February 24, 2004

To: To Whom it May Concern
From: Jim Kalmbach, Instructor
      English 349, Technical Writing II
re: Technical advisor

Thank you for agreeing to be a technical advisor for one of my students in English 349, Technical Writing II. In the class, I encourage students to find a real life technical writing project, one that uses the central skills they are developing in their major. I have had a good deal of success with these projects, but I have had one persistent problem: Many students choose projects that are far beyond my technical expertise. As a result, it is impossible for me to determine first whether they are planning their project appropriately and second whether their final document is technically accurate and appropriate.

The best solution that I’ve found is to require students to solicit the help of a technical advisor. Students in the class must ask an appropriate technical expert to read and comment at two points in their process: First around midterms when they have completed a project plan, and second towards the end of the semester when they have completed a late draft of their project.

At mid terms, when you read the project plan, my biggest concern are as follows: has the writer accurately analyzed his or her audience, has he or she articulated appropriate goals, and does the content outline accurately address the audience and the goals of the project? Please provide any feedback that seems appropriate to you about these issues and anything else that concerns you in the project plan. The student will share your comments with me, and I will follow up to make sure they are reflected in the final plan.

At the end of the semester, the student will deliver a late draft of the project and give you at least a week to respond. Please verify the technical accuracy of the material. If you find any errors, confusions, or important material that was left out, note these problems on the draft. You do not need to comment on issues of spelling, grammar, or style. I will read each project at least three times and will work with the student in these areas. On the other hand, if you normally flag such problems, feel free to mark up the paper; most students need all the help they can get.

When you have completed your review, sign and date the document. The student will include that draft when they turn in their final project. I am careful to compare the points you raise with the final draft to make sure that they have responded to any issues you raise.

Once again, thank you for your help. If you have any questions, you can contact me at 438-7648 or by e-mail at kalmbach@ilstu.edu.