
MEMORANDUM

TO: BALAJI RAJAGOPALAN, CHAIR, SENATE BUDGET REVIEW COMMITTEE (SBRC)
FROM: MARSHALL KITCHENS, LORI OSTERGAARD, AND GREG GIBERSON
SUBJECT: NEW PROGRAM PROPOSAL—MAJOR AND MINOR IN WRITING AND RHETORIC
DATE: 4 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. With regards to the committee's concern that our enrollment estimates suggest the major will barely break even in its fifth year, we should note that our estimates for the number of new majors were intentionally conservative. Therefore, we have revised our estimates to more accurately reflect the growth in student numbers in the first five years of similar programs at universities around the country, although the final numbers are still conservative estimates.

The committee also expressed a concern about the results of our survey of prospective students, so we have revised this 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 is a significant number of students (much higher than the estimates in the proposed budget).

2. With the revised figures in the budget, the projected expenses are sufficiently covered with significant reserves allowing for variations in enrollment. The new lines in years three and four will be needed to expand our course offerings in the major as we identify changing needs as well as to increase the number of full-time faculty teaching RHT 160. It is our goal to have only full-time faculty teaching WRT 160, which is a core course for the major as well as a Gen Ed requirement. These new lines are also necessary because as enrollments in the university increase, so do the number of sections of WRT 160. Given the increasing number of WRT 160 courses due to enrollment and the changing needs of the growing major program, we believe these two lines will be needed as will more lines, which we will seek through the normal allocation process when appropriate.

The faculty overload pay in the budget provides compensation for individual faculty members directing large programs that are relevant to the proposed major. One of the line items is for the Director of First-Year Writing who is responsible for scheduling and oversight for those teaching WRT 150 and 160, and the other is for the director of Writing Across the Curriculum.