

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATORS AS DESIGN ADVOCATES

A Course Design

This course design consists of a 3-unit project sequence for an undergraduate technical communication course. This class does not have a formal service learning component, but engages students in writing and design for communities in which they already participate. As design advocates, students work with community stakeholders on design projects in order to begin solving design-related issues in particular genres. Design advocates create new texts, revise existing texts, and/or provide "support" or alternative texts, engaging their communicative resources (in particular, their language varieties) to create accessible, usable texts for a given community while negotiating existing structures of power and developing innovative solutions.

Course Goals

- Explore what it means to advocate through design
- Create space for students to take inventory of and engage communicative resources through multimodal design
- Support students' collaboration with fellow community members to identify and begin to resolve design-related issues in particular genres
- Create space for students to modulate between micro and macro generic considerations
- Make meaningful connections between language, genre, and design
- Welcome the complexity of community-centered design in student projects
- Provide flexible projects options that accommodate and respond to community needs

Course Overview

This course begins with foundational readings and in-class discussions about genre, multimodality, language, and design. We create a class compendium of key terms and concepts (including community, communicative resources, and mutuality), create a "code of conduct for design advocates," and get started brainstorming about potential routes for community-centered design. Students also create an inventory of their communicative resources through self-reflection, interviews with peers, and identification of prior genre knowledge. The middle of the course consists primarily of in-class work time, design tool workshops, and practice analyzing genres and metagenres. The course concludes with small-scale usability in groups, where students choose one design to test and revise, or make recommendations for further development. During this stage of the semester, we also reflect on our approaches to community-centered design, students create a list of advice for students who take the course in the future, and we map the communicative strategies and languages we each employed throughout the semester.

Week One: Technical Communication as Advocacy

Readings: Excerpts from "The Technical Communicator as Advocate" (Jones), "The Technical Communicator as Participant, Facilitator, and Designer in Public Engagement Projects" (Moore), "The Roles of Technical Communication Researchers in Design Scholarship" (Sánchez)

Activities: Defining "Design Advocate," taking inventory of communicative resources, starting key terms and concepts compendium

Week Two: Multimodality + Genre

Readings: "Multimodality, Translingualism, and Rhetorical Genre Studies" (Gonzales), Chs. 6-9 of *Compose, Advocate, Design* (Wysocki and Lynch), excerpts from "Taking Up Space" (Dryer)

Activities: Identifying examples of genre as social action, adding to our key terms and concepts compendium, and practicing critical genre analysis of familiar designs

Week Three: Multimodal Language

Readings: The Glossary of Multimodal Terms, "What Hadn't Happened" (Anderson), Myths of Multimodal Composing (Braziller and Kleinfeld)

Activities: Multimodal Advocacy Textual Analysis (adapted from Warren-Riley and Hurley's "Multimodal Pedagogical Approaches to Public Writing"), adding to our compendium, and finding examples of multimodal language in everyday communication

Week Four: Community-Centered Design

Readings: "Translation as a User Localization Practice" (Gonzales and Zantjler), Equity-Centered Community Design Field Guide (Creative Reaction Lab), "Prototyping" (Dam and Siang)

Activities: Identifying the communities that we each inhabit and engage in, developing class guidelines for engaging with and alongside communities in design, brainstorming potential projects for Unit 1

Week Five: Identifying a Community Design Barrier

Readings: "Community-Based User Experience" (Emma J. Rose et al.), "Field Guide to Human-Centered Design" (Ideo-Org)

Activity: Developing design proposals for Unit 1 (Technical Description), Design tool workshop #1 (Adobe Suite)

Week Six: Community Listening

Readings: "The art of active listening" (Lukka, UX Collective), "Rhetorical Listening" (Ratcliffe)

Activity: Practicing strategies for active listening, discussing connections between design, listening, and empathy

Week Seven: Community Questioning

Readings: "DJs, Playlists, and Community" (Del Hierro)

Activity: Design tool workshop #2 (Canva, inventory of technology at digital resource lab on campus)

Week Eight: Responding via Design

Activity: In-class work week and addressing design "roadblocks" as they arise

Week Nine: Showcasing and Reflecting on Our Community Designs

Activities: Design tool workshop #3, Project Showcase

Week Ten: Identifying a Community Design Barrier

Readings: Exploring current and past projects of ASU Indigenous Design Collaborative. "Eight Years a 'Wooden Opponent'" (Pantelides, Mueller, and Green)

Activities: Developing design proposals for Unit 2 (Instructions)

Week Eleven: Community Listening

Readings: "How Do Multilingual Professionals Translate?" (Gonzales)

Activities: In-class work time, usability testing "crash course"

Week Twelve: Community Questioning

Activities: In-class work time, design tool workshop #4

Week Thirteen: Responding via Design

Activities: In-class work time

Week Fourteen: Identifying Design Barriers in Prototypes

Activities: In-class work time

Weeks Fifteen & Sixteen: Usability Testing

Activity: Usability testing planning and process

Major Unit Projects

Unit 1: Technical Description

Design advocates locate and work to address a design issue within their chosen community that can begin to be solved by a technical description of some kind.

Unit 2: Instructions

Design advocates locate and work to address a design issue within their chosen community that can begin to be solved by instructions of some kind (including a manual, how-to guide, step-by-step video, infographic, etc).

Unit 3: Usability Testing

In groups, design advocates select one technical description or instruction set to test through small-scale usability testing, creating a procedure, testing materials, and finding representative users who are willing to participate in testing process.

Assessment

Students are assessed by creating a list of their community's needs for their design project, then articulating connection points to the overall goals and expectations listed on the unit project assignment sheet. We create a rubric for each unit as a class that accounts for the range of design projects students have decided to pursue.