

***Getting to Know Us:
The Technical Communication Program at
Mercer University School of Engineering***

First year composition: Background

Mercer's English Department in the College of Liberal Arts dropped the requirement for Freshman English several years ago. Students usually take Freshman Year Experience, an interdisciplinary course that includes readings and writings, but have no structured composition course that is common across all undergraduate degree programs.

Mercer's Macon campus has had a series of undergraduate WAC efforts since approximately 1980. About half the faculty attended summer WAC workshops in the 1980s. A large number of faculty from all disciplines teach in Interdisciplinary Studies, Freshman Year Experience, and the Great Books Program—all of which have strong writing emphasis. Though there is no formal WAC program, there is an emphasis throughout the undergraduate programs.

Communication across the engineering curriculum

In Mercer's School of Engineering, a junior-level technical communication course has been required since the School's founding in 1985. All students in the engineering degree programs must take this course (TCO 341), as well as a freshman course (EGR 108) designed and led by the technical communication department, which has a heavy writing emphasis.

There is a strong commitment among engineering faculty for excellence in professional communication. Since our department is located in Engineering, technical communication faculty work side by side with engineering colleagues on a daily basis, sharing teaching experiences, committee work, and assessment responsibilities. The technical communication faculty often provide lectures for other classes, individual and small-group coaching for colleagues, and technical assistance with teaching technologies. Engineering faculty generally consider the technical communication faculty to be an asset contributing towards the strong reputation of Mercer's engineering graduates as competent communicators.

ABET assessment

The ability to communicate complex technical information to both specialized and public audiences is one of Mercer's eight Program Objectives regularly measured by ABET accreditation reviews. Data from employer and alumni surveys indicate that technical communication is one of the strongest skills of Mercer engineering graduates, primarily because of the across-the-curriculum emphasis.

In two recent SACS-related university-wide writing assessments, the engineering students performed better on writing than did any other majors in the University. The panel of evaluators were professors from all Mercer's schools and colleges.

The links in the technical communication learning chain are as follows:

- EGR 107, Introduction to Engineering Design—freshman design course with team projects, proposals, formal and informal presentations
- **EGR 108, Professional Practices**—freshman course with writing and speaking emphasis, engineering ethics, interactions between technology and society, and a research paper on cutting edge topics in engineering (course designed and managed by the TCO department)
- **TCO 341, Technical Communication**—junior course focusing on writing as an engineering professional requirement; individual and collaborative projects, including feasibility report, memos and letters, resumes, instructions with usability testing, proposal for real campus improvements, briefings and formal presentations (course designed and taught by the TCO department)
- Engineering 487-488—senior capstone experience with team design project for real clients; project and team management, formal written proposals and presentations for both the Preliminary Design Review and Critical Design Review.

Land beyond:

- BS in technical communication; majors, minors—please see the program requirements at www.mercer.edu/tco
- MS in technical communication management—please see the program requirements at www.mercer.edu/mstco
- Option for technical communication minor for graduate students in the Master of Science in Engineering—students selecting the all-coursework master's degree in engineering can elect to take three master's level technical communication courses from the MSTCO program

We would be pleased to provide additional information upon request.

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