ENG 4/574: Researching and Writing Technical Reports
Thursday, 7:00 p.m. – 8:15 p.m.
http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/haasg/eng4742007spring
Spring Semester, 2007
4 credits

Professor’s Contact Information
Dr. Gretchen Haas
201N Armstrong Hall
gretchen.haas@mnsu.edu
(507) 389-5506

Office Hours
Wednesday 1:00 – 3:00
I am also available to meet outside of office hours, on-line or off-line, if you contact me in advance to arrange an appointment.

About the Course
“Researching and Writing Technical Reports” or “Research Methods,” for short, is a course designed to teach you how to use a number of different research methods utilized within the field of technical communication and how to document the results of research. This course places a premium on applied learning so while you will read about research methods and read articles that report research, you will actually gain experience using each of the research methods we address in class. During the course, you will also have the opportunity to propose and conduct a larger-scale research project. The research methods this class addresses include secondary source research, interviews, observation-based research (from ethnographic and usability perspectives), surveys, text-based research, and experimental research. Students who complete this class should have a high level of confidence applying for research grants and proposing conference presentations, especially for the Undergraduate Research Conference (URC).

Texts
- Paper-based course packet (available from campus bookstore)
- On-line course packet (available from course Web site)
  Note: You may purchase this book or you may access it as an electronic resource from the MSU library Web site.

Equipment
- Computer
- High-speed internet access
- Microphone and speakers (Highly recommended)
- Web cam (Recommended)

Academic Dishonesty
Academic dishonesty is not tolerated in this or in any class at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Committing academic dishonesty in any portion of your work for this class is grounds for course failure.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
If you are a student with a documented disability, please see me as early in the semester as possible to discuss the necessary accommodations, and/or contact the Disability Services Office at (507) 389-2825 (V) or (800) 627-3529 (MRS/TTY).

Learning Objectives
- Learn about research methods commonly used in the discipline of technical communication
- Understand different research paradigms and their concomitant assumptions related to knowledge acquisition
- Gain experience in conducting a broad array of research methods, analyzing the varying results that come from different methods, and documenting the results of research
- Be able to design, execute, and present the results of a research project
- Become a critical reader of research articles published within technical communication
• Identify, analyze, and respond to potential ethical issues in technical communication research
• Understand how the practice of researching is really the practice of problem solving
• Be able to identify instances in your professional/home/community life that will benefit from a research methods-oriented problem solving approach.
• Understand how a research methods orientation will help you to identify the best solutions for problems you identify.
• Much research in technical communication involves people, so understand how research methods in technical communication relate to understanding sense-making, that is, how humans make sense of their professional/home/community worlds.
• Value the discipline that enables a well-designed research project to answer research questions
• Be able to develop problem-solving strategies for new situations.

Assignments and Grades
Your grade in this class will be comprised of your work in five categories: readiness assessment quizzes, responses to reading prompts, assignments related to team-based research mini-projects, reviews of other team’s mini-projects, and assignments related to your own individual research project. See Table 1 below for a breakdown of how your work in these five categories will contribute to your overall grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment Category</th>
<th>Percentage of Final Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Readiness Assessment Quizzes</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responses to Reading Prompts</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team-Based Mini-Projects (Assignments #2, 3, 4, 6, 7)</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews of Other Team’s Mini-Projects</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments Related to Your Individual Research Project (Assignments #1, 5, 8, 9)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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Table 1: Breakdown of Final Grade Calculation

I do not have any specific requirements regarding assignment formatting because the way you format your assignments will be part of your grade. I expect all assignments to be submitted without spelling and grammar errors. If you have an excessive number of errors in your assignment, I will return it to you for revision without grading it and you must turn in your revised assignment to receive a grade.

The evaluation criteria for each assignment will be included on individual assignment sheets. For undergraduate students:
• Meeting the criteria of each assignment will merit a C for your work.
• Mastering the criteria of each assignment will earn an A for your work.
• Should you fall short of meeting the criteria for the assignments, you will receive an F for your work.

For graduate students:
• Meeting the criteria of each assignment will merit a B for your work.
• Mastering the criteria of each assignment will earn an A for your work.
• Should you fall short of meeting the criteria for the assignments, you will receive a C for your work.
• The Graduate School reserves D and F grades for grossly substandard performance.

My policy on late assignments is that late is better than never; however, the grades of assignments turned in late will reflect a penalty that is commensurate to the degree to which the assignment was late. For example, an assignment turned in one week late will merit a ten percentage-point deduction; an assignment turned in three weeks late will merit a thirty percentage-point deduction; an assignment turned in five weeks late will merit a fifty percentage-point reduction, and so on. Additionally, when you turn in your assignment late, you forfeit the comments you usually can expect from me in response to your assignments.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week/ Date</th>
<th>Reading Assignment</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week One: Introduction to the Class</strong></td>
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| **Before class on January 18** | | • Purchase paper-based course packet  
• Test technology (D2L, StudyMate, Breeze) |
| **In class on January 18** | | • Introduce the course  
• Individual introductions  
• Review syllabus |
| **Week Two: Introduction to Research** | | |
“The Introduction” (pp. 73-84)  
“Research Questions and Hypotheses” (pp. 105-113)  
“Qualitative Procedures: Data Analysis and Interpretation” (pp. 190-195)  
• Respond to reading prompts |
| **In class on January 25** | | • Terminology exercise  
• Moral reasoning exercise |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week/ Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weeks Three and Four: Interviews</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Before</strong> class on February 1</td>
<td>Seidman, Irving. <em>Interviewing as Qualitative Research</em>. New York: Teachers College Press, 1998. “Why Interview” (pp. 3-5) “Technique Isn’t Everything, But It Is a Lot” (pp. 63-78) “Analyzing, Interpreting, and Sharing Interview Material” (pp. 107-112)</td>
<td>• Complete required readings • Take readiness assessment quiz • View method demonstration materials</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>In</strong> class on February 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Complete StudyMate quiz with team • Design interview mini-project with team</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Before</strong> class on February 8</td>
<td>Jameson, Jessica. “Transcending Intractable Conflict in Health Care: An Exploratory Study of Communication and Conflict Among Anesthesia Providers.” <em>Journal of Health Communication</em> 8.6 (2003): 563-581. (electronic course packet)</td>
<td>• Conduct mini-project research • Document mini-project method on the wiki • Enter data and preliminary findings on the wiki • Read research articles • Respond to reading prompts • Read my response to the articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In</strong> class on February 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Analyze interview data/findings and work on fleshing out your group’s report of interview-based research by adding an introduction and a conclusion and refining your methods, findings, and discussion sections.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Weeks Five and Six: Surveys</strong></td>
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<td><strong>In</strong> class on February 15</td>
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<td>• As a team, discuss the other teams’ interview mini-projects and respond with feedback and comments on their wiki pages • Complete StudyMate quiz with team • Design survey mini-project with team</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week/ Date</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reading Assignment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
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</table>
| **Before class on February 22** | Faber, Brenton. “Gen/Ethics? Organizational Ethics and Student and Instructor Conflicts in Workplace Training.” Technical Communication Quarterly. 10.3 (2001): 291-318. (electronic course packet) | • Conduct mini-project research  
• Document mini-project method on the wiki  
• Enter data and preliminary findings on the wiki  
• Read research articles  
• Respond to reading prompts  
• Read my response to the articles |
| **In class on February 22** | | • Analyze survey data/findings and work on fleshing out your group’s report of survey-based research by adding an introduction and a conclusion and refining your methods, findings, and discussion sections. |
| **Weeks Seven and Eight: Text-Based Research** | | |
| **Before class on March 1** | Macnealy, Mary Sue. Strategies for Empirical Research in Writing. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1999. (eReserves)  
“Discourse or Text Analysis” (pp. 123-147)  
• Complete required readings  
• Take readiness assessment quiz  
• View method demonstration materials |
| **In class on March 1** | | • As a team, discuss the other teams’ survey mini-projects and respond with feedback and comments on their wiki pages  
• Complete StudyMate quiz with team  
• Design text-based mini-project with team |
• Document mini-project method on the wiki  
• Enter data and preliminary findings on the wiki  
• Read research articles  
• Respond to reading prompts  
• Read my response to the articles |
| **In class on March 8** | | • Analyze text-based research data/findings and work on fleshing out your group’s report of text-based research by adding an introduction and a conclusion and refining your methods, findings, and discussion sections. |

**Thursday, March 15: No Class – Spring Break**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week/ Date</th>
<th>Reading Assignment</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weeks Nine and Ten: Observation-Based Research</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>In</strong> class on March 22</td>
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<td>• As a team, discuss the other teams’ text-based mini-projects and respond with feedback and comments on their wiki pages • Complete StudyMate quiz with team • Design observation-based mini-project with team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In</strong> class on March 29</td>
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<td>• Analyze observational data/findings and work on fleshing out your group’s report of observation-based research by adding an introduction and a conclusion and refining your methods, findings, and discussion sections.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Weeks Eleven and Twelve: Experimental Research</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week/ Date</td>
<td>Reading Assignment</td>
<td>Activities</td>
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</table>
| **In class on April 5** |                                                                                  | • As a team, discuss the other teams’ observation-based mini-projects and respond with feedback and comments on their wiki pages  
• Complete StudyMate quiz with team  
• Design experimental mini-project with team             |
• Document mini-project method on the wiki  
• Enter data and preliminary findings on the wiki  
• Read research articles  
• Respond to reading prompts  
• Read my response to the articles |
| **In class on April 12** |                                                                                  | • Analyze experiment data/findings and work on fleshing out your group’s report of experimental research by adding an introduction and a conclusion and refining your methods, findings, and discussion sections. |
| **Weeks Thirteen, Fourteen, Fifteen and Finals Week: Your Research** |                                                                                  | • Complete your group’s experimental research report |
| **Before class on April 19** |                                                                                  | • As a team, discuss the other teams’ experimental mini-projects and respond with feedback and comments on their wiki pages  
• Discuss individual research projects to date: woes, successes, and preliminary data             |
| **In class on April 19** |                                                                                  | • Send your final research project draft to your team members and me |
| **Before class on April 26** |                                                                                  | • Workshop research data/report drafts |
| **In class on April 26** |                                                                                  | • Present individual research project |
| **In class on May 3** |                                                                                  | • Present individual research project |
| **In class on May 10** |                                                                                  | • Present individual research project |