
MEMORANDUM

TO: SUSAN AWBREY
FROM: MARSHALL KITCHENS, LORI OSTERGAARD, AND GREG GIBERSON
SUBJECT: PROPOSAL FOR MAJOR/MINOR IN WRITING AND RHETORIC
DATE: 1/9/2015
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. Based on the feedback from UCUI, we are proposing the following changes to the proposal:

1. Naming: In section I E (p. 3 of the February 8 draft), we will provide a rationale for the terms *writing* and *rhetoric* as key terms:

On the national level, programs similar to ours tend to use such terms as writing, composition, professional/technical writing, or rhetoric in naming their programs. After much discussion, we have chosen *writing* and *rhetoric* as the key terms for our department and degree program. *Writing* is more student friendly than composition or rhetoric, though alone might portray a reductionist notion of what we do as focusing on style and correctness. *Rhetoric* provides the theoretical base by emphasizing communication and argumentation within the context of specific discourse communities. Thus, by joining *Writing and Rhetoric*, we hope to portray both an easily understandable and theoretically sophisticated concept of our department and our degree program.

2. Service Learning: In section II A (p. 4), under the heading "Engagement/ partnerships with the community (2020)," we will revise as follows:

The program will encourage all students to engage with the community in thoughtful and critical ways. Since civic engagement is a key component of the major and minor, many sections of WRT 160 and other core courses and electives will incorporate academic service learning or civic engagement opportunities as pedagogical tools. In addition, the internship will be available every term, and students will be assisted in locating appropriate internship opportunities either on campus, such as in the Writing Center, the first year writing program, or various departments and offices, or off-campus through local business, industry, or non-profits. For a list of community internship opportunities in coordination with Communication and Journalism, see <http://www2.oakland.edu/jrn/files/InternshipOrganizationsUpdatedSept07.pdf>

3. Student Surveys: We will insert the following clarification at the beginning of the section on student surveys (II F, p. 8):

In an effort to gauge student interest in and support for establishing a Writing and Rhetoric major at Oakland University, a survey of students was conducted during the winter and fall semesters of 2007. The primary participants in this survey were students in first-year writing programs at Macomb C.C., Oakland C.C, and Mott C. C., as well as Oakland University. We chose this sample of students in required courses 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.

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. These students are completing a required course in writing, and the method might be more similar to surveying an 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.

Of the more than 200 students surveyed in introductory writing courses at local community colleges, almost one-third were interested or very interested in a major in Writing and Rhetoric, over half were interested or very interested in a minor in Writing and Rhetoric, and over two-thirds either agreed or strongly agreed that OU should offer a major in Writing and Rhetoric.

We found similar results among the more than 150 students (7.5% of the first year class) currently enrolled at OU in first year writing courses. As representative of the general population of students in a required course, we find these percentages 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 lower rates actually signing up for the major, this is a significant number of students.

These results are supported by data at other institutions who have recently developed undergraduate programs in writing. Georgia Southern University, for example, created their program in 2002 and by 2007 had over 150 majors. Ithaca College, whose undergraduate enrollment is only 6,260, had over 170 majors within the first five years of their program. And the University of Texas-Austin created their program in 2006 and within that first year had 67 new majors. This last number is significant because in their proposal for the major, UT-A was also conservative in their enrollment estimates and projected an initial enrollment of only 20 majors in the first year, with a growth of only 20 additional majors for each of the next three years. This number is also significant because, according the chair of the Department of Rhetoric and Writing at UT-A, almost half of their new majors were “sophomores and juniors who have picked up rhetoric and writing as a second major because they (and their parents) believe that it will prepare them for employment after college.”

Specific analysis of survey material is included below.

4. 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 (see attachment).

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.” See attachment on “Employment analysis for technical writers, web designers, and instructional coordinators.” A more complete analysis is attached.

5. K-12 Employment Opportunities: We will remove the reference to K-12 employment opportunities from the proposal (II G, p.10).

6. New Faculty: In section III C (p. 11), we will revise as follows:

With our new hire in technical communication, we are prepared to staff all of our courses in the major. We already offer a number of upper level courses as general education writing intensive courses. The current Rhetoric faculty is sufficient in number and expertise to meet the needs outlined in this proposal. However, as more majors complete their core courses and begin taking electives, and the program grows and we begin to offer multiple sections of upper level courses, we will need to hire additional instructors with expertise in technical/professional writing, new media, and rhetoric history and theory to maintain a high quality level of instruction, both in the major and in first year composition. Hiring of new faculty is dependent on the growth of the program and generated funds from tuition. For every 25 new majors, we anticipate being able to hire 1 new faculty member. The department is also expected to grow nominally in faculty over the next few years to offset retiring faculty, faculty drawn to administrative duties, and an increase in students enrolled in first year writing.

7. Impact on 150/160: In section III H (p. 13), we will revise as follows:

Currently, 25-30 sections (approximately 20%) of 150 and 160 are staffed by tenured/tenure track faculty or special instructors each semester, with the remaining 80 plus sections staffed by special lecturers. As we develop the major and minor, many of the full-time faculty will be shifted into WRT 160 in order to provide a more consistent experience for students in the core course, and a few will be diverted to upper-level courses. As we implement a strong first year experience component into WRT 160 rooted in civic engagement, 21st century technologies, and inquiry-based research, we will create professional development opportunities for special instructors in both 150 and 160 to provide a coherent and engaging first year experience for all students in first year writing. In developing a major and minor and including WRT 160 in the core, we will also develop an innovative and engaging curriculum that will strengthen student writing across the curriculum as students prepare to adapt to the writing demands their various disciplines.

8. Clarification of Core Courses: In section IV A (p. 13), we will include the following clarifications:

Students who earned college credit for the AP writing course and those who have taken the equivalent of WRT 160 at other institutions are not required to take WRT 160. Students who have been exempted from WRT 160 for submitting a portfolio as described under the *General Education program* in the *Undergraduate degree requirements* section of the *Undergraduate Catalog* do not need to take WRT 160 and can instead choose an additional elective course to complete their 40 credits of course work.

Revise "Choose from one of the three tracks listed below" to read "Students will choose one of the following tracks listed below for their major course work and complete both the required course and three of the electives from that track. One of their elective courses may be chosen from another track within the major with the permission of the WRT department chair."

For the new media track, we will delete the Journalism courses and add courses that were recently approved by COI or that are currently under development that focus on technical skill within a rhetorical context: specifically the newly approved courses, "WRT 231 Composing Audio Essays" and "WRT 233 Digital Storytelling," and "WRT 332 Rhetoric of Web Design," which is currently under development.

Revise the electives to allow only courses chosen from the WRT rubric, unless substitutions are allowed by the department chair. Delete references to all other courses in section IV A 3 (p. 14). The revised text will read as follows:

8 credits (2 courses) chosen from additional WRT courses numbered 200 or above. Students may substitute appropriate courses from other departments with permission of the WRT department chair.

Clarify the capstone course: The capstone consists of either an internship (WRT 491) or senior thesis (WRT 492) that connects theory to practice. Students will produce a reflective research project on either their internship experience or their senior thesis research and present that reflection in a public forum such as an open assembly, Festival of Writing, or Meeting of the Minds. A list of possible campus resources for the different tracks is included, and a list of internships approved by Communication and Journalism is also available at <http://www2.oakland.edu/jrn/files/InternshipOrganizationsUpdatedSept07.pdf>. We can list example businesses for each track.

9. Rationale for WRT 160 as a core course: Including WRT 160 as a core course was first proposed by reviewers on COI as the practice of including the introductory, general education course as a part of the major occurs in approximately 75% of the majors in the College of Arts and Sciences, including majors in Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, Math, History, and Chemistry, to name a few. WRT faculty believe making 160 a core course will serve the best interests of both our majors/minors and students across the university. In short, including WRT 160 as a core course in our major will increase both the quality of this required course and the strength of the Writing and Rhetoric program in a number of ways:

It will emphasize the importance of infusing resources into that course by maintaining a high-ratio of full-time to part-time instructors in the course and providing professional development opportunities for instructors teaching the curriculum.

It will provide an efficient way for students in business, HRD, and other programs to adopt a minor in Writing and Rhetoric, as well as an expedient route for those who wish to become majors in Writing and Rhetoric.

It will allow us to identify strong writers and potential majors in the fall semester – those who placed out of WRT 150 – and engage them in writing and rhetoric studies early in their academic careers.

10. Certificate Program: We are planning to propose a certificate program in the near future. Our new hire, Jim Nugent, has a strong background in certificate programs for professional and technical communication and has written a book chapter that surveys the curriculum of certificate programs across the county. His chapter titled “Certificate Programs in Technical Communication: Looking Closer, through Sophistic Eyes” is included in a forthcoming edited collection on professional writing programs. We could add a note to that effect at the end of section IV (p. 15).

We hope that these suggestions for revision meet with your approval. Please let us know if there is anything that we have overlooked.

INFORMATION FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
EMPLOYMENT ANALYSIS FOR TECHNICAL WRITERS, WEB DESIGNERS,
AND INSTRUCTIONAL COORDINATORS

Technical Writers (<http://stats.bls.gov/oco/pdf/ocos089.pdf>)

The National Employment Matrix projects an increase of 20% in positions for Technical writers from 2006 to 2016. Technical writers put technical information into easily understandable language. They prepare product documentation, such as operating and maintenance manuals, catalogs, assembly instructions, and project proposals. Technical writers primarily are found in the information technology industry, writing operating instructions for online Help and documentation for computer programs. Many technical writers work with engineers on technical subject matters to prepare written interpretations of engineering and design specifications and other information for a general readership. Technical writers also may serve as part of a team conducting usability studies to help improve the design of a product that still is in the prototype stage. They plan and edit technical materials and oversee the preparation of illustrations, photographs, diagrams, and charts.

Most writers and editors have at least a basic familiarity with technology, regularly using personal computers, desktop or electronic publishing systems, scanners, and other electronic communications equipment. Many writers prepare material directly for the Internet. For example, they may write for electronic editions of newspapers or magazines, create short fiction or poetry, or produce technical documentation that is available only online. These writers also may prepare text for Web sites. As a result, they should be knowledgeable about graphic design, page layout, and multimedia software. In addition, they should be familiar with interactive technologies of the Web so that they can blend text, graphics, and sound together. Bloggers who are paid to write may be considered writers.

Some employers look for a broad liberal arts background, while others prefer to hire people with degrees in communications, journalism, or English. For those who specialize in a particular area, such as fashion, business, or law, additional background in the chosen field is expected. Increasingly, technical writing requires a degree in, or some knowledge about, a specialized field—for example, engineering, business, or one of the sciences. Knowledge of a second language is helpful for some positions. A background in web design, computer graphics, or other technology field is increasingly practical, because of the growing use of graphics and representational design in developing technical documentation.

Demand for technical writers and writers with expertise in areas such as law, medicine, or economics is expected to increase because of the continuing expansion of scientific and technical information and the need to communicate it to others. Legal, scientific, and technological developments and discoveries generate demand for people to interpret technical information for a more general audience. Rapid growth and change in the high-technology and electronics industries result in a greater need for people to write users' guides, instruction manuals, and training materials.

Writers and editors held about 306,000 jobs in 2006. More than one-third were self-employed: Writers and authors held about 135,000 jobs; editors, about 122,000 jobs; and technical writers, about 49,000 jobs. About one-third of the salaried jobs for writers and editors were in the information sector, which includes newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers; radio and television broadcasting; software publishers; motion picture and sound-recording industries; Internet service providers, Web search portals and data-processing services; and Internet publishing and broadcasting. Substantial numbers also worked in professional, scientific, and technical services. Other salaried writers and editors work in computer systems design and related services, public and private educational services, and religious organizations.

According to the Department of Labor, median annual earnings for salaried technical writers were \$58,050 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$45,130 and \$73,750. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$35,520, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$91,720. Median annual earnings in computer systems design and related services were \$59,830.

According to the Society for Technical Communication, the median annual salary for entry level technical writers was \$40,400 in 2005. The median annual salary for midlevel nonsupervisory technical writers was \$52,140, and for senior nonsupervisory technical writers, \$69,000.

Web Designers (<http://www.bls.gov/oco/pdf/ocos042.pdf>)

The growth of the Internet and the expansion of the World Wide Web (the graphical portion of the Internet) have generated a variety of occupations related to the design, development, and maintenance of Web sites and their servers. For example, webmasters are responsible for all technical aspects of a Web site, including performance issues such as speed of access, and for approving the content of the site. Internet developers or Web developers, also called Web designers, are responsible for day-to-day site creation and design.

The computer scientists and database administrators occupation is expected to grow 37 percent from 2006 to 2016, much faster than average for all occupations. Employment of these computer specialists is expected to grow as organizations continue to adopt and integrate increasingly sophisticated technologies. Job increases will be driven by very rapid growth in computer systems design and related services, which is projected to be one of the fastest growing industries in the U.S. economy.

Robert Half International, a firm providing specialized staffing services, noted the following salary ranges for computer-related occupations in their 2007 Salary Guide:

Senior web developer 71,000 - 102,000
Web developer 54,750 - 81,500
Web designer 47,000 - 71,500

Instructional Coordinators (<http://www.bls.gov/oco/pdf/ocos269.pdf>)

Instructional coordinators held about 129,000 jobs in 2006. Almost 40 percent worked in public or private elementary and secondary schools, while more than 20 percent worked in public or private junior colleges, colleges and universities, and professional schools. Other employing industries included State and local government; individual and family services; child day care services; scientific research and development services; and management, scientific, and technical consulting services.

Much faster-than-average job growth is projected. Job opportunities generally should be favorable, particularly for those with experience in math and reading curriculum development.

The number of instructional coordinators is expected to grow by 22 percent over the 2006-16 decade, much faster than the average for all occupations, as they will be instrumental in developing new curricula to meet the demands of a changing society and in training teachers. Although budget constraints may limit employment growth to some extent, a continuing emphasis on improving the quality of education should result in an increasing demand for these workers. The emphasis on accountability also should increase at all levels of government and cause more schools to focus on improving standards of educational quality and student performance. Growing numbers of coordinators will be needed to incorporate the new standards into existing curricula and make sure teachers and administrators are informed of changes.

Additional job growth for instructional coordinators will stem from the increasing emphasis on lifelong learning and on programs for students with special needs, including those for whom English is a second language. These students often require more educational resources and consolidated planning and management within the educational system.

Favorable job prospects are expected. Opportunities should be best for those who specialize in subjects targeted for improvement by the No Child Left Behind Act—namely, reading, math, and science. There also will be a need for more instructional coordinators to show teachers how to use technology in the classroom.