

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Graduates of Mercer's TCO Program have a unique combination of technological know-how and communication credentials that give them an edge in today's ever-changing marketplace.

Technical communication is a broad, rapidly expanding career field. Every type of industry uses technologies and needs to communicate well with many constituents. That means that they all need technical communicators!

Historically, the field was limited to writers and editors. While many jobs still require these skills, the field has grown by leaps and bounds. Today technical communicators may also specialize in graphics and design, multimedia, instructional design and training, interface design and usability, or knowledge management. The job market remains promising into the foreseeable future since technology continues to infiltrate every area of our lives.

RECOGNIZED PROGRAM

Mercer University School of Engineering's Bachelor of Science degree in technical communication, established in 1991, was the first in the Southeast. It has received national recognition as a model program in *Education in Scientific and Technical Communication: Academic Programs That Work* (Keene, 1997). The technical communication department (TCO) also offers a respected Master of Science degree in technical commu-

nication management. Targeted towards working professionals who want to be leaders in their companies, the MS degree is offered entirely by distance learning to students from around the world.

Every TCO faculty member holds a doctorate degree and is active in professional societies and scholarship. They serve in leadership roles for professional societies, such as the IEEE Professional Communication Society. They have received awards and recognition for significant contributions to the Society for Technical Communication. They are also active in the American Society for Engineering Education and others. Because of their hard work and the excellence of the graduates, Mercer's TCO program is recognized around the country.

SKILLS IN DEMAND

Combining strengths in both the technical and human areas, technical communication graduates are in demand in a wide variety of job areas, such as:

- ✓ **Multimedia** -- web design, graphic design, video production, instructional design for computer-based delivery

- ✓ **Documentation** – computer software, business processes, research and test results, corporate policies, ISO 9000 and other quality assurance
- ✓ **Marketing & Public Relations** – brochures, newsletters, product materials, publicity and outreach, media promotions and advertising, corporate communication, human resources
- ✓ **IT Support** – help desks, instructions and manuals, training development and delivery, hardware and software support, technology management
- ✓ **Knowledge Management** – intranet development, corporate planning, knowledge capture, best practices, user and task analysis, information development and distribution
- ✓ **Manufacturing** – process and product quality assurance, testing and design, business practices, organizational communication, information management
- ✓ **Instructional Design & Training** – corporate training, process development and implementation, instructional products and delivery, assessment of learning
- ✓ **Education & Public Service** – course development, technology support, media consultant, community services management and promotions, public health delivery, training
- ✓ **Defense** – related Industries-proposals, reports, documentation, instructional design and training, electronic performance support
- ✓ **Usability** – task analysis, user advocacy, usability testing, product improvement, interface design

AN EDUCATION YOU CAN USE

By careful advising and working with individual students, faculty advisors help students select courses that will

provide not only a solid broad foundation, but also some specialization within the field. Thus, students may select a minor in business, information technology systems, languages, graphic arts, and many other areas.

One significant area of interest for many technical communicators relates to global communication. Because the Web is world-wide, communicators must develop information that is usable by people from other nations and cultures. Documents must be prepared for easy translation. Graphics and language must be localized for the target population. In the past few years, a growing number of graduates have sought opportunities to study or intern abroad. Many of them acquire expertise in one or two languages in addition to English. This interest is growing as technology and business become more and more internationalized.

REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE

All students in the BS degree program are expected to work full time for at least one semester in some area of technical communication. This work experience allows them to apply classroom knowledge and to extend their capabilities for making immediate contributions to business and industry. Students are universally rated by their employers as having extremely high levels of communication skills, work ethic, knowledge of technology, and teamwork.

In every TCO class, the primary term project is a real-world problem to solve. Students have designed newsletters and brochures for industries; developed instructional materials for clients; created and edited web sites; developed CDs and videos; completed technical editing of articles for professionals; tested industry-developed products for usability; prepared research reports

on knowledge management; and developed and presented training for clients and faculty. Because of this experience, students graduate with an impressive portfolio of products to demonstrate their skills.

Each TCO class also has a major team project. In today's business environment, the "lone ranger" is rare. Professionals must know how to work effectively in collaborative work groups, and class projects provide this experience.

TIES TO INDUSTRY

Mercer's TCO Department maintains close ties with industries and practitioners around the country.

- ✓ Faculty members have experience working and consulting in industry. In addition, they teach practitioners in the MS program and keep abreast of current trends and practices.
- ✓ Students work for a full semester in an industry internship and deliver a report and a seminar upon completion of that work semester. Students, faculty, and other employers are invited to attend.
- ✓ Employers regularly contact the TCO Department with job opportunities; in addition, they provide valuable feedback to the department on the quality of the programs.

More than 150 companies have hired interns and graduates of Mercer's TCO BS and MS pro-

grams. The TCO Department keeps in touch with employers and facilitates contacts with students. Keeping up to date with research and theory while maintaining close ties with industry, the TCO Department provides exemplary education and resources for its students.

Mercer TCO graduates have interned and worked at a wide range of companies, including, Coca-Cola Enterprises, TSYS (a unit of Synovus), Holiday Inn Worldwide, Computer Process Controls (a unit of Emerson), Rayonier, Hayes Microcomputer, ARINC and Trane.

GROUNDING IN ENGINEERING

Though many technical communication programs are located in schools of arts & humanities, Mercer's TCO Department is located within the School of Engineering. Just as engineers take science and mathematics and apply them to solving real-world problems, so technical communicators take principles of communication and apply them to solving real-world information problems.

Being located within engineering provides many benefits to students:

1. Strong foundational knowledge of mathematics, sciences, and engineering
2. Focus on real-world problems and solutions for class projects
3. Rigorous analysis and problem-solving strategies
4. Mastery of a wide array of technologies
5. Experience serving on teams with engineers and computer specialists
6. Expectations of excellence

FUTURE OPTIONS

Not only is TCO an effective program for careers in technical communication, but it also prepares graduates for advanced study in many fields. Currently, a large percentage of graduates who have been out more than 5 years have enrolled in graduate programs:

- ✓ MBA
- ✓ Law
- ✓ Human Computer Interface
- ✓ Management Information Systems

- ✓ Instructional Technology
- ✓ Technical Communication Management

Because of the breadth of the field, students have the freedom to specialize at the master's or doctoral levels. Highly motivated and well prepared, TCO graduates excel in graduate programs.

DESTINED FOR SUCCESS

Students begin their professional lives at Mercer University in the Technical Communication Department. Taking part in all the courses and programmatic opportunities, they grow into professionals. A very active student chapter of the Society for Technical Communication involves them in leadership and networking around the world. When they walk across the stage at graduation, they walk into a profession with unlimited potential. They are prepared for the future.

With a required internship and class projects based on real-world problems, Mercer TCO students graduate with an impressive portfolio, demonstrating their wide range of skills.

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