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COM 385

Dr. Diels

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Technical Writing Reflection

During my time at Alma College and Delta College, I have grounded my studies around Technical Writing and Communication and Media theories. I have also spent the past four years working for the Registrar of Northwood University. Through my experience there, I have gained an intensive understanding of higher-education systems and functions. Therefore, when the opportunity to assist with rewriting Alma College's catalog presented itself, it became apparent that this internship would be the ideal combination of my studies, my work experience, and my future career goals.

The overarching goal of technical writing is to make a text—whether a website, brochure, instruction manual, or catalog—better understood by its audience. For this project, it meant considering how the students, staff, and faculty would perceive the current catalog. With my background, I could understand and follow the catalog, but it was clear to me the areas that could be troubling within the courses offered and the major descriptions. Therefore, my ultimate goal was to make changes to the catalog that would make it better understood by its vast variety of audiences.

At Northwood University, I spend the vast majority of my time documenting their student files, issuing student records, and consulting their catalogs. This experience has

given me a lot of exposure to the workings of higher education as well as a deepened

understanding of FERPA—Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act—which controls

a large amount of the flow of information in and out of an institution. This has given me

a lot of professional experience working under strict Federal guidelines and regulations.

Although my tasks at Northwood University may seem mundane, I enjoy working with

the students as well as their records.

When I started at Northwood University, I sat at the front desk for their

Academics and Registrar department. With this placement, I dealt with students more

directly and helped them schedule advising appointments and register for classes. This

position also introduced me to the student files. My job was to sort, scan, and document

all of their paper student files from their previous and current campus locations. This

could also be described as digitizing. I was responsible for deciding what was essential

and what information we did not need for thousands upon thousands of student files.

This task helped introduce me to a lot of the jargon and central workings of institutions

of higher education. Over time, I became extremely familiar with every document and its

contents, and therefore when a discrepancy arose I knew exactly what file in the online

database to consult. This was also where I was first introduced to institutional software

such as Colleague/Datel and ImageNow/Perceptive Content. I also became skilled in

finding student files on microfilm as well as locating their hardcopy transcripts we kept

on file. In terms of issuing records, I would issue both transcripts and diplomas in

compliance with FERPA. This meant I had to carefully verify information to ensure

diplomas were sent to the right address and that the issuing was documented in their

student file. For transcripts, I had to make sure the correct transcripts were marked official if they were, and issued to student if they were not. My most relevant task at Northwood University for this internship at Alma College was consulting their catalog. For this reason, I became very well versed in their catalogs. Often times, employers, students, or other institutions would request course descriptions from older catalog years. I would have to consult many catalogs to ensure I documented every course description that was required. This gave me a large familiarity with the text, its organization and its content. Additionally, every year I would be tasked with updating their staff and faculty list, a highly structured section in their catalog. I had to adhere to strict format guidelines to enhance cohesion and readability—two large components of technical writing.

Upon graduation at Alma College, I intend on completing my Certificate in Technical Writing at Delta College. I only have one class left to complete, which I believe helps qualify me to say I have both experience and understanding of technical writing. The required coursework has forced me to think critically about audiences while both creating and rewriting a variety of texts. Two of my large, technical-writing based documents I have written are a technical report, in which I discuss the usage of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) in food, and a recommendation report, in which I look at solving an issue at Northwood with prerequisites. Both required intensive research into the topics; the technical report required a lot more scientific evidence whereas the recommendation report required me to look at comparable higher education institutions in the region and how they address this problem. Other

coursework involved rewriting recipe instructions to be better understood, creating and rewriting documents such as memos and brochures with a cohort, as well as writing and reformatting my resume and cover letter.

Over the course of this semester, I have been tasked with helping to reformat the Alma College Academic Catalog. Some of these changes included moving the catalog itself from Adobe inDesign to Microsoft Word, a page break between majors, and removing the two-column format. I believe that these few fixes will immensely increase the audiences' understanding of the catalog. I also tried to unify the language in the Major descriptions, although more changes are necessary to improve it further—I didn't want to overstep and change something I shouldn't. That being said, I tried to make the changes outlined in the new major guidelines—and highlighted discrepancies. Although the rewriting of the catalog is not complete, I was happy to help in any way that I could. I know projects such as these take time, but it is important to take the first steps.

Eventually, I hope to end up with a career in higher education. Ideally, I would like to be able to use my experience in technical writing in this career field. This experience through Alma College has given me exposure to the jargon and language of another institution while helping me utilize my technical writing background. Although I do not want to spend my life reformatting catalogs, I am grateful for the opportunity Alma has given me. Overall, I believe my certificate along with my experience at Northwood University and Alma College will help me prove to potential employers, as well as myself, that I am capable of a career in higher education and professional or technical writing.