

SPECIAL REPORT
of the
ACADEMIC MATTERS COUNCIL
concerning a
CERTIFICATE IN
PROFESSIONAL WRITING AND TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Presented at the
769th Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate
May 4, 2017

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The English Department is proposing to convert an existing letter of specialization program in Professional Writing and Technical Communication to a certificate. The proposal notes that the program already meets the requirements for a certificate, and that employers would more readily recognize the credential if it were presented as a certificate.

At its meeting on April 12, 2017, the Academic Matters Council voted unanimously to recommend Faculty Senate approval of the proposal. It was submitted as Proposal #3647 in the Course and Curriculum Management System.

MOTION: That the Faculty Senate approve the Certificate in Professional Writing and Technical Communication, as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 17-072.

Briefly describe the certificate.

This certificate prepares students for careers as professional communicators in fields such as technical writing, grant writing, editing, publishing, and information design.

Provide a brief overview of the process for developing this certificate.

The Professional Writing and Technical Communication Program (PWTC) has existed as a letter of specialization for nearly twenty years. The courses in the PWTC letter of specialization are already well-established, with adequate staffing and regular offerings each year. We believe the program already fulfills the requirements of a certificate, and therefore little or no additional development is required. The PWTC website can be accessed here: <http://www.umass.edu/pwtc/index.html>.

Describe the certificate's purpose and the particular knowledge and skills that will be acquired by participating students.

The certificate provides students with training that prepares them for careers in technical writing, professional communication, and information design. Our courses provide: 1) practice in technical and professional writing, editing, and software documentation; 2) hands-on training in a range of industry-standard software; 3) an introduction to theories and practices of information design.

If this proposal requires no additional resources, say so and briefly explain why. If this proposal requires additional resources, explain how they will be paid for. For proposals involving instruction, indicate how many new enrollments are expected and whether the courses have room to accommodate them.

This proposal requires no additional resources (see above).

Please describe the curriculum for this certificate, listing all required courses and possible electives, any prerequisites or GPA requirements, the recommended order or coursework and any other pertinent information. You may attach additional materials related to the curriculum at the end of this section.

To be admitted into any of the five PWTC courses, students must have junior or senior standing and a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better. In order to continue in the PWTC program, students must earn a grade of 'B' or better in each PWTC course. Students who complete all five courses with a grade of 'B' or better will be awarded the program certificate.

REQUIRED COURSES

English 379: Introduction to Professional Writing (Fall)

This course offers an overview of commonly encountered professional genres such as memos, reports, job materials, and grant proposals. Students gain practice writing in these genres, with an emphasis on clarity and concision. They develop more sophisticated research skills and gain experience in communicating specialized information to non-specialist readers. Finally, they are exposed to a range of professional writing careers as they explore writing on both theoretical and practical planes through consideration of audience, as well as wider professional, social, and cultural contexts. Prereq.: ENGLWP 112 or equivalent; junior or senior status (or instructor approval) with a cumulative GPA of 3.0.

English 380: Professional Writing and Tech Comm 1 (Fall)

Introduces principles of technical writing and software documentation. This course simulates the writing and editing processes used in the computer industry; students write a 20-25-page manual documenting a software product, usually Microsoft Word. Prereq.: ENGL 379 (which may be taken concurrently) or permission of the instructor; junior or senior status with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better.

English 391C: Advanced Software for Professional Writers (Spring)

In this course, students learn to create web content using industry standard techniques and software for building websites (for example: HTML, CSS, and Adobe Photoshop). The major ongoing project for the course will be to create an online portfolio of content that demonstrates your skills as a web designer and professional writer. Class time includes lab work on the portfolio, workshop critiques of work-in-progress, and in-class exercises. Prereq.: English 379 or permission of instructor; junior or senior status and a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better.

English 381: Professional Writing and Tech Comm 2 (Spring)

This course continues and extends the work of ENGL 380. Students learn and apply principles of software documentation, information design, typography, and page design. They also learn to use industry-standard software programs such as Adobe InDesign, MadCap Flare, and Adobe FrameMaker. Prereq.: ENGL 380, junior or senior status, or permission of instructor, with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better.

English 382: Professional Writing and Tech Comm 3 (Spring)

This course serves as the capstone for the Professional Writing and Technical Communication Certificate. As such, the course has two aims: professionalization and specialization. Students participate in mock interviews, workshop their professional portfolios, and learn about careers in technical writing and information technology from working professionals. The course also provides students with directed opportunities to explore the theory and practice of particular kinds of writing and technology (e.g., report writing, grant proposals, speechwriting, voiceovers, integration with video and film, web site development). Each student presents a significant report on a topic related to technology, communication, and culture. Prereq.: ENGL 380, junior or senior status, or permission of instructor, and a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better.

RECOMMENDED ORDER:

English 379 and 380 may be taken concurrently and are prerequisites for English 381 and 382. English 379 is a prerequisite for English 391C, but this prereq may be waived with approval from the instructor (to allow students more scheduling flexibility). Although the entire program may be completed during a single academic year, students are encouraged to spread the work over their junior and senior years. English 382 is designed to be the capstone course for the certificate and should be taken last.

Explain how these courses represent a coherent course of study.

Students progress through the courses from more general to more specialized. English 379, the "gateway" course, serves as a broad introduction to professional writing and teaches writing in genres including resumes, cover letters, progress reports, and proposals. English 380 focuses on software documentation and document design. English 381 continues the work of 380, using more specialized software. English 391c teaches software and coding for designing and building websites. In English 382, the "capstone course" for the certificate, students undertake ambitious individual projects with technology and culture as their focus. Students also learn of current practices in industry from guest speakers, most of whom are PWTC program graduates.

Describe how there is a clear educational objective that can be achieved in an efficient and well-defined manner.

In PWTC, students learn how to connect the writing and critical thinking skills they learn in their major(s) to specific career paths. They become familiar with non-academic genres of writing, and they become more sophisticated in thinking about the ways that technology and the visual presentation of information affect how readers engage with written communication.

Explain how the course sequence offers a clear objective at the appropriate educational level.

Based on the Co-Directors (Toomey, Solberg) combined experience of 27 years teaching this PWTC curriculum, we feel confident that it is pitched at the right level for junior and senior UMass undergraduates. Students who complete the coursework for the certificate are prepared to undertake careers in professional writing, technical communication, information design, and related fields after graduation.

Describe the perceived need for this certificate.

Employers would more readily recognize our students' good work if it is presented as comprising a certificate. Also, students have expressed a desire to see their PWTC coursework highlighted on their transcript as a credential.

If the courses that comprise the certificate have been or currently are being offered, describe their schedule of availability. If the certificate is comprised of new courses, describe their planned availability.

Each of the courses required for this certificate are offered once every year. English 379 and 380 are offered every fall semester, and English 380, 391C, and 382 are offered every spring semester.

If the certificate requires or includes courses from outside the sponsoring department, provide evidence of agreement(s) with the unit(s) offering those courses. You may attach any memoranda of understanding below.

N/A

If the requirements for this certificate overlap with those of another certificate or a degree program, describe that overlap.

(Note that if a student who has completed a certificate seeks clearance for a degree program that overlaps with that certificate program, the Registrar will note on the transcript that the certificate has been superseded by the degree.)

Two of the program's courses may count as electives toward the English major; three count as general graduation credits. Students who complete the specialization also receive credit for the I.E. requirement (which English 382 satisfies). Two of the program's courses (English 391C and 382) may be counted toward the IT Minor.

What type of student is allowed to participate in this certificate program? (E.g., matriculated UMass students, non-matriculated CPE students, Five College students, graduate students, students in a specific degree program, etc.)

Non-majors: Although the program is housed within the English Department, PWTC courses are open to students in all other majors, so long as they meet the prerequisites. **Graduate and Continuing Education students:** Students undertaking advanced degrees may enroll in PWTC courses only by special arrangement with the instructors. Although persons not enrolled in a UMass Amherst degree program cannot receive the program certificate, they may enroll in the program's courses (space permitting) through UMass-Amherst Continuing and Professional Education.

What role will this certificate play in relation to other departments or degree programs on campus? Certificates vary widely across campus and may represent a subset of an existing degree program, a multidisciplinary program, or an entirely free-standing area of focus.

This certificate is a free-standing area of focus, but some of its courses serve other letters of specialization in the English major.

Is this a transitional certificate program?

(Transitional certificate programs are comprised of core courses from specific degree programs and may act as stepping stones into those programs. If a student who has completed a transitional certificate matriculates to the University and completes the degree program associated with that certificate, the transcript will note that the certificate has been superseded by the degree.)

No