

To: Senate Steering Committee

From: Senate Planning and Review Committee
Richard J. Rozek, Chair

Re: Review of new Proposal for a new Major and Minor in Writing and Rhetoric

The Department of Rhetoric, Communication, and Journalism in the College of Arts and Sciences has submitted a proposal to initiate an undergraduate major and a minor in Writing and Rhetoric. This proposal was approved by the Approved by College of Arts & Sciences Assembly on February 18, 2008. This proposal has the support of the SPRC.

Program Strengths

The mission of the Rhetoric Program is to develop students' abilities to write independently and collaboratively, to become engaged participants in democracy, and to be critical readers and thinkers in academic, community, national and global environments. Thus the major and minor in Writing and Rhetoric will develop students' abilities to communicate independently and collaboratively in writing, become engaged participants in a democratic system of government, and be critical readers, writers, and thinkers in academic and non-academic communities.

There are three tracks students may enter into: writing for the professions, writing for new media, and writing as a discipline. Students who pursue the professional track will take classes in business and technical writing and in writing for diverse disciplines; those who choose to follow the new media track will take classes that require their critical engagement with and production of digital texts, and those who pursue writing as an academic discipline will take classes ranging from classical rhetoric to the teaching of writing in preparation for graduate study in composition-rhetoric.

After completing their core coursework, majors in Writing and Rhetoric will be encouraged to participate in a semester-long internship that synthesizes the knowledge and skills they have gained from their specific tracks in the major. This internship will require that students put what they have learned into practice by working in some capacity in the local community, in web development projects on campus, or in research, tutoring, or co-teaching positions. Students who elect not to complete an internship for their capstone experience will compose a senior thesis that synthesizes the work they have done in the major or addresses some issue related to their elective work in one of the three academic tracks in the major. The core, elective tracks, and internship/thesis all reflect this program's dual commitment to theory and practice, to helping students use theory to be critical consumers and producers of text.

Additional strengths include that Oakland University would take a leadership role in this academic area with highly qualified and diverse faculty. There is a high level of interest among first year transfer and returning students who favor the three track disciplines. There are also ties between Oakland University and the local community that would be strengthened by internships and the cost factor of starting and developing the program is very low in comparison to other programs that have been presented to this committee. Finally, the possibility of implementing the new program immediately with a detailed curricula and assessment plans are in place is impressive.

Issues and Concerns

There are some concerns about this degree, one issue raised in committee is that SPRC would have liked to see a more developed section (e.g. careers) on how a graduate of the program would be able to translate those skills into various career options (including internships). Improved version may be helpful in future marketing of this program.

Second, the proposal includes the results from a survey of students in first-year writing programs at community colleges at Macomb, and Oakland as well as Oakland University. The number of students responding in the negative (50%) to the answer “How interested would you be in a major (e.g., Writing and Rhetoric) that emphasizes writing and critical thinking skills?” indicates a lack student interest in a writing program that emphasizes writing and critical thinking skills. Further, the answer to the question, “If you were attending Oakland University, how likely would you be to consider majoring in Writing and Rhetoric if such a major were offered? “, the students were also not very enthusiastic with 52% stating that they would not likely major in Writing and Rhetoric.

The analysis of the results in the proposal presented have some discrepancies. The proposal refers to question 4 when it really intends to refer to question 5 and vice versa. Next, the numbers produced do not match-up with the survey results. And finally, the conclusions purported to follow from the survey really do not follow. For example it is hard to see how in the analysis on Page 9 of responses to Question 6, 77% of students favor the major in Writing and Rhetoric when the table shows that 52% are not likely to major in Writing and Rhetoric.

Lastly, the additional attachments generally appear positive but there is some confusion about the library needs indicated for in proposed budget although some of the emails attached were confusing.

Although in principle this proposal is supported by SPRC and is appropriate in the planning for Oakland University, there are concerns which need to be addressed.