

## Students: Working with Clients

### **Be professional in everything you do**

From the initial meeting with the client to every email to the final presentation, you need to be professional. These people may hire you one day or they may know someone that may hire you someday.

### **Know there is a difference between the ideal and what the client needs/wants**

Much of the reading and discussion about technical and professional communication is about the ideal situation, i.e., a client that is 100% focused on this project, a client that accepts every recommendation without question, and a project that has not budget or time constraints. In practice, most projects are messy and involve negotiation on many key points. While a brochure may look great in tri-color glossy, the organization may only be able to print in grayscale, thus your work needs to keep these limitations in mind.

### **Make a plan for communication**

If your clients are anything like mine, these projects are usually in addition to normal workloads. It's good for the students and clients to be on the same about response times, who is the primary contact person, number of communications within any given week, etc. It is also a good idea to provide a weekly or bi-weekly progress report on the project. Other issues to be addressed in this document include how to handle questions that relate the project, follow-ups to questions or requests, and any other pertinent information that may be specific to your particular client. Be certain to explain that it is likely there will be a greater frequency of communication earlier in the term so that the client can plan accordingly.

Separating the communication plan from the project plan helps to emphasize the importance of communication in the process of a successful project.

### **Create a realistic project plan**

The project plan includes at a minimum a project timeline, list of final deliverables (that can be slightly modified throughout the term—see note below on project creep), and format of

deliverables. This document can be highly detailed or streamlined, but it functions as the foundation for the project's management.

### **Prepare to make a well-thought argument for your decisions and recommendations**

Sometimes your design sense and what you think “looks good” does not always align with clients. Thus, if you want to argue for a position, you need to really support that argument with evidence. The evidence can be scholarly or more trade-based, but it can't just be because “it looks better.” The question of why it looks better needs to be answered. But more importantly, any position that you argue for need to fit with the client's needs and expectations.

### **Stand firm and Avoid project creep**

A vital part of the learning process is for the students to initially deal with the almost inevitable project creep that will arise. Clients will often change their minds and/or want more than is possible during a term. The premise behind a detailed project plan is to keep all parties on the same page and to provide support should project creep come into play.