**Debrief of the Interdisciplinary Experience:**

**What happens when you put a team of editors and a team of engineers together to create one project?**

***Executive Summary***

During the Spring 2020 semester at the University of Alabama in Huntsville I was honored with the opportunity to be enrolled in the Technical Editing course with Dr. Joseph Robertshaw. The Technical Editing course focused on developing our skills as technical editors by pairing our class with a class of engineering students who were working on their second semester of an IPT (Integrated Product Team) senior project. Our purpose as the technical editors was to provide feedback and guidance on how to develop a well-formatted document that presented their work in the best way possible. This paper will document the benefit of my experience throughout the course and will discuss how the gained knowledge will be used outside of the classroom.

1. **Introduction**

The IPT project was a new steppingstone in exploring the world of technical editing. Learning the mechanics and styles of technical editing from a book is one method of gaining knowledge, but by putting our skills to use in a live project brought the level of learning up a few notches. When working in a team composed of engineers and editors there came a clash of preferences, ideas, and goals; however, this provided an excellent opportunity to break down barriers between two different worlds on a college campus. In this project, I was elected to take on the responsibilities of Team Lead for my technical editing group. This role came with extra challenges including guiding my team members, leading the team as we navigated a new type of learning, and encouraging the team through every assignment or deadline we encountered. The project guided my team and I down a road of development and growth that brought us out on the other side as better editors. I want to discuss how this project affected my growth as a student and a technical editor, evaluating how involving students in a project such as this might ignite a fire that may have dimmed behind a desk.

1. **Development of Skills**

When I began working on this project, I had a basic set of technical writing skills and some experience working within team environments in prior semesters. The project taught me about types and levels of edit, proper communication between teams and team members, version control, and time management. However, these skills were not acquired without complications along the way. I encountered problems throughout the project that I took steps to ensure were handled promptly and correctly. Managing communications between team members on the engineering team and the technical editing team proved to be a difficult task, but once a system was established, it became easier to accomplish our goals. While there were many other problems throughout the semester, those are not my focus; rather, I choose to focus on the success our teams had in overcoming the problem and formulating solutions. I learned a lot through the semester, specifically I developed my critical thinking skills, research abilities, observational skills, and skills in working with editing applications (i.e. Word, Adobe Reader DC). These skills will be useful outside of the classroom in my daily life and future career. They apply to many situations and have directed me in a direction of personal and professional growth.

1. **Experience in Collaboration**

Following my development of technical editing skills, this project has taught me many things about collaboration within teams and between people within a team. Collaboration is a skill that is constantly evolving in the professional world and requires constant reevaluation. When collaborating with other people, the way in which a person should present themselves changes based on the following factors: the environment, the scope of the collaboration, and the personalities of those involved. Not every situation requires complete professionalism, but not every situation welcomes casual interactions. Finding the balance is essential when working in a team environment, and the IPT project introduced me to situations where this was the case. From the beginning of the semester we began to learn about the difficulties of collaborating with a team, especially a team that has been working together before we were integrated into their project. The engineering team had been working on this project for a semester already, so integrating a new set of team members came with its difficulties. However, I took the time to learn their systems and helped my team members adhere to those systems to ensure that the transition went smoothly. Establishing our purpose and reinforcing the idea that we were there to help was essential in gaining the trust of the engineering team. I learned a lot about working with a multitude of different personalities, in different environments, and with different types of work. There would be occasions where we needed to be professional and some where we could have more casual talks about the project. I would also work on editing text, graphs, tables, and images, all focused on different topics. Learning to shift between environments and topics is a very useful skill in helping myself become better at collaborating. Collaboration involves being able to develop understanding of all that surrounds a project, and this class has helped me expand my abilities in working within a team-centered environment.

1. **Learning by Doing**

The most vital part of this project was the fact that instead of learning terminology and filling out tests, we got to put our knowledge to use by editing for a team. By being actively involved in a project, we were able to observe how it would feel to work as an editor in the future and begin to make a name for ourselves as editors. Throughout the semester we got to learn about the actual process of editing and what problems we could potentially encounter in our future careers. I learned a lot about what I needed to do to be a good editor, and I began to understand that an editor does more than look for grammar or spelling mistakes. I got to be involved in working with different applications and transferring data between different formats, these skills will prove to be useful in the technological world. Understanding how to work with multiple platforms and handle different types of data is essential in a world where these factors are constantly changing, and this project definitely helped in developing an understanding of being flexible as an editor. This semester we experienced a unique opportunity to put our skills to the test in different ways. With the shift from on-campus learning to all distance learning, we got to see first-hand how to handle a big change to work-flow dynamic. When the shift occurred my teams immediately established a central mode of communication and switched everything to one location. Witnessing how quickly an environment can change was beneficial since the real world is always shifting in how business is conducted; for example, one client may want you to be on site and another may only want electronic communication. The ability to know how to adapt to different situations will help me in being able to work with my clients in the future. Without working on a project this semester, I do not believe I would have gained as many skills nor as much knowledge as I have throughout the course. I know that I have benefited more from this type of learning than any other type in the past, and I can say that the learning-by-doing method has truly aided in my educational development.

1. **Conclusion**

This project provided me with the opportunity to develop my skills, improve on collaboration, and experience a hands-on approach to learning how to be a good technical editor. Overall, the project pushed my team and I in ways that encouraged us to step out of our comfort zones and communicate efficiently daily. The project also provided experience like that of an actual workplace environment, which allowed us to begin developing in leadership and team interaction. I hope this project goes on to not only aid us in finding jobs in the future, but also encourage other professors to involve a more hands-on approach in the classroom. I believe this project has given me a new outlook on the technical editing world and has prepared me to do my best work in the future. I look forward to seeing how the skills I developed in this course prove to be of use in my future career, and how learning continues to evolve to keep students passionate about their studies.