Master of Science in Technical Communication

Policies & Procedures

Overview of the Program

Employers in all sectors consistently rank communication skills as being crucial to success and indicate an ongoing need for employees at all levels who can communicate effectively. However, today’s ability to communicate effectively requires not only traditional verbal skills, but also facility with visual communication, with digital media, and with the tools used to create and produce communication.

The Master of Science in Technical Communication is designed to prepare students to communicate effectively in a 21st century information environment. The program teaches students how to design, produce, and manage print and digital texts, using traditional and developing technologies. Through a balance of theory and practice, the curriculum ensures that students develop the analytical abilities, technological expertise, and hands-on skills necessary for success as a technical communicator; likewise, the curriculum provides students with a comprehensive understanding of the professional, cultural, and ethical issues that shape the field. The program prepares students for technical communication positions in the private, public, and non-profit sectors and offers professionals the opportunity to further advance their careers. Students who complete the program will be accomplished writers, editors, designers, and researchers who are able to respond effectively to a range of audiences, issues, and communication situations.

Program Objectives

The goal of the MS in Technical Communication is to provide students with strengths in four key areas: rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, analysis, and research; practices and processes of the field; and technology. More specifically, students who successfully complete the program should:

Rhetorical Knowledge
- Recognize and understand the ways in which genres shape communication
- Understand the importance of user-centered design
- Analyze, articulate and respond to the needs of specific audiences and communication situations
- Apply conventions of genre and form appropriate to specific audiences and contexts

Critical Thinking, Analysis, and Research
- Understand a variety of theoretical approaches to technical communication
- Understand relationships among language, knowledge, and power
- Recognize, analyze, and understand the contexts within which language, information, and knowledge are produced, managed, organized, and disseminated
- Integrate previously held beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge with new information and the ideas of others
- Understand ideological perspectives regarding research methods and research design
- Read, interpret, and evaluate research studies
- Identify and apply appropriate methods for investigating particular research questions
Practices and Processes
- Develop flexible strategies for drafting, revising, and editing
- Demonstrate ability to communicate verbally and visually in multiple genres
- Understand the collaborative and social aspects of research, writing, and design processes
- Demonstrate awareness of community and cultural patterns in communication
- Demonstrate understanding of legal and ethical uses of information and technology

Technology
- Demonstrate a critical perspective of technology, its uses, users, and contexts
- Understand the role of technologies/media in accessing, managing, developing, and communicating information
- Choose appropriate technologies for presenting, organizing, and communicating information for a range of audiences, purposes, and genres
- Demonstrate ability to use a range of technologies for writing, editing, and designing
- Develop flexibility in adapting to new technologies

Program Requirements

Required Courses

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required Core Courses (6 credit hours)</th>
<th>Credit Hrs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TWC 504 Applied Rhetoric &amp; Technical Communication</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWC 505 Research in Technical Communication</td>
<td>3</td>
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Elective Courses (24 credits)

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<tr>
<th>Electives (24 credit hours). Choose eight courses from the list below. Courses should be selected in consultation with program head or committee. Other courses may be approved by the program head to fulfill elective requirements.</th>
<th>Credit Hrs</th>
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<tr>
<td>TWC 501 Fundamentals of Technical Communication</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students who do not have previous technical communication coursework or relevant industry experience must take this course</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWC 511 Principles of Visual Communication</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWC 514 Visualizing Data &amp; Information</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWC 521 Principles of Web Authoring</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWC 522 Social Media in the Workplace</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWC 531 Principles of Technical Editing</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWC 543 Grant &amp; Proposal Writing</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWC 544 User Experience</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWC 545 Content Management &amp; Topic-Based Authoring</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWC 546 Technical and Scientific Reports</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>TWC 551 Copyright &amp; Intellectual Property in the Electronic Age</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWC 552 Information in the Digital Age</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWC 598 Special Topics (may be repeated for credit with different topics)</td>
<td>3</td>
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Capstone Requirement

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<tr>
<th>Capstone Requirement (choose one of the following options)</th>
<th>Credit Hrs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TWC 593</strong> (ASUOnline students must do an applied project). An applied project on a topic of relevance to the field and your career interests.</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TWC 599</strong> A thesis on a topic of relevance to the field and your career interests.</td>
<td>6</td>
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**Applied Project**

An applied project should demonstrate your ability to apply knowledge and skills learned in the program, use research methods appropriate to the field, and prepare a deliverable (document, website, etc.) that is effectively structured, written, and designed for its intended users and purposes. The applied project will result in two documents:

**Workplace Deliverable.** The workplace deliverable is an information product that you are preparing for a specific audience, purpose, and context of use. It may be a document requested by an employer or client (real or hypothetical). The deliverable can take a variety of forms/genres, including a manual, report, online help system, website, grant proposal, training guide, etc.; in order to meet the criteria for the applied project, the final deliverable should be the equivalent of approximately 30 pages. If your workplace deliverable will be designed for digital use rather than print-based, consult with your committee chair about requirements for length.

**Metacognitive Analysis.** Accompanying the workplace deliverable will be an analysis of approximately 30 pages in which you discuss how your project—both the process and the workplace deliverable—demonstrates that you have applied what you have learned in the program. The analysis should discuss your goals for the workplace deliverable and your methods for ensuring it meets those goals. The analysis should also discuss how and why you used coursework and/or other learning to complete the project, and how the project and your new knowledge and skills fit within the bigger picture of technical communication and your role as a professional/technical communicator. The goal of the analysis is to articulate what you did and why you did it, but also to place your work and your learning within a larger professional context.

**Thesis**

A thesis should demonstrate your ability to apply what you have learned in the program to a scholarly/academic research project. The thesis is an in-depth paper of approximately 60-70 pages that reflects original research on a specific topic within technical communication. It demonstrates that you can articulate research questions, identify methods appropriate for investigating those questions, apply the methods, and critically analyze and interpret the findings.

The thesis option is appropriate if you have interest in or intend to apply to doctoral programs or want to pursue research that is scholarly or empirical in nature, rather than a workplace deliverable. If you’re not sure if this option is right for you, discuss your ideas with your advisor and/or committee chair.
**Program of Study** ([https://graduate.asu.edu/sites/default/files/How-to_iPOS.pdf](https://graduate.asu.edu/sites/default/files/How-to_iPOS.pdf))

The Graduate College requires all students to submit an electronic program of study form (iPOS) that lists the courses you have taken and those you plan to take, as well as your chair and committee members. The iPOS is completed online and can be revised as necessary. The iPOS should be filed during your second semester in the program; it *must* be filed before you have completed 50% of the credits for the program. Please do not list a faculty member as your chair or committee member until you have obtained his/her consent to serve in that role. After electronic submission, the iPOS is then sent to MSTC faculty for approval.

**Satisfactory Academic Progress**

All graduate students are expected to make systematic progress toward completion of their degree. The degree must be completed within six years. Satisfactory progress entails meeting all of the benchmarks and requirements set by ASU as well as those set by the program, including successfully completing and defending the thesis or applied project (see below). Students are required to maintain a minimum of a 3.00 GPA and must be continuously enrolled, as described below.

**Maintain a minimum of 3.00 GPA on both the iPOS and Graduate GPAs.** The iPOS GPA is calculated from all courses that appear on the approved iPOS. The Graduate GPA is calculated from all courses numbered 500 or higher that appear on the transcript, with the exception of courses counted toward an undergraduate degree at ASU (unless shared with a master’s degree in an approved bachelor’s/master’s degree program); and courses identified as deficiencies in the original letter of admission.

If either GPA falls below 3.00, you must develop, with your advisor, an academic performance improvement plan that includes the conditions and timeframe for making satisfactory academic progress in the degree program. A student is considered to be on academic probation until the conditions specified in the academic performance improvement plan are met and both GPAs are above 3.00. If the student has not achieved the minimum cumulative graduate GPA of 3.0 by the end of the probationary period, the Director of the MSTC program will recommend to the Division of Graduate Studies that the student be withdrawn from the program. All coursework undertaken during this probationary period must be approved by the program Director prior to enrollment. Probationary students will not be permitted to register for the capstone project.

Grades below 2.00 (C) cannot be used to meet the requirements for a graduate degree. Additionally, a student who receives a grade of C (2.00) or below in a core (required) course must repeat the course in a regularly scheduled class the next time it is offered. Students will not be allowed to repeat a core course more than once. Failure to achieve a grade of B or above in a repeated core course will result in a recommendation to the Division of Graduate Studies that the student be withdrawn from the program.

**Maintain continuously enrollment in the degree program.** Failing to do so without a Graduate College-approved Request to Maintain Continuous Enrollment is considered to be lack of academic progress and may lead to automatic dismissal of the student from the degree program. Persistent “W” and “I” grades during multiple semesters on a plan of study or transcript may reflect lack of academic progress.

If you fail to satisfy the requirements of the program and/or the university, you may be dismissed from
the program based on the Academic Unit’s recommendation to the Graduate College. The Vice Provost for Graduate Education makes the final determination.

Academic excellence is expected of all students doing graduate work. Upon recommendation from the Director of the MSTC program, the Division of Graduate Studies can withdraw a student who is not progressing satisfactorily. Students who have not met the program’s standards for satisfactory progress also have the option of voluntarily withdrawing from the program.

The highest standards of academic integrity are expected of all students; failure to meet these standards will result in expulsion from the program. The ASU academic integrity policy is available at [www.asu.edu/aad/manuals/sta/sta104-01.html](http://www.asu.edu/aad/manuals/sta/sta104-01.html).

**Procedure for Theses and Applied Projects**

Each capstone option requires a committee made up of at least three faculty members, two of whom, including the chair, must be from the Technical Communication graduate faculty. Your committee will work with you to select an appropriate topic, supervise your progress, and evaluate your capstone project, whether it is a thesis or an applied project.

1. **Select your graduate committee (3 members total).** Begin by asking potential committee members if they are available and would be willing to serve on the committee. You will work most closely with the committee chair, and it is important that there is a good fit in terms of areas of interest and research. You will be required to enter the committee information into myASU in order to set up your final plan of study (iPOS) for graduation. We encourage you to form your committee by the end of your second semester in the program (or when you have completed 12-15 credits of coursework).

2. **Develop your thesis or applied project proposal.** You will work with your committee chair to develop your proposal. The purpose of the proposal is to persuade your committee that you have a viable project and that you have worked out a plan for completing that project. The proposal should demonstrate that you have done enough background research to be able to articulate the value of the project as well as the methods you intend to use. It should include the following:
   - a literature review that provides context and outlines the key concepts underlying the project
   - research questions (or an explanation of the purpose of the applied project deliverable and the “problem” it solves or “need” it fulfills)
   - detailed discussion of research methods and planned analyses
   - timeline for completing the project

3. **Schedule a proposal meeting.** Once your chair indicates that the proposal is ready, send it to your committee members and schedule a meeting with the entire committee (this can be via phone, Skype, or other arrangement). During the meeting, you will discuss your proposal in order to get feedback from the committee and gain approval to move forward with the project. Your proposal should be approved the session before you would like to begin work on your thesis/applied project.

4. **Complete your research and draft your thesis/applied project documents.** Your proposal should provide a starting point for your thesis or for the analysis of your applied project, but you
should expect to revise and expand the literature review and methodology sections in particular as you get further into the project. As with the proposal, provide a draft of your thesis or applied project to your committee chair for review before it is submitted to other committee members. Your chair will decide when the project is ready to defend. If you are writing a thesis, it must be formatted according to ASU Graduate Education Guidelines: [http://graduate.asu.edu/format](http://graduate.asu.edu/format).

5. **Schedule the defense for your thesis or applied project.** Be sure to allow time for revisions before the defense, and keep track of all Graduate College requirements such as format, and review and submission deadlines. Generally, you should plan to have a complete draft of your thesis or applied project (deliverable and metacognitive analysis) to your chair at least one month before the final date to schedule a defense (see Graduate College deadlines).

If you are completing a thesis, the defense must also be officially scheduled via your MyASU website under the My Programs and Degree Progress “Defense” tab for ASU Graduate Education. This must be done at least ten working days prior to the actual defense. More information is available here: [http://graduate.asu.edu/](http://graduate.asu.edu/). An Applied Project defense does not need to be scheduled via MyASU.

6. **Defend your thesis or applied project.** During your defense, you will give a 15-20 minute professional presentation that reviews key aspects of your thesis or applied project. The presentation will be followed by a discussion of the project with your committee. All members of your committee must be present for the defense, though they may participate via phone, Skype, or other arrangement. Based on the merits of the project and the defense, the project will earn a Pass, Pass with Major Revisions, Pass with Minor Revisions, or Fail.

**PLEASE NOTE** that capstone credit hours (TWC 593 for the Applied Project; TWC 599 for the Thesis), including the final defense, must be completed during the academic year (August to May). They cannot be completed during the summer.

**Graduation**

Graduate students are responsible for meeting all Graduate College deadlines for completion of requirements, as well as requirements of the program. The Graduate College posts the deadlines for completing program requirements for graduation: [http://graduate.asu.edu/graddeadlines.html](http://graduate.asu.edu/graddeadlines.html). Students completing a thesis must refer to the deadline for thesis formatting, defense scheduling, and final submission. Applied projects follow the deadlines for the culminating experience on the Graduate College schedule.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Students will not be approved to attend graduation ceremonies unless all requirements are met by the deadlines set by Graduate College.

**Contact**

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**Graduate College Policies and Procedures can be found here:** [http://graduate.asu.edu/faculty_staff/policies](http://graduate.asu.edu/faculty_staff/policies)