Carole L. McKinney, MA, instructor  
Mayland Community College  
ENG 114 – Professional Research and Writing

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course seeks to enhance students’ business communication skills by teaching communication forms, including business memos, letters, and reports, and appropriate documentation practices. A particular focus lies on maintaining professionalism and ethical responsibility while communicating sensitively and effectively with the diverse needs of a business audience.

DESCRIPTION OF MODULE:

The traditional 16-week course includes a day-long discussion of corporate culture; I propose to expand this portion of the class to a week and a half in length and include a specific homework assignment targeting student understanding of cultural values, leading to an investigation of methods for successfully avoiding or overcoming cultural workplace conflicts with Hispanic persons; this group comprises by far the Mitchell, Avery, and Yancey Count largest local immigrant population. During the module, students will work in groups that research a variety of relevant issues and learn techniques that help ensure effective and professional communication and interaction with persons from Hispanic culture. After this module is complete, traditional writing assignments throughout the semester will include multicultural considerations as part of the assignment prompts (for additional specifics, please consult “Methodology”).

OBJECTIVES:

During and after this module, students will:

1. Learn immigration facts and issues relevant to North Carolina and the local community, with a focus on Hispanic immigrants, the largest local population. Includes:
   - Number of Hispanic immigrants/year
   - Number of illegal Hispanic immigrants/year
   - ESL difficulties for Hispanic immigrants; i.e., difficulty obtaining driver's licenses, filing taxes, attending public schools or colleges, obtaining medical care, interacting with landlords, employers, police, and social services programs
   - Social services available to/needed by Hispanic immigrants
   - General problems facing Hispanic immigrants; i.e., lack of worship facilities, prejudice in school, prejudice in the workplace
   - Cultural misunderstandings based on different constructions of gender
   - Cultural misunderstandings based on different approaches to work and time
2. Become familiar with and respect the specific values of various cultures, especially Hispanic
3. Become familiar with and respect the specific differences between local culture and various cultures, especially Hispanic
4. Learn mature and professional strategies for overcoming potential conflicts with various cultures, especially Hispanic
5. Practice teamwork and interdependence skills
6. Practice research and documentation skills
7. Study methods of professional multicultural interaction
8. Practice oral presentation skills
9. Practice interacting with cultural sensitivity in challenging situations
10. Demonstrate cultural sensitivity in class writing assignments
**METHODOLOGY:**

**Session 1 (1.5 hours): Introduction**

- **Reading assignment:** Chapter 2 of Pfeiffer’s *Technical Communication: A Practical Approach*: “Culture in Organizations.”

- **Class discussion:** Elicit anecdotes of student experiences with representatives of other cultural groups. Using these and chapter readings, identify common problems that disrupt inter-cultural communication in the workplace. Encourage paradigm shift by brainstorming the difficulties of a student’s own placement in a foreign culture in which his or her values are different from the majority culture’s.

- **Research assignment:** Students will be given the most recent possible statistics on immigration in North Carolina to help them identify cultures that are increasingly represented in the state and in our area. In our area, they will find that Hispanic migrant workers and their families make up the majority of immigrants; therefore, the assignment will focus on Hispanic cultural issues.

**Research Assignment Details**

Groups will consist of 4 members, and classes will generate 3-5 groups. Each group will be assigned one of the following topics, and will delegate research, composition, documentation, and presentation duties equally among the group members.

The instructor will accompany the groups to the library during the last 30-45 minutes of class to help initiate productive research.

- **Group 1 focus: Hispanic immigration**
  - Number of Hispanic immigrants/year
  - Number of illegal Hispanic immigrants/year
  - Immigration and naturalization enforcement issues
  - Benefits Hispanic immigrants provide for the local area
  - Problems Hispanic immigrants create in the local area

- **Group 2 focus: English as a Second Language (ESL) difficulties for Hispanic immigrants**
  - Obtaining driver's licenses
  - Filing taxes
  - Attending public schools or colleges
  - Obtaining quality medical care
  - Interacting with native citizens, especially landlords, employers, police, and social services employees

- **Group 3 focus: Social services and Hispanic immigrants**
  - Social services and illegal immigrants
    - Services available
    - Services unavailable
  - Services underutilized by legal immigrants
  - The influence of prejudice on Hispanic access to social services
  - The influence of prejudice on the quality of social services offered to Hispanics
Group 4 focus: Hispanics in the workplace
- Misunderstandings based on different cultural constructions of gender relations
- Misunderstandings based on different cultural constructions of personal space
- Misunderstandings based on different cultural constructions of deadlines and time
- Misunderstandings based on racial prejudice from native supervisors and co-workers

Group 5 focus: General social problems facing Hispanic immigrants
- Lack of worship facilities
- Prejudice in the school environment
- Gang activities
- Family size
- Low income average
- Hispanic-specific health issues

Groups will be given a week to complete the project outside class, and one class meeting will occur between Session 1 and Session 2 of the module; during this intervening class meeting, students will be introduced to APA documentation style for use in this and future lessons.

Session 2 (1.5 hours): Presentation
Groups will each make a ten-minute informal presentation to share their findings with classmates. Each member’s base grade will be assessed individually, dependent on thoroughness and quality of research, use of APA documentation, and presentation skills. A group grade will be added to the students’ base grades to reflect the effectiveness of the entire group’s participation, communication, and teamwork.

Session 3 (1.5 hours): Debriefing and Practice
Students will brainstorm, referring to chapter reading, research presentations, and materials provided by the instructor, to explore mature and professional methods for addressing potentially challenging cultural interactions.

Between discussion sessions, students will role-play a variety of multicultural interactions (for example, one student may play the role of a Hispanic patient who is afraid of receiving an injection but has limited English-speaking skills, while a student majoring in nursing plays the role of an employee who must give a flu shot to this client). Students will be given the opportunity to resolve several challenging situations, and evaluate their own level of success in applying interactive techniques, focusing on improvement of personal cultural interactive skills.

During session 3, students will also be challenged to synthesize their new awareness of Hispanic-specific issues into a larger awareness of multicultural interactive issues by being introduced to situations involving different ethnic groups with similar issues (i.e., brainstorming the possible responses of the supervisor of a Muslim employee with high mathematics skills and ESL difficulties who is a cashier, and is the subject of a groundless complaint made by customer who is hostile to Muslims).

Post-module follow-up:
Students will complete a variety of writing prompts to demonstrate different business writing skills during the semester; I include several example prompts here that have been altered to permit students to research and display multicultural sensitivity skills.

- Example Writing Assignment 1: Procedural Memo
Suppose you are a Human Resources Facilitator for McDuff Global, Inc. A team of workers at McDuff is developing blueprints for an industrial waste storage facility. You have received a complaint from a female team-member, Mary Roe, who feels she is being sexually harassed. She states that her male colleague invades her personal space at her desk, touching her arm and shoulder while he speaks and bending over her with his body touching her back as he inspects her drawings. She says that she feels trapped and threatened, but that she has not asked him to stop. Sexual harassment regulations specify you can’t pursue her complaint legally unless she has asked him to stop and he has persisted despite her request.

Your investigation reveals that her colleague, Juan Rodriguez, is from Ecuador, and was raised in a culture that regularly uses touch to establish rapport between persons while communicating, and that has a much smaller concept of personal space than the American ideal. You feel this matter can probably be resolved easily with proper communication between the two, but you don’t want to single Juan out for discipline. You advise Mary to communicate her discomfort politely to Juan and then keep records of incidents if he persists. Since you feel he may still need an explanation of what her communication means in terms of McDuff’s corporate culture, you decide to address this problem in memo format without singling Juan out for confrontation.

Research legal sexual harassment guidelines for our region and write a 1-page memo to be sent to all McDuff employees, tactfully reminding them what constitutes sexual harassment and stating the accepted procedures for handling both sides of sexual harassment situations in an appropriately professional manner. Use the guidelines for successful memos from chapter 5, pp. 138-140, and document your research in APA format.

- **Example Writing Assignment 2: Combined Problem Analysis and Recommendation Report:** Suppose you are a Production Line Supervisor at the New York widget production office of McDuff Global, Inc. Using the guidelines from Chapter 8, pp. 232-233, write a 2-page problem analysis report for your immediate supervisor, Production Manager Jim Jameson, detailing a conflict between Jane Doe and Deborah Epstein, who had a shouting argument during your shift. During this argument, Jane accused Deborah of being lazy because she didn’t come in to work last Friday, and Deborah defended herself by saying it was Yom Kippur.

  The first page of your report should discuss the problem incident. Include results of research into the significance of Yom Kippur and how cultural differences created the misunderstanding. The second page should present your recommendations on how best to resolve the conflict and prevent future incidents. Refer to the guidelines for problem analysis report format on page 232-3. Include references to research sources on how to mediate inter-cultural conflict. Document all research in APA format.

- **Example Writing Assignment 3: Flyer Advertising Medical Services to Immigrant Mothers:** Suppose you are an office worker serving a local obstetrician. The obstetrician has noticed that certain birth defects, including spina bifida and other nervous system disorders, that are associated with low level of maternal folic acid intake have been occurring with more frequency in babies born to immigrant mothers. She asks you to design a one-page flyer that can be distributed in your waiting area and posted throughout the community, encouraging immigrant parents to understand and get adequate folic acid. The flyer should aim to:

  - Be easily understandable to multicultural readers (refer to and use the rules from our chapter reading on simplifying communications for multicultural readers)
  - Persuade immigrant mothers of the need to take folic acid supplements
Tell immigrant mothers how they can obtain these supplements
Let immigrant mothers know how much folic acid to take and how often it is needed
Follow attractive business document layout rules, including those on readability, use of color, use of graphics, font style and tone, etc.

You may wish to enlist the assistance of a person or persons who speak a different language in order to assist you in translating all or portions of your flyer for the majority immigrant population(s) in this area.

- **Example Writing Assignment 5: Positive Letter:**
  Suppose that you are the social functions director at McDuff Global, Inc. You plan to invite thirty of McDuff’s best clients to a company-sponsored Cinco de Mayo celebration, showing your appreciation for those clients.

  Research the customs and origin of Cinco de Mayo, then create a business letter asking your clients to come and writing material that both demonstrates your understanding of Cinco de Mayo and persuades multicultural and clients of both genders from Mexico, Spain, Germany, and France that they will have a great time at the celebration.

  Include a separate references page in APA form that provides a bibliography of your research sources—both into Cinco de Mayo and into the cultures whose representative members you are inviting.

- **Example Writing Assignment 6: Negative Letter:**
  Suppose that you are a human resources manager who has to discipline employee John Doe for making repeated, offensive ethnic jokes in the presence of other employees who are members of that race. You originally distributed a memo to all employees at McDuff encouraging that they avoid making comments that are offensive to members of another ethnic group or gender, but it has not persuaded John Doe to stop his joking. Write a tactful and polite, but firm, letter addressed specifically to John in which you make it clear that disciplinary consequences will ensue if his joking does not stop.

- **Example Writing Assignment 7: Neutral Letter:**
  Suppose that middle manager Rita Jameson has been selected for reassignment to McDuff’s branch office in Mexico City. Write an informational letter explaining your selection and describing the professional reasons why Rita was chosen for this assignment.

- **Example Writing Assignment 8: Sales Letter:**
  Suppose that you work for a computer software company that sells a computer program named Mariana Rock, which uses immersion techniques, word/picture association, and interactive laboratory work to train your customers how to speak a variety of different languages.

  You know that the large company McDuff, Inc. is converting to a multinational corporation, and has renamed itself McDuff Global, Inc. Your research shows that due to that conversion, McDuff is starting to move a large number of their manufacturing operations overseas. You know this means they will need for some of their existing American employees to relocate and manage the new facilities as they come online. This means the American managers urgently need to be able to communicate fluently with new workers overseas, many of whom do not speak English.
Write a sales letter to John Doe, the Human Resources Director at McDuff, in which you work to convince him to buy your software and use it to train his employees. In order to generate selling points, begin by researching existing language training methodology in order to learn the best ways to train mature students how to learn a new language. Include research references and document them in APA format.

- **Example Writing Assignment 9: Formal Proposal:**
  While researching your cultural relations in the workplace project, you and your group members identified a number of obstacles preventing immigrants from succeeding in the American social community and/or the American workplace. Select one of these difficulties and create a formal proposal report detailing how it should be solved.

  - If you select a workplace obstacle, take the role of a human resources director and assume the CDO has asked you to propose in detail how McDuff Global, Inc., should take action to reduce or remove the obstacle in your main corporate office. Some actions you might use include employee sensitivity training, conducting surveys that measure employee populations’ perceptions of one another, creating workplace publications designed to reduce the problem, a revision of McDuff’s corporate policies, etc.
  - If you select a community obstacle, take the role of the deputy mayor in that community, and assume that the mayor has asked you to propose in detail what should be done about the problem. Outline what different service providing organizations, county officials, etc. must do in order to address and reduce the problem. Some actions you might propose may include approaching law-enforcement officials and requesting a modification of their behavior, asking physicians or hospitals to create publicity campaigns, asking school board members or principals to change their policies, etc.

**EVALUATION:**

Eight percent of the course grade will result directly from the presentation score described in the methodology section. However, due to the adaptation of writing assignments to include multicultural issues, up to 90% of course grades will potentially be affected to some degree by the inclusion of this module. Since students will have the option to choose from several assignment prompts for each type of document, a realistic estimate of the total percentage this module would eventually contribute to a student’s final score is 40-75%.

Assessment rubrics are available in Appendix A, (writing), and Appendix B, (speaking), attached to this document.

**RESOURCES:**


Gonzalez, Cindy. "Driving Privileges for Illegal Immigrants an Increasing Concern." Omaha


