



# Beginning your Graduate Work in Professional and Technical Writing

Fall 2022



College of Humanities  
and Social Sciences



## General Info

- Program Director and Primary Advisor: Dr. Heidi Lawrence
- Graduate Academic Coordinator: Jay Patel
- Faculty: Dr. Isidore Dorpenyo, Dr. Douglas Eyman, Dr. McKinley Green, Dr. Nupoor Ranade



# Communication

- Activate/use your GMU email
- Sign up for the PTW Listserv
  - Send an email message to [listserv@listserv.gmu.edu](mailto:listserv@listserv.gmu.edu).
  - Leave the subject line of the email blank. In the body of the message type the following: **subscribe ENGLPWR-L YOUR NAME** (i.e. Jane Doe). So, “subscribe STR-ENGLPWR-L JANE DOE.” You will receive a confirmation message with the subject line, “Command Confirmation Request.”
  - Follow the instructions in the confirmation message to complete your subscription. Once your request is complete you will receive a message that your subscription has been completed.
- Sign up for the PTW Slack
  - [https://join.slack.com/t/ptwmason/shared\\_invite/zt-nk41zizp-tZUIfhx\\_ihLKPpI2wRdMJw](https://join.slack.com/t/ptwmason/shared_invite/zt-nk41zizp-tZUIfhx_ihLKPpI2wRdMJw)
- Sign up for the GMU STC\* Slack:
  - [https://join.slack.com/t/gmustc/shared\\_invite/zt-4oec9p36-o0dBo\\_da6SMiGPeCpfP\\_0w](https://join.slack.com/t/gmustc/shared_invite/zt-4oec9p36-o0dBo_da6SMiGPeCpfP_0w)
  - \*GMU STC is a student organization that runs professional development events throughout the year. You should join/get involved!



# Advising

- As Program Director, Dr. Lawrence is every PTW student's advisor.
- She is on leave for the 2022-2023 academic year. She is nholding open advising sessions on the first Friday of every month via Zoom. See your email and Slack for the link!
- You are also encouraged to network and seek out the advice of other faculty and students as you move through the program.
- You are responsible for mapping and tracking your own progress through the program, using all of the tools available to you.
- Dr. Lawrence **does not** prompt decisionmaking or track specific degree progress for students. This is your responsibility, using the tools available to you from the university.



# Degree Requirements—MA

- <https://english.gmu.edu/graduate/advising/sheets>
- Core Classes (12 credits)
- PTW Classes (9 credits)
- Theory Class (3 credits)
- EITHER:
  - Thesis (6 credits 799)
  - OR
  - Project (3 credits 797 PLUS an elective)
- Generally, I will approve substitutions for any English class for a PTW course, though you must contact me **before** you take the course for the substitutions



# Degree Requirements—Graduate Certificate

- [https://d101vc9winf8ln.cloudfront.net/documents/37345/original/PWR\\_Certificate\\_Advising\\_Sheet\\_2020.pdf?1603382871](https://d101vc9winf8ln.cloudfront.net/documents/37345/original/PWR_Certificate_Advising_Sheet_2020.pdf?1603382871)
- 18 credits total
- Core Classes (12 credits)
- PLUS two additional courses—proposal writing, technical communication, etc.
- Many students transfer from the Certificate to the MA program.
- You do not have to reapply; Jay can help you with a transfer to the MA.
- But—do this as soon as you can. You can only transfer 12 credits from one degree program to the other, so you do not want to lose credits.



# Courses

- Courses run on multi-year rotations
  - 501 and 503 run every fall
  - 502 and 505 run every spring
  - Proposal writing runs annually—509 in fall, 689 in spring
  - 797 (project) is a group independent study and can be taken whenever you are ready
- The only summer class we consistently run is 507 (web authoring)
- Courses like 611 and 613 tend to run every other year, usually in the fall (but sometimes more often)
- Think about course variety—mixing up theory/reading-heavy classes with writing/production-heavy classes



# Being a Graduate Student

- Very different than being an undergraduate. Expect a huge learning curve.
- Expect to spend 10 hours per week on every class you take, **minimum**.
  - This means 3 hours in class and 7 hours of out of class work. Again, this is a **minimum**.
  - In the first few weeks as you get used to the reading and workload, it may take more time per week.
- Full time at the graduate level is 3 classes per semester. This is not “taking it easy.” This will be hard.
- If you are working full time, start with one class per semester.
- A final reiteration: do not take more than 3 classes per semester if you are a full-time student.
- Give yourself this time—get everything you can out of the classes, program, campus.



# Graduate School Reading

- Graduate school reading is harder than undergrad reading. The reading itself is more complex, and the conversations about the reading are designed to be more in-depth.
- Keep in mind the following questions that you should be able to answer about a text after you are finished reading it.
  - What happened? Can you re-state the article's arguments?
  - What evidence is provided, or method was used? (Survey data, textual analysis, interviews, theory?)
  - What are the article's primary conclusions? What are the implications of the conclusions?
  - What is the significance of the piece? How does it relate to or fit in with the other articles read that week or in the class?
- Underline, circle, highlight, or note anything that answers one of these questions or illuminates an issue of interest to you.
- When you are finished reading an article, see if you can answer all of these questions about the text—if you can't, go back and find the answers (or see if they aren't there). This will help you to read deeply in a way that will ensure you can contribute productively in class.
- Also use the first few weeks of class to figure out how you read best. On screen? Printed out? Etc.





# Graduate School Writing and Feedback

- You should expect weekly writing assignments in graduate school alongside big, end-of-semester projects.
- Weekly writing may be graded or ungraded. Large projects may involve extensive drafting with a grade at the end.
- It is common to do \*a lot\* of writing in graduate school, across a wide range of assignments. In one week, you might write discussion board prompts, a response essay, and some client work, depending on your coursework for the semester. Give yourself plenty of time for this writing.
- You may be graded holistically, or only receive grades at the end of a project, which may be different than what you experienced in undergrad. Be patient with this if you are accustomed to more frequent graded check-ins—it is meant to facilitate your learning and progress and keep you focused on your own growth and the big picture of a project.
- If you ever want to know your grade or would like feedback earlier in a project, always reach out. We are here to help. But overall know that grades in graduate school likely look a little different than they did when you were an undergraduate.



# Technology

- Most of our program courses are hybrid—meeting max 7 times per semester in person.
- Before the semester begins, make sure your technology is working:
  - Have a working camera. This will likely be necessary for online weeks
  - Have access to good, reliable wifi/internet connections.
  - Make sure your computer works. Get things fixed or replaced if need be.
  - Plan to bring your laptop to in-person weeks as well if you can. This isn't a requirement but just a generally good practice.



# Professional Development

- You will hear a lot about this in class.
- Our goal is to help people accelerate careers in professional and technical writing, whether that includes landing that first entry-level opportunity or a leadership position in your existing career.
- Mastery of content is only one part of this professional process—gaining the networking, professional documentation/portfolio, and skill competencies alongside content are part of the professional development process.
- So, in addition to advanced reading, writing, and research skills, the PTW program will help you build the professional development competencies you need to pursue your goals in this program.



## Throughout the Program

- Go to class—online, in person. Be present and give yourself this time to focus.
- Connect with your professors and colleagues
- Use campus resources to build your network and competencies
- **Build your portfolio of writing samples;** look for opportunities to create and build different types of writing samples for different types of jobs you are interested in.



# Looking ahead: Thesis and Project

- The MA ends with one of two final tasks—either a thesis or a final capstone project
- You usually complete these in your final semesters of the program
- 797 (project) is taught **every spring**. It is mentored by me and another faculty member and will include everyone graduating that semester.
- 799 is (thesis) completed independently under the direction of a director with two readers.
- You can let a lot of things guide this decision:
  - Future aspirations
  - Current collateral and portfolio
  - Workplace/organizational problems
  - Your own interests and goals
- Each option has different advantages:
  - Both must be research-based, requiring extensive literature/library research **as well as** possible empirical work (interviews, observations, corpus development, archival work, etc.)
  - Both must be “ready to go” **before** the semester you start the work. So you should be thinking about this ahead of time, and you should leave the semester prior to your thesis or project ready to go the next semester
  - Both will require mostly independent work and individual deadlines



# About the Thesis

- Long, academic document
- Best for big questions, lengthier work
- If you want to do interviews or a workplace study, a thesis gives you more time and space to do that
- If you have future academic pursuits, a thesis can be a good “test run” of lengthier research-based work



# About the Project

- End product is up to you—we recommend white papers if you do not have another idea
- You can do something that solves a problem in your workplace or other organization
- In 797, you will review the work of the program, build your final professional portfolio, and you will complete the final project
- But—the work still must be grounded in the theory, methods, and research of our discipline; you will be asked to write an essay that discusses and argues for how you've used program concepts in your project alongside the final product



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