayne Campbell, Linda Flower, and Lorraine Higgins, break down the concept of community literacy discussing theoretical boundaries, that there are divisions within communities, within schools where people often struggle to be heard. These boundaries spring up for any number of reasons in a community, from cultural to educational.<sup>39</sup> They even exist between the disciplines. At my own university, as well as universities all over the country, while it’s not often overly explicit, there does exist some apprehension, even tension, when discussing interdepartmental collaboration. It isn’t that the departments don’t get along, it’s a matter of uncomfortability with each other perhaps due to certain stigma that we have imparted onto each other. This stigma might be grounded in a lack of faith in understanding methods, research practices, and theorizing, but I merely speculate. What is certain about this division is that it exists and it absolutely should not. It’s important, especially within the confines of the university, that we, as instructors within our universities, reach out to help create these community literacies. It is only by becoming a better community within that we might better help and understand the community without.

Administering service-learning within a university and participating in this community literacy comes with additional benefits. Students take away principles of civic responsibility in that they engage in activities that better the academic community and thus improve student activities and experiences and apply these principles in their professional lives. Still, another benefit can be found after reading “A Laboratory in Citizenship” by David Sapp and Robin Crabtree, where they elaborate on the upside of the civic engagement between students, faculty, and staff where we might apply certain discoveries within our community “and systematically reflect upon the process and its deeper social implications.”<sup>40</sup> However, I must acknowledge a drawback to service-learning, and that is, there remains resistance in academia that service-learning can be

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Peck, Flower, and Higgins, “Community Literacy.”

<sup>40</sup> David Alan Sapp and Robbin D. Crabtree, “A Laboratory in Citizenship: Service-learning in the Technical Communication Classroom,” *Technical Communication Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (October 2002): 411–32, doi:10.1207/s15427625tcq1104\_3, 411.

viewed as propaganda meant to politicize the classroom, that “classrooms are not ideal places ‘to train guerilla students.’”<sup>41</sup> Sapp and Crabtree counter this, stating that this isn’t necessarily the case, that instructors engaged in service-learning “are interested in using service-learning opportunities to teach genuine democratic citizenship in the technical communication classroom,”<sup>42</sup> an argument with which I concur. Still, as it pertains to VPA, is it so bad to “train guerilla students?” I would argue that via government funding, sponsorship, and media saturation, the divide between the sciences and VPA and the humanities has long been politicized. Along this line of thinking, I’m hard-pressed to overly concern myself with the naysayers in this regard.

To ensure that this service-learning project remained focused on producing excellent technical communicators, I found that I would have to seek ways to shape specific assignments so that they would align correctly with a strong technical communication pedagogy. To maintain an effective “integrative pedagogical frame,” Kelli Cargile Cook recommends defining explicitly for students the literacies they might be expected to possess upon completion of the course.<sup>43</sup> She suggests and lays out the concept of layered literacies, basic, rhetorical, social, technological, ethical, and critical. These literacies may be approached in different ways, yet Cook discusses the difficulty of teaching all of these literacies at once in a semester-long course. However, they may be taught in conjunction with each other or by layering some of them together.<sup>44</sup> Cook states, “Service-learning assignments allow students to practice all of these literacies and to do so within authentic, transactional settings.”<sup>45</sup>

In an effort to engage in this hybridity between the VPA, the humanities, and engineering, I asked my students to not simply be advocates for change in interdisciplinarity, but to also transform into what Robert Johnson calls “agents for change in corporate and academic contexts.”<sup>46</sup> I asked my students to engage, interact, to participate directly with their audience. Working with their audience in such a way reflects an updated model of *plural authors, singular text*, where not only do students work within a group of their own, but also with their audience to create a single product, a process Johnson terms “audience *involved*,” in that the audience becomes “an actual participant in the writing process who creates knowledge and determines much of the content of the discourse.”<sup>47</sup> This community model was meant to work to reinforce the idea of community literacy, where differing disciplines and cultures combine into a joint communicative collaboration. Usability testing is paramount, since, as it pertained to this class and as stated by Robert Johnson, user knowledge can be implemented in-progress of design via user feedback.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 415.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Kelli Cargile Cook, “Layered Literacies: A Theoretical Frame for Technical Communication Pedagogy,” *Technical Communication Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (2002): 7.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 8-17.

<sup>45</sup> Cook, “Service-learning and Undergraduate Research.”, 32.

<sup>46</sup> Johnson, “Audience Involved,” 91.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 96.

## Methodology:

The syllabus for this course in technical communication was designed in such a way as to be open and easily interpreted by students. I'm not an advocate for teaching through transference and believed transparency was necessary, that there was a need to communicate precisely what my students would be experiencing throughout the semester as can be seen in the "Course Description & Overview" in *Figure 1 Syllabus*. It is described that the students will be working throughout the semester with the VPA toward a goal that reinforces STEAM. When discussing the syllabus in class, this is the perfect opportunity to lead students to the connections between their fields in engineering and the engineering tasks available within arts and arts administration. Students are often surprised to discover things like many of the tools used in theatre set design can also be found in mechanical engineering labs or that working with a Yamaha soundboard calls to mind many of the key principles they learned in electrical engineering. More predominantly comes the relationship between their fields in engineering, technical communication, and the aspect of arts administration. Drawing these examples actually worked quite well to make the students more accepting about stepping a little outside of the STEM classes and what they felt were their comfort zones.

The "Course Objectives" for the syllabus were designed to reflect the layered literacies frame discussed by Kelli Cargile Cook, and, in conjunction with the assignments in this course, were designed to specifically target the basic, rhetorical, social, technological, ethical, and critical literacies. There was a total of three major assignments for this class:

- Career Document: This assignment required students to search for a job posting for a position they felt qualified for upon graduation from college, investigate the company, and prepare a dossier of career documents tailored to the position.
- Mini-Manual Project: There are specific subsections into which this assignment was divided:
  - Project Proposal and Elevator Pitch: Not only were the students expected to formulate a proposal for their final assignment (see *figure 2 Final Assignment*), but they were also expected to pitch this idea in video format.
  - Progress Memos/ Emails: Memos of progress throughout the process of work toward the final project. These were professionally designed and written using the instructions outlined in the textbook.
  - Usability Test Plan and Report: This assignment is a lesson in designing a study and administering a test that could then provide user feedback to shape their overall project.
  - Final Report: This was the final product, the last and most impactful assignment for the students that produced a useable mini-manual to one of the five areas of the VPA.
  - Oral Presentations: These were formal presentations and a place for students to practice before an audience.
- Professionalism: This factored in how each student conducted themselves in class and how they engaged with their clients.



The career document assignment works to reinforce three of the key literacies discussed by Kelli Cargile Cook which are basic, rhetorical, and social. Basic literacy seeks to help a writer make “informed decisions about usage, grammar, mechanics, styles, and graphic representations based on knowledge of readers and writing situation.”<sup>49</sup> What basic literacies *isn't* is a set of hard and fast rules to which a writer must adhere to at all costs. This frees the writer to make better rhetorical choices about purpose and audience, demonstrating the fluidity at which this literacy might be layered with others. While it might be thought that these basic literacies travel with our students as they enter a technical communication from a composition classroom, it must be acknowledged that the genres within technical communication differ to a great degree from most composition courses. While it is certainly helpful that students making this transition bring with them the knowledge that genres do indeed vary, technical communication has within it its own basic literacy and must be approached as such.

The basic literacy being assessed in the career document will be the student's ability to tailor their documents in very specific ways so as to address their audience in a way that is grammatically and traditionally appropriate. While grammar could extend to any prose, there remains certain conventions in writing a resume or cover letter, such as using active voice, concision, order and layout, and personal honesty. Things to consider are, what might the students include within the résumés work history and how might they write sufficiently in order to include any and all pertinent information?

Rhetorical literacy is a literacy outlined by Kelli Cargile Cook of particular note. It is “a multifaceted knowledge that allows writers to conceptualize and shape documents whatever their specific purpose or audience.”<sup>50</sup> This literacy insists that there must be an intimate understanding of an audience, who they are, what they understand; the basic rhetorical appeals, ethos, pathos, logos, for example, and even the canons are at the forefront in this literacy.

The career document overlaps this literacy with the basic literacy in that, when the students compile their documents and consider grammar and convention, how might they consider approaching their voice and tone within the résumé and cover letter? The students must understand the necessity of each piece of the career document they intend to use, what they plan to include within those documents, and an understanding that shaping those documents is a rhetorical purpose driven by a deep and researched understanding of their audience.

Social literacy (in this case, extensive collaboration) was an extremely important focus of this study, since my students were made up primarily of STEM majors, taking a class in the humanities that asks them to work with those in the VPA. The career document engages this literacy via having students practice their tone, style, and content, shaping it for appropriate professional contexts. In fact, a portion of this specific assignment asks students to build a LinkedIn profile that can be engaged in a public, yet professional domain.

Another literacy that could be included within this document, although I did not include it as one, could be to gauge the students' level of technological literacy. Aside from simply using Microsoft Word or some other word processing software, the students

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<sup>49</sup> Cook, “Layered Literacies,” 9.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

were also expected to use some design choices that could have extended beyond what could be found typically. Furthermore, students engage in a very social technology via LinkedIn and must navigate it garnering a thorough understanding of just how it works. These students immersed themselves somewhat deeply in communicative technologies.<sup>51</sup> What's more, as I review the assignment parameters several, if not all, of Cargile Cook's key literacies might also have been included to gauge within the career document assignment.

The mini-manual assignment asked team members to assemble a manual on specific equipment within the VPA. Along with this, they were also required to construct a quick-reference guide. The mini-manual was expected to consist of two parts: the first part would act as a quick reference guide for the technology with which they worked. These user-tested portions were considered by the VPA faculty to be some of the most essential, the most crucial portions. The second part of the mini-manual was an in-depth reference that could complement the first part. In cases where justification or more explanation was needed, this section served as the repository for longer text. In many cases with working with the VPA, I found that many, save on member, were more interested in quick reference guides than anything overly in-depth.

The project proposal worked along with basic literacy, as do all of the assignments. The rhetorical literacy in this assignment asked students to consider the purpose and audience for their project and also consider the fact that I was their primary audience for their proposal itself. By way of both rhetorical and social literacies, the students engaged with their clients, determining the context, scope, and organization of their project the students discerned a specific necessity of their clients and negotiated how they might deal with issues.

The students further practiced social literacy in the interactions with fellow team members, distributing work amongst themselves in a spirit of productivity and fairness. Encouraging the students to designate a leader is certainly valuable; although, I did not make it a requirement for my students at the time of this project. Designating a group leader creates a unique and real-world perspective on social literacy that could be quite valuable. The dynamic offers much in the way of experience and certainly works to streamline this assignment, to hold each member of a team accountable with deadlines and such. What's more, using the elevator pitch for the project proposal also furthered the social literacy practice where students projected themselves to a professional figure and carried themselves in such a way as to exude confidence and knowledge about their idea. The interaction during the elevator pitch was meant to provide valuable experience when approaching an employer or potential employer with an idea.

Ethical literacy looks at students' ethical understanding in a business setting and ran hand-in-hand with social literacy via the interactions of the students with their clients. Students often worked with their clients considering such things as situation, purpose, and audience, and, in fact, were meant to consider such ethics in their general communications. How they might formulate emails and memos or approach presentations were all considered during their ethical decision-making process.<sup>52</sup>

The students were also expected to plan for and use specific project tools, calling into action their technical literacy. They were faced with considering their own

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

limitations and abilities, their own level of understanding with creative and communicative software programs like PowerPoint, Publisher, Adobe Creative Suite, and the like. They had to establish clear and precise timelines and designate specific responsibilities and communicate those points concisely and clearly to their instructor.

One last key literacy that my students actually engaged in is critical literacy. Kelli Cargile Cook defines critical literacy “as the ability to recognize and consider ideological stances and power structures and the willingness to take action to assist those in need.”<sup>53</sup> When my students considered the ways that textual and graphic elements of their design worked together to create a readable/usable, meaningful, and persuasive message for their audience, they had to have an “awareness of the effects of technologies within the human contexts.”<sup>54</sup> Especially when considering their work for usability testing, they had to understand how their products could be used. Did the mini-manual “assist or hinder human interactions?”<sup>55</sup> The students had to realize that the technologies they were using and developing weren’t simply mundane tools, but legitimately impacted human interaction.

When speaking of their final project, it would have been difficult to administer this class without coming to the realization that each student would be bringing forth their own techné informed by their own disciplines. Many engineering students at Michigan Tech come with certain assumptions, sometimes based around ideas that they stand to make more money in their given field, they might make an impact to further their field or mankind, they might invent some new and great thing, etc. All of these points lay out a basis, a groundwork for how they might obtain or produce knowledge in their fields, as discussed by John Wild. The important thing to remember during the composition of this course was that I didn’t want to break down their motives, their building blocks for their techné. Instead, it was my goal to focus these technai into something that might be used to produce or reshape existing knowledge in another discipline, such as in the VPA. In turn, I hoped to see their techné grow, that the impacts they made could be farther reaching.

I chose to include very specific areas of the VPA, so that the students might complement them with their own backgrounds, their own expertise. Considering that the majority of my students were engineering majors, it was decided that the areas for focus that overlapped with things needed in VPA would be products rooted in mechanical, electrical, audio, lighting, and computer engineering. The twenty-five students fit into a scheme of five teams, each geared to one of these areas of engineering with the potential for overlap. For example, one team was designated to design a mini-manual for the ETC Ion Lighting Console for their final project. While it might seem that such a project would exclude some of the students in the group that may not be focused in lighting, this project afforded the team to recall field-specific knowledge for which they may have already been trained in the areas of electrical, lighting, and even mechanical engineering.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

## Results:

The career document assignment came in two parts: the first part of the assignment expected students to submit a rough draft of their documents. Going over these documents as their instructor, I was able to help reinforce and help them practice further their understandings of the concept of basic literacy, the grammar and traditions expected by many employers. I did this by offering feedback on specific issues I saw within the documents. Common errors consisted of typos and minor sentence level issues that offered a training opportunity on the importance of proofreading and having others to do so for them as well. It was also a place to discuss the opportune time to take chances in their writing. While this is often encouraged in a composition course, for good reason (I firmly believe students should take chances within their writing), a career document isn't necessarily the place to become a grammatical daredevil. Instead, this is a place to write what they know, and write how they know to do so. As a result of utilizing rough drafts in such a way, the second part of this project was very successful.

This rough draft submission also helped to reinforce the rhetorical literacy expected. A common issue appeared in the résumés when students often included unnecessary content such as jobs that did not necessarily pertain to the work they sought, or the order of employment was often haphazard. Furthermore, students often submitted rough drafts that seemed a bit run-of-the-mill, as if they had done an internet search for some template that lacked uniqueness. Before they submitted their final career documents, I was able to steer my students to include pertinent job information and history while remaining honest and ethical and to order their experience in a uniform and appropriate manner that aligns with conventions. I was also able to impart on them the importance of standing out, making their work seem more unique via visual elements, tone, and style. Upon guiding them, my students were able to realize that building these career documents is certainly a social practice.

The social literacy came as students worked with me and each other to develop appropriate and unique documents. Students took feedback and employed some great suggestions they received into their documents, but it's also important to realize that building these documents was a social practice in submitting them to an employer as well. These documents were meant to be shared to a professional public, and these students had to be shown the importance of that aspect. They weren't just writing for themselves. They were writing *about* themselves for *others*.

While there remained minor errors here and there, there is no doubt that the final career documents were examples of good, hard work. The students, mostly seniors at this point in their academic careers, were glad to have had this assignment. It surprised me to find that many of them had never really gone over career documents until this class, so I found this exercise all too important for them.

The final assignment, the mini-manual assignment (*figure 2 Final Assignment*), was the most pivotal and asked students to take all they had learned and apply it to an aspect of service-learning that offered a real-world experience. Here, what the students learned of working within their community, the layered literacies, what John Wild's categories of techné intersected with Patricia Dewey's expectations on arts administration. This was the assignment that asked students to apply service-learning to

the aspects of VPA. When speaking to the rhetorical literacy, these students considered previous knowledge on their products, such as pre-existing manuals and how-to guides when building their own. They also had to consider the knowledge they brought to the project as well, either from their discipline or other outside experience. The connections made during this phase were quite exciting. What's more is that the students also had to consider deeply just what their client required, and what they provided exceeded many expectations.

What I found was that the students became much more accepting of working outside of the comfort zones, their professional portfolios. They linked things they didn't typically think they would. One student commented that their initial impressions lead them to believe this class would be somewhat of a waste of time, but, after giving it a chance, they linked several aspects to their own field that they wouldn't have initially. In fact, they commented that this assignment was probably one of the more informative they had ever undertaken. One major reason they pointed to was how they entered into a similar assignment (the Yamaha soundboard) that they may find in the own career (electrical engineering). They drew connections between the circuitry they'd become used to in their field and discussed that troubleshooting and navigating they found in the usability testing of their project that was even more in-depth than what they'd been used to in their own field, that they could "see the practical nature of their field at work." In fact, discussing this project with those in the VPA, there was much conversation of using it at an intercollegiate level, that they wanted to share what we had all learned at a level that not only benefitted Michigan Technological University, but how it might benefit universities on a much broader scale. This was a very common finding. The theater director not only advocated for a publication for my students, but we currently also pursue an avenue for creating a new division of research testing of industrial equipment for Michigan Tech.

Throughout the semester, students were forced to negotiate avenues of just how to develop their ideas in conjunction with their clients. Trying to align their concepts with those things that fit with ideas and concepts that rarely saw conception in a textual capacity offered an intriguing and masterful inception of the VPA that is rarely realized, leaving me to wonder as to what this avenue of research might offer outside of the VPA. Too often I found myself approached by members of the VPA with which I was working where they would comment on how valuable and how impressive what we were doing on the VPA would be, but, I'm sorry to say, it wasn't all about just what we could provide to the VPA. I'm certainly glad that it showcased what it did, but I'm constantly looking at how this might all be applied outside just as seamlessly. I certainly that the VPA at Michigan Tech, but this work certainly will not stop there.

The students worked exceedingly well with their clients, and few obstacles in the way of scheduling arose. Toward the end of the semester, when students were finishing their user testing and compiling reports, things did get a bit precarious due to a rather large production going on in the VPA. Still, from a perspective of community literacy, students worked well as a team, managing to be both productive and fair. The final mini-manuals also demonstrated a rich savvy of technological literacy, as the teams used a multitude of different software in their creation, but they also provided to their clients both static and electronic versions of these mini-manuals, the latter demonstrating striking examples of interactivity that allowed for very streamlined navigation.

## **Discussion and Limitations:**

I had a minor issue at the very beginning of the class when I began to discuss just what the class would entail. I was met with quite a few sighs when mentioning that we would be partnering with the VPA in service-learning, potentially due to students not being able to draw connections to their own interests or future career goals. In the future, I would like to draw these connections a bit more clearly and much earlier on in the class than I did previously. However, to be perfectly honest, I didn't even realize myself the vast interconnectivity at play in this class. The VPA tends to utilize quite a bit of equipment that sees use in all aspects of life, from construction to medicine. While both my students and I worked with the VPA, we found ourselves in quite a learning experience, one that proved to be very illuminating and quite valuable to a group of young engineering students.

While considering Kelli Cargile Cooks key literacies, I feel that far more could have been listed on each assignment. I feel it is important to include this information to the students as a matter of transparency. In fact, I often solicited feedback during class over certain aspects, and I wanted all of the students to be aware of just what I was doing, the method behind my madness. That said, I feel as though I could have still be a bit more transparent and hope to implement this in the class in the future, perhaps even going so far as to user testing my own students.

The mini-manual project went very well, generally speaking; however, I feel it important to stress that a leader should be designated for each group. Perhaps this could be done by the instructor or perhaps students might be able to interview each other to determine who might be the best fit, but a laissez-faire attitude by the instructor here can be detrimental. I decided to let students choose or not choose, as they saw fit, and this met with some serious complications and unnecessary fits of stress. The three teams that elected a leader remained on-time and finished with little issue. The two teams that decided on a democratic approach met with issues on divvying out work and maintaining a real schedule. Without no one in the group to hold them accountable, the proclivity for procrastination became a very real threat to them finishing the project at all. As the instructor, I was forced to assume the mantle of their leader and move their groups forward. This seems to be an easy issue to avoid in the future.

This class could be most effective as an IRB-approved study, one where I might watch students over the course of the semester and implement surveys that might be used within the data. Due to time constraints, I was unable to adapt this method in my research at this point; however, I plan to delve in much more deeply over the course of my PhD work with the same institution, hopefully answering many questions and making the class much more user centered. Potential beyond what I currently plan could be explored in departments that go beyond the VPA. This interdisciplinary exercise could be translated between a number of departments where service-learning might be emphasized to strengthen the community literacy within the university. One other potential avenue to expand this research might be a longitudinal study that investigates the impact of this course on students' critical thinking and problem solving extending into their fields of study. However, it should be noted that Michigan Tech typically offers the technical communication course to juniors and seniors. This becomes problematic in that students

can't be observed further within the confines of the university. A better approach could be to find a way for Professional and Technical Communication to be offered to students sooner, perhaps before beginning communication courses within their specific fields. Otherwise, it might be useful to study these students as they move on into their professional careers outside of the university.

The class went to great lengths to reinforce a community literacy with the realm of the university. As hoped, engineers worked diligently with those in the arts, and did so with excitement and vigor. I feel that this class proves and will continue to prove that interdisciplinary work between STEM, the humanities, and the arts isn't merely possible, but extraordinarily beneficial to each discipline, the students, and the university as a whole.

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## Appendix:



### Course Syllabus

#### Walker 131 Office Hours

Monday: 2pm-3pm  
Wednesday: 12pm-1pm  
Friday: 2pm-3pm

#### Course Description & Overview

In this reading, writing, and computer-intensive class, you'll engage in communication that aims to clearly and concisely transmit complex information to both experts and nonexperts. This practice will extend across multiple genres, such as emails, memos, resumes, cover letters, transmittal letters, progress reports, and terminal reports. The work in this course will focus extensively on communicating through technology.

Throughout the semester, this class will work collaboratively with the Arts, exploring the value of STEAM (or science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) within the confines of Technical Communication as it applies to the business of the Visual and Performing Arts (VPA). This course will be an experience in service learning with the Arts acting as the vessel, providing you real-world scenarios in business where investigation, discovery, and collaborative problem solving will take center stage. You will be expected to work closely with leaders from VPA, investigating the Arts as a business and applying the theory and practice of Technical Communication to provide needed analog or digital advertising, manuals of instruction for equipment or processes, or even standard operating procedures (SOP) within specific areas of the department.

#### Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Plan, draft, and revise multimodal texts across various genres.
- Compose texts considering a variety of audiences
- Identify necessity and purpose and apply design/writing skills to achieve specific goals
- Communicate and collaborate with colleagues during research and design
- Design visually effective texts
- Review and edit a variety of texts

#### Required Readings & Other Materials

- Lannon, John and Laura Gurak. *Technical Communication*. 14th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2017.
- Other assigned readings will be posted in Canvas

Figure 1 Syllabus

### Technical and Professional Communication

- A multi-platform web browser (such as Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, etc.)
- Word Processing software (such as Microsoft Office 365)
- PDF compatible readers
- Access to Canvas through your MTU email and ISO password

Note: As a MTU student, you're eligible to download Microsoft Office 365, Adobe Acrobat Pro, and Google Chrome to your personal computer or laptop as part of the Campus Common CORE software program. Visit IT's software website at <http://www.it.mtu.edu/campus-common-core-software.php> and sign into the 'downloads' page.

#### Technology Policy

Any assignments involving technology can be completed by using software found on PCs in any computer lab on campus. For a list of labs and seat availability, visit: <https://www.it.mtu.edu/computer-labs.php>

The Van Pelt Library has audio/video recorders that are available for checkout to students. They can be checked out for several hours at a time from the Circulation Desk at the library. Note: HDMZ (120 Walker) equipment is not available for general checkout.

#### Personal Technology Policy

While I recognize students' need for educational and emergency-related technological devices such as laptops, PDAs, cellular phones, etc., using them unethically or recreationally during class time is never appropriate. That said, using your electronic device to take notes and do in-class work is encouraged; however, this will change if the device distracts other students or myself. Once again, the use of your devices is subject to the professionalism grade below.

#### Assignment & Grade Distribution

<i>Letter Grade</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Letter Grade</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
A	93% – 100%	C	70% – 75%
AB	87% – 92%	CD	65% – 69%
B	82% – 86%	D	60% - 64%
BC	76% – 81%	F	0% - 59%

Your course grade will be determined by the number of points you earn out of 1000 total. The 1000 points are broken down as follows:

## Technical and Professional Communication

### *Professional Portfolio/Career Document (100 pt.)*

This will be a professional document detailing your research history and professional outlook. You will include a professional resume, a cover letter, and additional finished examples of your work thus far. This can be either digital or analog.

### *Responses (100 pt.)*

Responses of at least 300 words to readings will be assigned regularly; they must be turned in via Canvas in memo format. Late work is accepted for a reduced grade—I'd rather have you do the work late than not at all—but your Professionalism grade (see below) will suffer if work is habitually late.

### *Project Proposal and Elevator Pitch (100 pt.)*

Consider the following when you write this plan: an explanation of what your project is, the rationale behind your choice, a timeline showing what you plan to do and when (all within the given time frame), and the resources you plan to use and where to find them. This document should include the context, scope, and organization of the project. You need to analyze the problem or question and prove to your instructor that the project needs to be carried out. Tie in your research and questions within your introduction. Briefly summarize your project proposal.

### *Usability Test Plan and Report (150 pt.)*

Here, you may find that there are existing materials, manuals, or advertisements for your given area, but they can be difficult to understand and use. You must decide how you should test the instructions you and/or your group writes for potential users to ensure that they meet the users' needs. You will be expected to (1) craft user-centered instructions, (2) make appropriate design and media (method of communication) choices that support engagement and comprehensibility, (3) conduct a usability study and incorporate user feedback into your instructions, and (4) report your findings in a clear and concise manner.

### *Progress Memos/Emails (100 pt.)*

You will systematically provide memos of your progress throughout your process of work toward your final project. These are to be professionally designed and written using the instructions outlined in the textbook.

### *Final Project (250 pt.)*

In this class, you will investigate theatre and the Arts as a business and apply the theory and practice of Technical Communication toward the Arts via needed analog or digital advertising efforts, manuals of instruction for equipment or processes, or even standard operating procedures (SOP) within specific areas. You will be expected to meet with someone within the Visual and Performing Arts department early in the semester to gauge necessity and plan a way to fulfill that necessity.

### *Oral Presentations (100 pt.)*

This will be a formal in-class presentation of your Final Project; however, this is not just a platform for you to showcase your project. You may begin by showing the project, but you will also be expected to analyze for the class the decisions you made in the creation of the project and why you made them, addressing your usability tests and how they influenced your product. Everyone within the group must be equally involved in some capacity during the presentation in order to receive full credit. The length of each presentation should be ten minutes, not including your setup time. Come to class early on the day you present to ensure the setup is configured correctly.

## Technical and Professional Communication

### *Professionalism (100 pt.)*

Includes the quality completion of readings, discussions, in-class and homework activities, informal writing assignments, project drafts, summaries of two on-campus cultural events during the semester, and peer review exchanges.

### **Attendance**

Your unwavering attendance is both required and expected. Decisions about papers will be made in class and your grade for Professionalism (See below) depends significantly upon regular attendance. Missing more than three class sessions will result in a grade penalty of minus one letter grade for each day missed, and missing six or more class sessions will result in failing the course.

I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. Please note that if you miss class, I will not re-teach the material to you during office hours and any work we do in class (e.g., peer review) cannot be made up. If you do miss class, I would suggest discussing any missed materials with your classmates.

That said, however, I'm not a complete monster. I do understand that there are times when extenuating circumstances (such as a death in the immediate family or sudden incapacitating personal injury) do arise. In these cases, I will refer to Michigan Tech's policy on attendance found here:

<http://www.mtu.edu/deanofstudents/academic-policies/attendance/>

### **Professionalism**

A significant portion of your grade is based on the professionalism you demonstrate toward the course and its content, toward me, and toward your fellow students. Conduct that influences professionalism includes but is not limited to the following:

- Your willingness to engage the texts and issues associated with the course in the spirit of learning more about yourself and the world you live in.
- Your ability to respect a diversity of opinion as demonstrated by conducting yourself in a civil manner and by refraining from interruptions and ridicule of others.
- Your ability to listen and participate during class.
- Your ability to offer relevant, on-topic commentary.
- Your ability to arrive at class or a conference on time and prepared. This requirement includes obtaining the textbook by the first day of class.
- Your ability to focus on class during class time. Habitual entrances and exits during class sessions will result in a grade penalty, as will holding private discussions or texting during class and disruptions arising from cell phones, watches, pagers, and the like. Exception: if your cell phone rings to a song from the 1980s, you will receive extra credit.
- Your ability to avoid complaining and asking questions whose answers have already been provided (e.g., "Can I make up the quiz?" and "What is the response for next time?").
- Your ability to let me know ahead of time if you have to miss an appointment or conference.
- Your attendance at and brief (~250-word) summaries of two on-campus cultural events during the semester. These events may be lectures, plays, concerts, art exhibits, or other occasions.

## Technical and Professional Communication

They may not be events whose primary purpose is entertainment or an athletic contest; ask me if you're not sure if an event qualifies. Be sure that your summary demonstrates that you stayed for the duration of the event.

You may be asked to read and discuss issues from perspectives that may disturb your moral and/or religious prejudices. While I do not intend to influence your opinion, make you purposefully uncomfortable, or otherwise grade you on your perspectives, you may find some material too personally offensive to maintain high standards of intellectual pursuit and honesty. If you think your views will interfere with your ability to conduct yourself professionally in this course, we'll need to schedule a meeting and discuss it.

### Late or Missing Work

Late or partially-completed homework assignments will significantly impact your professionalism grade, such as "Responses" listed above. However, late essay and project drafts impact your grade in two ways: your professionalism grade AND the essay or project grade itself. These types of assignments submitted **ONE (1)** day (starting the instant it is considered late on Canvas) after the due date will receive a reduction of a letter grade, and it will lower another letter grade by day **TWO (2)**, and yet another letter grade on day **THREE (3)**. This means that, if you turn your paper in three days late, the very best grade you could hope for will be a D. If your assignment is **four (4)** or more days late of the due date, you will receive a **ZERO (0)** for the assignment. Students must turn in complete, final drafts of ALL major assignments in order to receive a passing course grade.

**NOTE:** This rule can be modified simply by notifying me **BEFORE** the date the assignment is due and giving me a valid reason for its tardiness.

### University Policies

Michigan Tech has standard policies on academic misconduct and complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. For **more information about reasonable accommodation for or equal access to education** or services at Michigan Tech, please call the Dean of Students Office, at (906) 487- 2212 or go to [http://www.mtu.edu/ctl/instructional-resources/syllabus/syllabus\\_policies.html](http://www.mtu.edu/ctl/instructional-resources/syllabus/syllabus_policies.html)

### Plagiarism

Plagiarism, which Michigan Tech defines as "knowingly copying another's work or ideas and calling them one's own or not giving proper credit or citation," is a violation of the academic integrity policy: <http://www.admin.mtu.edu/usenate/policies/p109-1.htm>. In this class, we will discuss the practical and ethical aspects of source attribution so you can learn how and why to avoid plagiarism in your academic work. It is crucial that you take care to acknowledge the sources of your written, audio, or visual material in this and other classes. Instances of plagiarized work will be handled according to university procedures, which includes a reporting of the incident to the Office of Student Affairs.

### Disability Services

If you have a disability that could affect your performance in any class or that requires an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact your instructor or Disability Services at 487-1494 as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements can be made. <http://www.mtu.edu/deanofstudents/students/disability/>

## Technical and Professional Communication

### **Veterans / Military**

Veterans and active duty military personnel with special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployments, drill requirements, disabilities) are welcomed and encouraged to communicate these, in advance if possible, to their instructor(s). <http://www.mtu.edu/registrar/students/veterans/>

**The Office of Institutional Equity** <http://www.mtu.edu/equity>

**Equal Opportunity, Discrimination, or Harassment Statement**

<http://www.admin.mtu.edu/admin/boc/policy/ch5/>

### **Disclaimer**

*This syllabus is subject to change by the instructor.*

**Technical and Professional  
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**Schedule of Classes, Readings, and Response Questions**

<b>Date</b>	<b>What's Happening</b>	<b>What's Due</b>
Jan. 9 Monday	Syllabus Review & Intros	
Jan. 11 Wednesday	Introduction to Technical Communication	Read: Chapter 1 "Introduction to Technical Communication" (pp. 2-14)  Write: Respond to prompt #1, under the "General" section on page 14. Post your response to Canvas before class.
Jan. 13 Friday	Rhetoric and Technical Communication	Read: "The Rhetorical Situation" by Lloyd Bitzer  Write: Explain in no fewer than 300 words how you might use rhetoric in your specific career field.
Jan. 16 Monday	Martin Luther King Jr. Day Recess/No Class	
Jan. 18 Wednesday	Memos and Letters	Read: Chapter 15 "Workplace Memos and Letters" (pp. 323-350)  Write: Respond to the prompt under the "Digital and Social Media" section on page 366 and post it to Canvas before class.
Jan. 20 Friday	Audience Analysis	Read: Chapter 2 "Meeting the Needs of Specific Audiences" (pp. 15-32)  Write: Respond to prompt #1, under the "General" section on page 31. Post your response to Canvas before class.
Jan. 23 Monday	Persuasion in Technical Writing	Read: Chapter 3 "Persuading Your Audience" (pp. 33-58)  Write: Respond to prompt #1, under the "General" section on page 58. Post your response to Canvas before class.
Jan. 25 Wednesday	Building a Proposal  Introduction to the Final Project	Read: Chapter 22 "Proposals" (pp. 536-571)  Write: Respond to prompt #1, under the "General" section on page 571. Post your response to Canvas before class.
Jan. 27 Friday	Organizing Texts	Read: Chapter 10 "Organizing for Readers" (pp. 184-200)  Write: Respond to prompt #1, under the "General" section on page 200. Post your response to Canvas before class.
Jan. 30 Monday	Professional Style and Tone	Read: Chapter 11 "Editing for a Professional Style and Tone" (pp. 201-235)  Write: Follow the directions under the "General" section on page 235 and submit to Canvas.



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Feb. 1 Wednesday	Research in Technical Communication	Read: Chapter 7 "Thinking Critically about the Research Process" (pp. 120-146)  Write: Respond to the prompt under the "Global" section on page 146. Post your response to Canvas before class.
Feb. 3 Friday	Informal Reports	Read: Chapter 20 "Informal Reports" (pp. 471-491)  Write: Post to Canvas a progress report detailing your progress thus far on your final project. Use the guidelines outlined in Chapter 20.
Feb. 6 Monday	Formal Reports	Read: Chapter 21 "Formal Analytical Reports" (pp 492-535)  Write: Respond to the prompt under the "Global" section on page 535. Follow the directions, except only do one document from one organization.
Feb. 8 Wednesday	Visual Information	Read: Chapter 12 "Designing Visual Information" (pp. 236-260)
Feb. 10 Friday	Winter Carnival Recess/No Class	
Feb. 13 Monday	Visual Information	Read: Chapter 12 "Designing Visual Information" (pp. 261-280)  Write: Respond to prompt #3, under the "General" section on page 280. Post your response to Canvas before class.
Feb. 15 Wednesday	Designing Professional Documents	Read: Chapter 13 "Designing Pages and Documents" (pp 282-306)  Write: Find an example of effective page design. Screenshot or photocopy 2-3 pictures and attach a memo explaining to your instructor why the design is effective. Be specific in your evaluation. Submit your work to Canvas.
Feb. 17 Friday	Designing Résumés	Read: Chapter 16 "Résumés and Other Job-Search Materials" (pp. 367-377)  Write: Respond to the prompt under the "Digital and Social Media" section on page 393. Post your "draft" résumé to Canvas before class AND bring it to class in digital format for in-class workshopping. This should be specifically for a company for which you are interested in working.
Feb. 20 Monday	Designing Résumés	Peer review of résumés
Feb. 22 Wednesday	Workshop	Workshop Final Team Project Proposals.

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Feb. 24 Friday	Application/Cover Letters	Read: Chapter 16 “Résumés and Other Job-Search Materials” (pp. 378-392)  Final Team Project Proposals due on Canvas by midnight.
Feb. 27 Monday	Instructional Writing	Read: Chapter 19 “Instructions and Procedures” (pp 439-470)  Write: Complete prompt #1 under the “General” section on page 469 and submit to Canvas.
Mar. 1 Wednesday	Ethical Communication	Read: Chapter 4 “Weighing the Ethical Issues” (pp. 59-79)  Write: Complete the prompt for “Digital and Social Media” on page 79 and post your memo to Canvas.
Mar. 3 Friday	Workshop	Workshop mid-semester Final Team Project Reports in class.  Résumé and cover letter due on Canvas by midnight.
Mar. 6 Monday	Spring Break/No Class	
Mar. 8 Wednesday	Spring Break/No Class	
Mar. 10 Friday	Spring Break/No Class	
Mar. 13 Monday	Project Management and Teamwork	Read: Chapter 5 “Teamwork and Global Considerations” (pp. 80-100)  Write: Complete the prompt under the “General” section on page 100 and submit to Canvas. In this instance, utilize the group in which you’re working toward your Final Team Project as the example.
Mar. 15 Wednesday	Away for Conference/ No Class	Mid-semester Final Team Project Progress Report due on Canvas by midnight.
Mar. 17 Friday	Away for Conference/ No Class	
Mar. 20 Monday	Elevator Pitches	Elevator pitches due in class.
Mar. 22 Wednesday	Emailing and Texting in a Professional World	Read Chapter 14 “Email and Text Messages” (pp. 308-320)  Write: Complete the prompt under the “Global” section on page 322 and submit your “email” to Canvas.
Mar. 24 Friday	Online Collaboration	Read: Chapter 24 “Blogs, Wikis, and Web Pages” (pp. 602-615)

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		Write: Complete the prompt under the “Global” section on page 616 and submit to Canvas.
Mar. 27 Monday	Evaluating and Interpreting Information	Read: Chapter 8 “Evaluating and Interpreting Information” (pp. 147-167)  Write: Complete the prompt under the “General” section on page 167 and submit to Canvas.
Mar. 29 Wednesday	Social Media	Read: Chapter 25 “Social Media” (pp. 617-626)  Write: Complete the prompt under the “General” section on page 627 and submit to Canvas.
Mar. 31 Friday	Summarizing Research	Read: Chapter 9 “Summarizing Research Findings and Other Information” (pp. 168-181)  Write: Complete prompt #2 under the “General” section on page 181 and submit to Canvas.
Apr. 3 Monday	Group Conferences	
Apr. 5 Wednesday	Workshop	User Analysis Report
Apr. 7 Friday	Presentations	Read: Chapter 23 “Oral Presentations and Video Conferencing” (pp. 572-601)  Write: Respond to prompt #1, under the “General” section on page 601. Post your response to Canvas before class.
Apr. 10 Monday	Group Conferences	
Apr. 12 Wednesday	Workshop	Usability Testing Report
Apr. 14 Friday	In-Class Presentations	
Apr. 17 Monday	In-Class Presentations	
Apr. 19 Wednesday	In-Class Presentations	
Apr. 21 Friday	Poster Session Q&A	Final Team Project report due by midnight on Canvas and poster presentations for Visual and Performing Arts faculty walkthrough.

HU3120 R03 – Spring 2017  
Final Project

### Assignment Overview

For this assignment, you will investigate theatre and the Arts as a business and apply the theory and practice of Technical Communication toward the Arts via a much-needed user manual for equipment or a particular process, or perhaps a standard operating procedure (SOP) manual within a specific area. You will be expected to meet with someone within the Visual and Performing Arts department to gauge necessity and plan a way to fulfill that necessity. Along with the instruction manual, you should also provide a quick reference guide that may aid with immediate startup and address concisely common issues to provide efficient usage.

### Assignment Objectives

- Demonstrate an increasingly advanced awareness of rhetorical principals, specifically focusing on audience, in technical communication
- Make appropriate design choices that support engagement and comprehensibility
- Collaborate effectively with client and team members to ensure effective design and achieve specific goals

### Key Literacies

- **Rhetorical:** Consider the previous knowledge, context, and informational needs of your target audience while inviting engagement
- **Social:** Practice communicating and distributing work amongst team members in a way that improves productivity and fairness
- **Technological:** Learn to use a new piece of equipment and consider the possibilities and constraints associated with its use for implementation of instructional design
- **Visual:** Consider the ways that textual and graphic elements of your design work together to create a readable/usable, meaningful, and persuasive message for your audience

### Required Content

#### 1. Clear and Limiting Title:

A title that demonstrates a “clear and exact preview” of the equipment or task for which you’re writing. No abstract titles!

#### 2. Informed Content:

Be sure to know what you’re talking about. This is not the time for guesswork. The contact person with whom you will be working in the VPA should be viewed as a field expert. You should have performed the process

Figure 2 Final Assignment

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for which you are writing as to be intimately familiar, and you should have reviewed any previous information concerning the process or equipment before beginning your work.

**3. Visuals:**

The manual you design should contain a limited number of visuals not only to demonstrate to the reader what to do, but also to provide a dimension of persuasiveness. Properly used visuals can help minimize word use. You may use visuals such as icons, representational and schematic diagrams, flowcharts, photographs, and/or prose tables.

**Appropriate level of Detail and Technicality**

Discuss with your VPA client the intended audience thoroughly. Determine the potential level of skill and relevant background a user might have. If this cannot be determined, write for a more general audience and do three things:

1. Give readers enough background to understand why they need to follow these instructions.
2. Give enough detail to show *what* to do.
3. Give enough examples so each step can be visualized clearly.