CIS304 PAPER
DESCRIPTION & ORGANIZATION

GROUP PROJECTS. There are a number of important components to this course—keeping up with the chapter readings, good writing skills, a good resume, a good Web page at the end of the semester. But one of the most important is your group project. Groups of four people will be choosing a topic involving some aspect of business/organizational communication, carefully researching that topic, writing a paper on it, and giving a professional presentation on it at the end of the semester. Groups are mandatory. The fourth or fifth week is the time to be thinking of possible project ideas, and who you might like to work with in a group. Although I do not ask for formal group sign-up until mid-term, groups of four can sign up sooner if desired—as long as you, the group, have some tentative topic ideas.

TOPIC. Topic selection is fairly wide open. As mentioned above, the topic should have a clear connection to some aspect of business or organizational communication, concerning internal or external audiences, or both. You might choose a topic raised in another business class that you (as a group) would like to explore more thoroughly. Or you could turn to my PAWS Web page for links to current events in business, business trade publications or business academic journals. Exploring appropriate databases via Hunter Library could be very fruitful. This will have been done by the time you turn in your Proposal assignment.

WRITING AND STYLE. Locker does a good job describing report writing in Chapter 14. She spends considerable space on organization guidelines (and see below), but note also her section on "Presenting Information Effectively in Reports." What she does not emphasize is how difficult it is to smoothly integrate into a research report references to 12-to-16 bibliography sources. This takes work on the part of all group members, and particular effort on the part of a group member willing to be the editor towards the end of the semester. Do NOT simply dump off to the group or the editor "your section of the paper" (which may or may not be what others expected). You must meet and work as a group to craft how your different sections integrate as part of the whole.

OBJECTIVITY. Material included in the paper should fall within the defined scope and relate to the stated purpose. Content should be well-researched—primarily from reliable, unbiased sources—and should reflect the 6-to-8 weeks of intermittent but persistent work that you have put into this effort. Note that your personal opinions are irrelevant, except in the (optional) *Recommendations* section of the paper. Think of this report as a general briefing paper you are providing to the Chief Executive Officer of a company. The CEO is interested in an **objective, factual, thoughtful report**. Avoid filling pages with information the CEO could have found by herself in a 60-second search of the Web; your information should go deeper than that. Note **reference requirements** below.

METHODOLOGY. You have two choices for this paper: A) Extensive, detailed, scholarly library research on a contemporary topic appropriate to this assignment, or B) Somewhat less extensive library research in combination with the collection of some primary data (possibly interviews with experts or practicing professionals; most probably survey data). If you decide on

the latter you must follow Locker's textbook guidelines (Ch. 13) and my lecture guidelines regarding the construction of a survey and its administration.

GROUP WORK. You must work as a team on this project. In addition to having each other's phone numbers and regular e-mail accounts, you will have a WebCT discussion area, a WebCT e-mail, and a WebCT "chat room." Additionally, you will have some time towards the end of our scheduled class period almost every week. Note that your grade at the end of the semester on both the oral and written portions of this project will be determined in part by the other members on your team.

LENGTH AND QUALITY. Each person in the research group should count on contributing 4-to-5 pages, so at the end of the semester I will expect a well-integrated 15-to-20 page report from each team. Overall quality of this paper should be reflective of standards that would be reasonable for a potential employer to expect from upper-level university Business majors.

FORMATTING. The paper should be double-spaced; with 1.2" margins; 11 or 12-point font, preferably Times Roman, in APA style—including any figures, tables and graphs. At least one table and one graph is expected, more where appropriate. Typically, Tables and Figures are numbered separately, consecutively; each is accompanied by a meaningful title. Explanatory text precedes the visual. (For more, please review Chapters 13, 14 & 15). The paper should be well-edited so that it flows smoothly, utilizing effective transitions. No grammatical or spelling errors, of course. A review of Chapter 4 and Appendix B might be helpful. Writing should be in formal business style. I prefer third person voice, but I will accept first-person ("we"). Whichever you choose, be consistent (Locker's example in Ch. 14 uses the first-person "I").

How to Organize Specific Reports
Parts of the Formal Report (based primarily on Locker, Ch. 14)

As Locker notes, the organizational components in a report can vary. In fact, I differ from Locker. Please follow the guidelines below when writing and organizing your research report.

Title Page
Contains four items:
- The title of the report
- Whom the report is prepared for
- Whom it is prepared by
- The date

Letter or Memo of Transmittal
Keep it short. Please see the text regarding how to write and organize the transmittal

<u>Table of Contents</u>
- List the headings exactly as they appear in the report
- List all the headings if the report is less than 25 pages
- In a long report, pick a level of headings and include that level and above

<u>Executive Summary</u>

(For this report, put the Executive Summary on a separate piece of paper)
- Tells the reader what the document is about (150-250 words)
- Is not a "tease"— it summarizes the basic findings of the report for a busy executive who may not have time to read the full text. (In this regard it is similar to the abstracts of professional journal articles you have read. The executive summary will also include a brief statement of your recommendations [if any] and the reasons for the recommendations)
- Should be easy to read, concise, and clear
- Has a more formal style than other forms of business writing

Report Body:

<u>Introduction</u>. Always contains purpose and scope (May include more; see text.)

- Purpose
    - The purpose statement identifies
        - the rhetorical purposes (to describe, to explain)
    - It may also identify (but these are not applicable to this CIS paper):
        - the organizational problem the report addresses
        - the technical investigations it summarizes

- Scope
    - Identifies how broad an area the report covers
    - Allows the reader to evaluate the report on appropriate grounds

<u>Background</u> (of the situation, not a full-blown history of topic itself)
- Included even if the current audience knows the situation, since reports are often filed and read again years later by a very different audience
- May cover many years or just the immediate situation
- Most of your references will be incorporated here. (In an academic paper this portion of a report is called a Review of the Literature.) Strive for a well-integrated account of the background and context of the issue at hand. Include a description of relevant case studies, model implementations (or implementation failures) here. Writing should flow smoothly, synthesizing the pertinent information you found. This section could be 3-6 pages of your report.

<u>Body of the Report (your headings as needed)</u>
As Locker states, this section focuses on the specific problem at hand. If you are doing in-depth library research, the preceding section will likely blend right in to this one (and you will decide on unique organizational headings as needed). If you are conducting some data-gathering (methodology), then this section will have an Assumptions, Methodology, and Findings.

Conclusions
- Summarizes the main points made in the body of the report
- Contains no new information

Recommendations *[Optional for CIS paper]*
- Action items that would solve or ameliorate the problem
- Often combined with "Conclusions" if both sections are short

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research *[Especially if you do have a Methodology section]* This organizational format differs slightly from Locker's example in the "Analyzing Information and Writing Reports" chapter—but follows APA organization closely. Recall that I have posted some links to examples from the Assignments Described link on PAWS.

References
APA style in both the body text and *Reference* section of your paper; note Locker and my Web links for appropriate formatting.
- 12 - 16 references
- At least 4 academic references (at least two of those 2001 or later)

Appendices *[optional, but* survey *questions or interview questions, for example, would go here]*

Presenting Information Effectively

Use these four techniques
1. Say What You Mean
2. Tighten Your Writing
3. Introduce Sources and Visuals Gracefully
4. Use Transitions, Topic Sentences, Headings and (where appropriate) Sub-Headings

Headings in Reports
- Headings are usually short phrases that describe the material until the next heading
    - Informative headings tell the reader what to expect in each section
    - Headings must use the same grammatical structure

- Locker discusses headings in Ch. 14 (Although her example is not technically APA style, you may follow it for your heading styles if you like. Or use APA.)

- Appropriate headings are critical to the organization of the paper
    - Material that follows a heading must be related to that heading (including all subheadings, of course
    - As a rough guide, one would expect no more than one main heading per every 2 pages of text