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ENG 5960-003: Graduate Internship in professional writing

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English 5960: Graduate Internship in Professional Writing

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Course Goals and Objectives
Coursework can provide students with the framework necessary to communicate effectively in professional settings; when writing or editing in the workplace, however, the principles learned in classes must be adapted to fit the rhetorical situation (audience, purpose, and context). The internship in Professional Writing is designed to give you practical experience in creating communication that fits the specific needs of a company or organization. Through the course, you will also be given the opportunity to reflect on topics such as organizational culture, enculturation, effective workplace writing practices, collaboration, technology, and research in professional settings.

Course Requirements

Internship hours: As part of the course, you are responsible for 150 hours at the organization or company where you have been placed. You and your internship supervisor should establish a work schedule in which you will accomplish the required hours.

Meetings with director: Although there are no in-class hours associated with this course, you will meet with me at least three times: after your first two weeks in the internship, at the midpoint in the internship, and one to two weeks before the end of the semester. You are, of course, welcome to meet with me as many additional times as you’d like. If your internship will be held out of town, you may arrange to meet with me over the phone or via instant messaging.

Observation: If possible, I will observe your work once during the semester.

Supervisor evaluations: At midterm and again at the end of the semester, your internship supervisor will be asked to complete a brief evaluation of your work and professionalism.

Writing assignments: As part of the course, you will submit writing that demonstrates the professional writing you have done as part of your internship and your reflection on that work.

- **Reflective log:** Throughout the semester, you will write a reflective log that documents your experiences in the internship. Several prompts will be provided to you, but you are welcome to write on any topic that arises. You will bring your reflective log to each meeting with the internship director and submit a final copy by April 28.

- **Research on issues in Professional Writing:** Drawing on your experience in the internship, you will research a professional writing issue through academic and professional sources.
You will then write a brief report synthesizing the research and connecting it to your experience. The report is due March 17.

• *Portfolio:* At the end of the internship, you will create a portfolio of all the work that you have composed, revised, or edited (either individually or collaboratively).

• *Self-assessment:* You will write a two- to three-page single-spaced memo discussing the work included in your portfolio, focusing on the strengths, weaknesses, challenges, development, or possibilities for the future that the work demonstrates. The portfolio and self-assessment are due April 28.

Note: This course is graded on a Credit/No Credit basis. You must complete all work at a satisfactory or better level to receive credit.
Reflective Log

You will maintain the reflective log throughout the semester. By the end of the internship, you should have at least 30 entries (~2 per week). Entries may be of varying lengths, but they should be typed. The goal of this log is that it be reflective, which means rather than summarizing what you have done, you record your thoughts and analysis of the experiences you have had.

Because this log is designed to be an ongoing reflective record, you might find that later entries contradict or contextualize earlier entries. That’s ok. There is no need to revise those earlier entries to create a single, coherent record. If you find that you’ve changed your mind about something you said earlier, simply discuss that in your most recent entry.

Below is a list of topics that you might use to prompt your entries. You are, of course, encouraged to write on any topic that arises, and a single entry may address more than one topic. You may also reuse prompts as often as you’d like.

• Before beginning the internship, what are your expectations? Concerns or fears? Hopes?
• Describe the space of your internship? What is the environment like? What are the strengths and drawbacks of this environment? What can you tell about the values or power relationships of the organization or company by the way it arranges and decorates its space?
• What kind of training did you receive? What was helpful (or not helpful) about that training? How would you have liked the training to be different?
• Do you know the people you will be working with? How have you been able to establish a professional and/or personal relationship with them?
• What do you do when you have a question about your work?
• What kind of research do you do for your writing? Are you provided with the materials you need? Do you have to find information on your own? What new types of research have you had to learn?
• Analyze one of your writing or editing projects. How did you get the assignment? Did it connect to previous work you had done? How did you decide what to write? How to organize? What tone to use? What to leave out?
• What process have you used for editing? What is most difficult about editing? What resources are useful to you?
• What is your relationship to your supervisor? To your co-workers?
• To what degree do you work independently and/or out of the office? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this?
• How would you describe the role collaboration plays in the work you have done?
• How would you describe your work with customers or clients? What are the challenges and positives of working with people outside the organization or company?
• What kinds of technology do you use for your work? What do you like/dislike about it?
• What has been the most surprising aspect of your internship so far?
• What do you wish you had done differently as part of your internship?
• What aspects of your internship work are you particularly proud of?
• What has been the most important learning experience in your internship so far?
• Looking back on the internship, how has it met your initial expectations or fears?
Report on Issues in Professional Writing

Due: March 17

Using five different academic and professional texts, write a brief report that synthesizes an issue in Professional Writing and then connects that issue to your own experience in the internship. You may use articles, books, listserv postings, and professional websites. I would prefer you not use textbooks. When selecting your sources, consider relevance, professionalism, quality of the source, and date of publication. The report should be appropriately cited and should be written in memo format.

Possible sources for information include the following journals, websites, and listservs:

- *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*
- *Journal of Business Communication*
- *Technical Communication Quarterly*
- *Business Communication Quarterly*
- *Technical Communication*
- *Intercom*
- EServer Technical Communication Library
- Technical Writing Listserv (Techwr-L)
- Copyediting Listserv (Copyediting-L)
- Society for Technical Communication Forum
- Association of Teachers of Technical Writing Listserv (ATTW-L)

Many of the journals listed here are not carried by our library, so leave yourself sufficient time to order the articles you want via interlibrary loan or to go to the University of Illinois library.

Note regarding listservs: Listservs are an excellent resource for graduate students, faculty members, and professional communicators. Most faculty are members of several listservs because they provide a place to get questions answered right away and to discuss issues of importance without waiting for publications to emerge. Listservs are excellent resources for graduate students in two ways: (1) most sites post an archive of past discussions that you can read through and (2) you can register for the listserv and receive emails of current discussions about relevant issues. As a member of the listserv, you are also welcome to post comments and questions. Before doing so, however, consider these guidelines for professional listserv participation:

- “Lurk” on the site for a week or so to gain a sense of how people talk to one another on the list
- Phrase comments and questions professionally (these are potential future colleagues and/or employers!)
- Although there are mixed views on whether a listserv post is a publication that is open to citation in other publications, the current convention is that if you want to use someone’s post (from the live discussion or archive) in this report or in another document you write, email that person (off-list) to request permission and explain the nature of your proposed use. Be concise, but polite!
• If the listserv gets heavy traffic (lots of posts each day), consider setting your membership to digest form (where you receive a whole day’s email in one message) or having the messages moved automatically to an email folder you have set up for the listserv.

• Just as on internet discussion boards, not everyone on a listserv maintains the conventions of professional demeanor you might expect. Don’t be too concerned if you see an email that seems to you to be inappropriate or unprofessional. Most of the other people on the list will be more professional.
Portfolio and Self-Assessment Memo

At the end of the semester, you will put together a portfolio that includes all the documents you composed, revised, and edited. Some of these documents will be formal, such as annual reports, brochures, and edited articles, while other work might be less formal such as email to colleagues or clients and meeting minutes.

The goal of the portfolio is to demonstrate the work you have engaged in over the course of the semester. You should arrange your portfolio to draw my attention to the different projects and/or types of tasks you have worked on. Your portfolio should be packaged professionally (professionally does not mean “expensively”) to show your work in the best light. The portfolio should be easy-to-navigate. Some tips:

- The closer a document is to the beginning of a portfolio or section, the more attention it generally receives
- Tabs or divider pages draw readers’ attention to categories of information and key points
- Divider pages can include brief explanatory notes that describe what the documents in a section are and under what circumstances they were created
- Readers expect to find everything related to a specific topic in one clearly labeled place

Included at the front of your portfolio will be a two- to three-page (single-spaced) memo that discusses your internship work this semester. In discussing your work, you should refer specifically to some of the pieces included in your portfolio as examples.

You may organize your self-assessment in any way you choose. If necessary, you may use one or more of the prompts below to focus your thinking:

- What pieces in your portfolio are you particularly proud of and why?
- What challenges did you face in your professional communication during the internship, and how have you (started to) overcome them?
- What composing, revising, editing, designing, or speaking strengths are demonstrated in the portfolio?
- What areas of your professional communication would you like to continue to improve? What might you do to improve them?
- What are the most important professional communication skills or concepts you have learned through this internship?
- How do you plan to use your professional communication abilities in the future?