
MEMORANDUM

TO: RICHARD J. ROZEK, CHAIR—SENATE PLANNING AND REVIEW COMMITTEE
FROM: MARSHALL KITCHENS, LORI OSTERGAARD, AND GREG GIBERSON
SUBJECT: NEW PROGRAM PROPOSAL—MAJOR AND MINOR IN WRITING AND RHETORIC
DATE: 9 APRIL 2008
CC: RON SUDOL, MICHELLE PISKULICH, JAN ELVEKROG

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to address questions concerning our proposal for a major and minor in Writing and Rhetoric.

1. Career Opportunities: In Section II G of the proposal (p. 10), we will add an analysis of employment opportunities for graduates of technical and professional writing programs from the Department of Labor.

Technical Writing in particular is in high demand (49,000 jobs in 2006) and positions for technical writers are expected to increase by 20% from 2006-2012. More generally, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, writers and editors held about 306,000 jobs in 2006. Demand for professionals in new media – in particular the design, development, and maintenance of web sites – is also high. While graduates of the writing as a discipline track may go on to graduate study in Rhetoric and Composition, they may be eligible for jobs as instructional coordinators – a field for which a “much faster-than-average job growth is projected.”

Concerning internships, we are drawing from the extensive list of internship opportunities developed by the Department of Rhetoric, Communication, and Journalism and will continue to expand this list for marketing purposes and for the benefit of our students. If specific numbers are requested for the proposal itself, we would be happy to include those as well.

2. SBRC raised concerns about the survey results as well. Based on the issues raised by SBRC about the results of our survey of prospective students, we have revised that section of the proposal to provide additional information about the student population we chose to survey. The primary participants in our survey were students in mandatory first-year writing courses at Macomb C.C., Oakland C.C, and Mott C. C., as well as Oakland University. We chose this group because it would provide us with a broad sampling of prospective students from feeder schools to Oakland University, as well as provide us with an understanding of the interest of current O.U. students.

It is important to note that this sample represents the broad range of the general population of incoming or transfer students, and is not restricted to students strong in writing or to those who may have elected to take a course in writing. The students we surveyed were completing a required course in writing, so the method might be more similar to surveying a required introductory math class on becoming math majors rather than an introductory International Relations class – an elective in which students are already interested in the subject – on becoming IR majors.

Given the broad sampling of students, we find the survey results significant, especially when generalized to the more than 2,000 First-Year or incoming students. This would indicate that among students transferring from the community college or all First-Year students already enrolled at OU, one-third would be interested or very interested in majoring in Writing and Rhetoric and half would be interested in a minor. Even with significantly lower numbers actually signing up for the major, this suggests a rather large number of students (much higher than the estimated 10 in year one included in the proposal). For instance, if our results are generalized to an incoming class of 2,000 students and 3% of the 52% who would be interested in a major in Writing and Rhetoric actually sign up for the major, we would have

approximately 30 majors in the first year, not including currently enrolled students who decide to change to a major in Writing and Rhetoric. Based on our conservative estimates of majors over the first few years, these results suggest our program could have significant numbers of students immediately after implementation.

3. Concerning discrepancies in the survey results, we will clarify by separating our discussion of surveys taken by prospective OU students (community college students) and current OU students. We provided tables and complete data for surveys given to prospective students because we wanted to emphasize the prospective student results to show that we will not need to draw current students away from other majors to make our program viable. We provided a brief summary of the surveys from current OU students simply to demonstrate there is support from that population as well. The discrepancies identified by SPRC are not actually discrepancies, but poor document design on our part. We will reformat this section to make it clearer.

4. We will do what we can to clarify the section on Library needs, but we could use a bit more clarification from the committee on this concern, if possible.