UCCS DFEI 2020/2021 Ethics Roundtable Series

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Information Design
&
Students’ Ethical Awareness in the Visual Presentation of Data

This material was developed by Tom Wahl, MA, and Cameryn Fox, and is intended for classroom discussion rather than to illustrate effective or ineffective handling of administrative, ethical, or legal decisions by management. No permission or compensation is needed for classroom use as long as it is acknowledged to be the creative work of the author and the UCCS Daniels Fund Ethics Initiative. For public action or electronic posting, please contact the UCCS Daniels Fund Ethics Initiative Collegiate Program at UCCS College of Business at 1-719-255-5168. (2021)
Presenters

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&

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Agenda

- What is TCID & TCID 2080?
- The Assignment
  - The Purpose
  - The Why
  - The Description
- Questions
What is TCID?

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

• Dr. Sean Williams, PhD – Department Head

• One of few standalone technical communication degree programs in the country

• Prepares students for developing career fields:
  • User Experience (UX) Design
  • Technical // Professional Writing & Editing
    o Defense
    o Nonprofits
    o Businesses
  • Web Creation

• 11,000: US Bureau of Labor estimates of new jobs in field of technical communication & information design

• Curriculum designed to provide foundation of theory, technology, and practical application
What is TCID?

"TCID is on the cutting edge of collaborative real-world experiential learning affording immediate benefit to corporations seeking strong technical communication professionals."

— Paul H. Massey, L3Harris Technologies, Inc.

BA IN TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION DESIGN

CORE COMPETENCIES
Graduates of the TCID program:

- write clearly and correctly for specific audiences
- assess and learn new technologies to meet communication goals
- communicate fluently in multiple media formats
- collaborate with others from diverse backgrounds, including subject matter experts, end users and the public
- manage complex projects and ethically manage the work of others
- conduct user research on complex products and communicate that research effectively to others

22% field growth in Colorado
10% field growth nationally

TOP 10
Colorado Springs is rated among the ten fastest growing areas for technical communication in the US by the annual STC Salary Database

$72,850
median income per year for technical communicators
According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Some of the positions graduates fill include:
- TECHNICAL COMMUNICATOR
- USER EXPERIENCE DESIGNER
- CONTENT STRATEGIST
- INFORMATION ARCHITECT
- USABILITY RESEARCHER
What is TCID?

Class Sampling

- Intro to Tech Writing
- Intro to Business Writing
- UX Design Principles
- Document Design
- Internship
- Special Topics:
  - Technical Communication & Social Justice
  - Social Media
  - Grant Writing for Nonprofits
  - Structured Authoring
So then:

What is TCID 2080?

“This course will teach you the best practices to communicate in real-world professional environments.”

**GENRES:** Memos, Letters, Reports, Proposals

**STYLE:** Concise, Plain Language

**FORMAT:** Topic Headings, Bullets
Short Paragraphs & Sentences
Document Design
Visual Hierarchy & Easy to Skim

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**TCID 2080 - Business and Administrative Writing**

3 Credits (Minimum) 3 Credits (Maximum)

This course is about writing strategies, specifically understanding and applying these strategies within the context of workplace communication. This course will teach you the best practices to communicate in real-world professional environments. You will organize, design, write, and revise clear documents and visuals. Genres include everyday workplace communication such as memos, letters and emails; employment documents; and research-based documents such as proposals, reports, and presentations. ENGL 2080 is an option for the second core writing course across the university. Prer., ENGL 1308 or ENGL 1310 or ENGL 1410.

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**VS. ACADEMIC WRITING**
Yolonda Alston
Eng101
Professor Alicia Bolton
13 June 2012

Covergirl: Queen Latifah Trusts CoverGirl Products

The CoverGirl ad from March 2012 includes a picture of Queen Latifah in a grayish background with her green eye shadow. Queen Latifah has small brown eyes with long curly black eyelashes. She has a beautiful big smile with shiny white teeth. Queen Latifah also has a lovely pair of small gold round dangling earrings in her ears. The word “CoverGirl” is written in big bold green letters across her forehead, all to improve her appearance. Queen Latifah’s name is written in small green letters underneath in the right hand corner. The graphic design is from her head to her shoulders, just enough for the viewers to focus on CoverGirl’s product. Queen Latifah appears to be wearing an olive green shirt and blue jeans. The advertisement effectively uses logos, ethos, and pathos to convince viewers to buy CoverGirl products.

The first appeal is shown by using logos to give the viewer’s reason to buy CoverGirl products. CoverGirl claims that their products are for women. The second appeal is shown by using ethos to give the viewer’s reason to buy CoverGirl products. CoverGirl claims that their products are for women. The third appeal is shown by using pathos to give the viewer’s reason to buy CoverGirl products. CoverGirl claims that their products are for women.

FORMAT = DOCUMENT DESIGN = INFORMATION DESIGN

• Audience-oriented
• Empathetic

ETHICS ASSIGNMENT ➞ DATA PRESENTATION

• Charts, graphs, etc.
• Ethical applications

GENDER NEUTRALITY
The Marsh Style Guide is referring secretaries as she throughout the text. It is sexist and outdated. When the secretary signs a letter in her own name as secretary to someone, she should not include his initials unless another person in the organization has the same surname.

We suggest updating the guide to make the pronouns neutral since the role of a secretary can be any gender. For example: “When the secretaries sign a letter in their own name as a secretary to someone, they should…”

Clichés & Jargons
Clichés and jargons are terms that lost meaning because of overuse. It’s difficult to avoid them since they come up everywhere. Finding these in business writing can make bad impressions and assumptions about the writer. It can also cause confusion and misunderstanding.

The best way to write a business document is to make sure the simplest words were used. According to the Pro Writing Aid’s article, “How to Avoid Jargon in Your Business Writing”:

A good rule of thumb is, would a 13- or 14-year-old be able to understand what you wrote? If not, then you might want to consider doing some revising.

PLAIN LANGUAGE
We the writers always need to put ourselves in the shoes of the reader. We need to ask ourselves these questions:

• Does the message come across without confusion?
• Is the document written in active voice?
• Can you remove the unnecessary information?

INFORMATION
Information is what makes the fast via emails, texts and instant to teach employees the communicate through Marsh Style Guide is because it was created 34 years yet.

Acceptable in the workplace to compose an email or how therefore, we suggest here about how to effectively through these
The Assignment

- Information Design & Students’ Ethical Awareness in the Visual Presentation of Data (charts, graphs, etc.)

*OR*

Adventures in Misleading Information Design
Students’ social media feeds and nightly newscasts are awash in visual misinformation - we want to help them recognize when it occurs – both in others’ info design and in their own.
Assignment Description:

**PRE-ASSIGNMENT**

○ Review/Assign web-based resources: *Ways Writers Use Graphs to Mislead, TED Talks, etc.* – informative & appealing to students

○ Review Examples

○ Discuss the prevalence of misleading Information Design

○ Tie into key Daniels Fund Ethics Initiative Principles
Assignment Description:

**Discussion**
- Please find your own example of unethical data representation or technical design. This can be from a news outlet, social media, or a creation of your own using real data. Explain why this is unethical and the impact it can have on its viewers.
- Respond to the person above you in the discussion thread by fixing the data/example they have provided. Please explain what you changed.

To receive full credit, they need to post their initial post (#1) by a certain day, so that others have time to do their responses (#2)

**Memo**
- Please write a short memo reflecting on the material of this module.
  - The Daniels Fund Ethics Initiative Principles
  - The impact of unethical data
  - Why is it important to be ethical when we are presenting data to an audience?
- Add a page at the end of the Memo answering the following questions:
  - What do you think you did well on this assignment?
  - What do you think you could have done better at?
  - What are some ways you implemented material from this class into your work?
  - How will you implement this into your own work/life?
Daniels Fund Ethics Initiative Principles

- Integrity
- Trust
- Accountability
- Transparency
- Fairness
- Respect
- Rule of Law
- Viability
Integrity: Act with Honesty in All Situations

- Represent data in an honest way, that is not misleading to the audience.

Maybe this could be a bit more accurate than Ivanka would like?
Trust - Build Trust in All Stakeholder Relationships

- This graph lacks accuracy and doesn't make sense.
- This will cause the viewer to lose trust in the information and the source.
- You want viewers to trust the information you are giving.
*Issues with math and alignment are not country-specific
Accountability - Accept Responsibility for All Decisions

- Know when you are being dishonest or skewing the graph axis scale.
- The scale can skew the data and change the message.
- Color can also help people easily understand the graph.
- Be aware when *design* impacts assumptions or interpretation.

![Graph comparison showing misleading vs more accurate data representation.](image-url)
Which Graph Accurately Displays the Information?
Design Issues

Average Female Height per country

Who listens to podcasts?
U.S. population 12 years of age or older

- 31% Age 35-54
- 32% Age 55+
- 28% Age 18-34
- 11% Age 12-17
- 9% Age 12-17
- 17% Age 55+
- 34% Age 35-54

Colors and positioning changes
Readers will assume that size differences in shapes or areas are proportional to values.
The curved design doesn’t help the reader.
Transparency - Maintain Open and Truthful Communications

- Information Design needs to be clear.
- Tell the truth.
- Don’t try to change the graph to change the results.
- Know your sources and their bias.
- Use the appropriate type of graph to communicate your information.
Another example is focusing on ratios and not providing whole numbers for users to see the big picture.
This past year we have seen how news outlets haven't portrayed data in an honest way. These types of graphs lead people to be more anxious and nervous during uncertain times.
Fairness - Be Fair and Equitable

- You can’t let your own bias be reflected in the information Design
- Let the data speak for itself
Examples aren’t just from Fox either – trade groups with assumed credibility will also act unethically to present their point, though they can easily be assumed to be a credible source of information.
Discussion: Ways Misleading Information Can be Improved

◉ An improved scale
◉ Clear lines and points on the graph
◉ Accurate Plotting of the Data
Discussion: News Source Bias

Where you get your information from can play a role in your own unconscious biases.
Discussion: Things to Avoid When Presenting Information Design Ethically and Clearly

- Misleading and unclear axis labels
- Inconsistent Scales/Omitting the baseline
- Numbers not adding up correctly, especially in pie charts
- Cherry-picking data, like including limited years or responses chosen to support a specific argument
- No key for the information in the graph
- Going against the conventions.
  - Bad graphic choices, like low-contrast color choices or a distorting perspective.
  - Visual deceptions, like inappropriate use of white space or comparative elements that don’t seem to correspond to the data they represent
  - Poor use of a graph type (like making a series of bar graphs when a line graph would be clearer)
Discussion: Let’s Review

◉ Information Design is very important for relaying truthful information to the public.

◉ Small errors in Information Design can change what people perceive the message to be.

But all rules are out the window for (Pizza) Pie Charts.
Daniels Ethics Initiative Principles: Key Points

- **Integrity and Trust**
  - Build a truthful relationships
  - Be honest
  - Honesty will put you ahead, in comparison to other competition

- **Accountability**
  - If you are putting information out, ensure that it is accurate.
  - Take responsibility for your own bias and errors.

- **Transparency and Fairness**
  - Understand bias (sources and you own)
Thanks!

Any questions?