

## Online MS Course Descriptions



### FALL 2009 COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

#### **Engl. 6410/7410: Theory & Research in Technical Communication** **Professor: Kelli Cargile Cook**

**Course description:** This course will introduce you to many of the major contemporary theories of written discourse as they are influencing research in professional communication. By reading and writing about this material, you will have an opportunity to explore the complexities of communication: how communication has been differently defined and circumscribed and why these differences matter to people who study and produce practical documents.

**Course objectives:** By the end of the course, you should be able to meet the following objectives:

- Define and map differences among some of the major theories that are currently most influential within the community of scholars studying professional and technical communication.
- Explain and illustrate the implications of some of these theories on our perceptions of what texts are and how they function in organizational life: for example, to transfer information, construct reality, regulate conduct, and create identity.
- Explain and illustrate the implications of some of these theories for people conducting research: for example, what questions researchers decide to ask, what aspects of communication researchers decide to look at, how researchers interact with subjects, what researchers perceive as their role.
- Explain and illustrate the implications of some of these theories for communication specialists. For example, how practitioners understand their roles, carry out their communication tasks, and are implicated within wider systems both inside and outside organizations.

**Course assignments:** All students are required to complete the following assignments:

1. Participate weekly in online discussions
2. Write three papers: a midterm, a book review, and a final paper

In addition, doctoral students are required to meet an additional one hour per week at a time to be determined. This meeting will be held in a seminar setting to discuss the course materials.

**Textbooks:** Both master's and doctoral students are required to read three textbooks in addition to course reserve materials:

1. Longo, B. (2000). **Spurious coin: a history of science, management, and technical writing**. Albany, NY: SUNY Press. ISBN: 0-7914-4556-9  
**NOTE:** We will discuss **Spurious Coin** within the first two weeks of class. Please order and read this text as quickly as possible.
2. Gurak, L. J. & M.M. Lay. (2002). **Research in technical communication**. Westport, CT: Praeger. ISBN: 1-56750-665-8
3. Johnson-Eilola, J., & S.A. Selber (2002). **Central works in technical communication** New York: Oxford. ISBN: 0-19-515705-2

Doctoral students will read two additional texts and discuss them in our weekly face-to-face seminars:

1. Henry, Jim. (2000). **Writing Workplace Cultures: An Archeology of Professional Writing**. Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois UP. ISBN: 0-8093-2320-6.
2. Scott, J. Blake, Longo, B., and Wills, K.V. (2006). **Critical Power Tools: Technical Communication and Cultural Studies**. Albany, NY: SUNY Press. ISBN: 978-0-7914-6775-6

### Engl. 6420/7420: Theory of Usability, Web Analysis, and Analytics Professor: David Hailey

This class is named “Usability Studies” because it was developed back in the dark ages when usability was only good tool for Web evaluation. In the past ten or so years, other tools have been developed that increase our abilities to analyze websites.

The other testing methodologies I will introduce include the Delphi Method, User Cognition Studies, User Preference Studies, Content Quality (accuracy and rhetoric), plus Code and Metadata Analysis, and, finally, Web analytics (ongoing examination of existing sites).

Adding these more complex processes makes it possible for you to integrate different analysis models at different times and different parts of the document. For example, you might do a Delphi Study to determine what questions you need to ask as you build the site – determine which tests and when.

Texts – Web Analytics: an hour a day, Avinash Kaushik, Sybex press, 2007. Plus your choice:

**Steve Krug’s Don’t Make Me Think**. A great book if you are working largely independently or with a small group where you need a book with easily accessible answers.

**Jakob Nielsen’s Designing Web Usability**, A good book that looks much more at visual design issues.

**Carol Barnum, Usability Testing and Research** A very comprehensive book that looks at all of the different usability ideas.

You should be able to choose your usability book or books based on my following description:

**Don’t Make Me Think** is a very accessible book with some good, though simple theories. Basically, Krug suggests that usability is a common sense approach to evaluating a site based on the need to be as simple as possible. It is a book that would be especially valuable if you are working alone or in a small group, or you do not have the financial support to do comprehensive usability studies.

**Designing Web Usability** is similarly simple, but includes much more on visual design issues.

**Usability Testing and Research** is a much more theoretical book that is essential if you ever intend to teach or research this topic – on the other hand, if you intend to teach or research this topic you need all of them.