

Humanities Department Strategic Planning Statement: 2009

Summary:

The Humanities Department plays an important role in the General Education program, and we seek to integrate this role with the goals of our undergraduate major programs and graduate programs to achieve the strategic goals of the university. Our major programs and graduate programs are well-established and successful. This year we celebrated two milestones—the twenty-fifth anniversary of our undergraduate major in Scientific and Technical Communication (STC) and the twentieth anniversary of our PhD program in Rhetoric and Technical Communication (RTC). Virtually all of our efforts at these various levels complement each other.

Goal 1: Attract, retain and support a world-class and diverse faculty, staff and student population.

Faculty:

Recent Accomplishments: The department has addressed Goal 1 through successful recruitment of new faculty. Since 2005 the Humanities Department has hired eight new tenure-track faculty members, bringing established records of scholarship and the strong promise of future distinction to the department. These new colleagues reflect the department's commitment to intellectual and cultural diversity. Five of the eight have substantial international experience, six of the recent hires are women, and four are members of underrepresented minority groups. (Appendices 1 and 2 show the current faculty demographics and recent recruiting history, while appendix 4 details steps to be taken to address efforts to diversify the faculty and appendix 5 contains the mentoring plan that assists their efforts to become successful teachers and scholars.)

Ongoing Efforts: Searches conducted during 2009-10 for new assistant professors in French Studies and New Media, have resulted in the hiring of another faculty member from an under-represented minority group. The French search represents a particularly successful “textbook” example of pro-active diversity planning; the department searched for a candidate whose research addressed not traditional French literature, but francophone postcolonial literature or linguistics. From a diverse pool of applicants emerged two finalists from sub-Saharan Africans with PhDs from US universities. These new colleagues further enhance the profile of our doctoral program in Rhetoric and Technical Communication (RTC) in the important areas of globalization, international technical communication and digital media studies.

Staff:

Recent Actions: In 2009 we replaced two long-serving staff members—our Department Coordinator and a Computer Support Staff—as a result of retirement and transfer, respectively. In 2008 we transferred a tenure-track faculty member to a Lecturer position as Director of our computer center, the Humanities Digital Media Zone. And in 2007 the English as Second Language (ESL) program was merged into the Humanities Department, with its Director becoming a Lecturer in Humanities. Through these staffing changes the department gained first-rate individuals with no loss of efficiency. These

new staff members show great promise for further development and contributions to the department.

Ongoing Efforts: We have instituted a program to upgrade the skills and performance of our three-person clerical staff and to monitor the performance of the clerical staff with a particular emphasis upon providing skills development and comportsment coaching to improve customer service.

Students:

Recent Achievements and Actions:

Enrollments of undergraduate majors and graduate students have remained stable during the past five years. We plan a minor (10%) increase in majors and continued stability in the graduate program, which is the largest in the college. (Appendices 6 and 7 show the number of majors and degrees awarded in recent years, while Appendix 8 shows the enrollment projection for HU majors.)

Ongoing Efforts:

Recruiting and retain a diverse population of undergraduate students.

The department already exhibits more diversity among its students than the university as a whole, and shows significant gender diversity. There are fewer underrepresented minority students and the department is committed to working to improve this situation. Appendix 3 shows current students demographics and Appendix 4 contains worksheets detailing efforts to broaden the diversity of HU students. These actions include:

- Three Summer Youth Scholarships the department has established (\$350 each) for high school students from under-represented groups to participate in the Summer Youth Program and enroll in the Summer Youth courses offered by the department. Each covers half the cost of the program; they are advertised in high schools with substantial populations of students from under-represented groups.
- Department Chair Ron Strickland is working with Department of Social Sciences Chair Pat Martin and Lori Muhlig, MTU's Coordinator of Native American Outreach to develop a strategy for recruitment of Native American students. Jill Hodges, a lecturer in the department of Native American descent, will support this effort.

Recruiting, Supporting and Graduating PhD students in RTC

- In contrast to STEM disciplines, women make up a slight majority of Humanities faculty and graduate students nationwide. Currently, of 35 on-campus graduate students, 21 are women and 14 are men. These include five international students and four students from under-represented populations (including two black international students who are US permanent residents). Again, Appendix 3 shows the demographics of HU graduate students and Appendix 4 shows the steps planned to increase these numbers going forward. Included are the following efforts:

- Stepped up efforts to recruit top-quality graduate students from across the United States, and to recruit more international graduate students. We will focus particularly on applicants from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe—all areas where Department Chair Ron Strickland has prior experience and contacts. By recruiting excellent international students and US students from underrepresented groups we will further improve the quality of our program and we will also broaden our diversity profile. Further, there are some “cultural climate” advantages to be gained through this two-pronged approach to enhancing diversity. For example, by recruiting black students from sub-Saharan Africa, we can create a departmental community in which African American students also feel less “in the spotlight” and more comfortable in daily interactions. Last fall we met with representatives of U.S. State Department-associated recruiting agencies in several foreign countries in an effort to increase international admissions to the program, and we are working to establish “pipeline” relationships with colleagues abroad to recruit graduate students from other countries. Currently such a “pipeline” for applicants exists with the Technological University of Dortmund in Germany (through a contact of Prof. Dieter Adolphs). The department seeks to establish similar connections to recruit students from Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland, from Vietnam National University in Hanoi, and from the University of Ghana—Legon (all through contacts of Chair Ron Strickland).
- In addition, the department annually promotes its graduate programs to prospective students at various national conferences, including the National Communication Association Conference (NCAC), the Conference on Composition and Communication (CCC) the Modern Languages Association (MLA). Several applications to the graduate program have originated from these efforts. The department also supports those graduate students presenting their research and scholarship at these conferences.

1.3 Provide exceptional infrastructure...

In 2007, the Writing Center received a donation of \$90,000 from Kimberly Clark Corporation for a major renovation, resulting in what has been described as an “exceptional infrastructure and a welcoming, aesthetically pleasing environment.”

In keeping with this effort, the department plans a major renovation of its computer lab—the Humanities Digital Media Zone (HDMZ) to take place beginning summer of 2010. The re-designed HDMZ will be a visually exciting, dynamic and multifunctional space accommodating foreign-language and English as Second Language (ESL) classes and lab activities as well as Technical Communication, Web, Graphic and Game Design, Digital Photography and Digital Film Production courses. A design firm from Milwaukee is helping us plan the renovation of the HDMZ with some minor changes to integrate the Writing Center and the HDMZ. A second stage of renovation, to upgrade the ESL facility and improve the entrance of the writing center, will begin when funding for these improvements is secured.

Goal 2: Deliver a distinctive and rigorous discovery-based learning experience grounded in science, engineering, technology, sustainability, the business of innovation, and an understanding of the social and cultural contexts of our contemporary world.

It is important to recognize that the activities of the Humanities Department faculty constitute one of the primary means by which students at Michigan Tech come to understand the social and cultural contexts of our contemporary world. Few activities undertaken here would not fit into this goal, but the most important deserve to be singled-out.

The department has developed new course offerings in technical communication:

The department has added a new graduate course (HU 6115) in the advanced study of Technical Communication (TC) special topics, including TC theories; feminist studies of TC; the study of TC in international contexts; theories and practices of usability; and TC research methods and methodologies.

The department also has increased the frequency of offering Special Topics in Technical Communication (HU 4690) to offer a wider range of special topics, including rhetorics of technology; white papers, grants and proposals; international technical communication; technical communication and globalization; and science writing.

The department has maintained writing-intensive classes with individual attention to students' needs: Small Class Size and Discovery-Based Learning

The Humanities Department provides writing-intensive courses with close personal attention to students' learning. Students' introduction to written, oral, and visual communication begins with UN2001. The course affords students a strong rhetorical foundation that is applicable to any discipline, and that encourages using written, oral, and visual communication for inquiry and discovery, and for problem-solving.

UN2001 also cultivates intellectual diversity and a worldview adapted to the needs and challenges of the 21st century.

- The small class size of 20 students provides an opportunity to “strengthen innovative student-centered activities, programs, and services,” thereby offsetting some of the drawbacks of the larger lecture sections held in most majors.
- The very existence of the course attests to its focus on “enhance[ing] students’ communication skills and understanding of and participation in creative processes,” including the process of composing arguments in written, oral, and visual modes.
- Finally, the attention to collaborative work, ranging from peer review and brainstorming to collaboratively written papers and presentations, contributes to “develop[ing] graduates with strong leadership and team-building capabilities, critical thinking skills, and ethical awareness.”

The Writing Center serves a campus-wide population and consistently reports a strong impact on retention for first-year students who keep weekly writing center appointments. In 2008-2009, for example, such students who entered the university with lower-than-average ACT scores had a 90.29% retention rate, compared with a 68.75% retention rate for those who did not keep appointments. Significantly, international graduate students

account for more than 30% of weekly appointments in the Writing Center. These students receive important support as they prepare theses and dissertations in English. This support is separate from and in addition to the support for international students provided by the ESL program, which constitute another instance of experiential learning within the Humanities Department.

Humanities faculty members have played a key role in organizing campus-wide events that also advance the educational goals of the university. Two notable examples are the Summer Reading Program and World Usability Day.

Ethics, Critical Thinking and Cultural Knowledge

Finally the department takes seriously its role in providing broad-based education in the liberal arts to develop students' critical, reflective and creative capacities, social and cultural awareness, and foundations for ethical judgment. Therefore we will maintain our strong commitment to the general education program. The department will consider using one of open tenure lines to search for a philosopher who specializes in theoretical and applied ethics, is qualified to teach logic and critical thinking, and is particularly interested in general undergraduate education.

We are seeking to expand our efforts to promote Michigan Tech's degree programs in liberal arts to college-bound students throughout the state and region by developing contacts with secondary educators, and we are exploring the possibility of reaching out to non-traditional and off-campus students with online and evening offerings of Humanities courses such as literature, creative writing, philosophy and modern languages.

Goal 3: Establish world-class research, scholarship innovation and creative work that promote sustainable economic and social development in Michigan, the nation, and the world.

3.1 Improve our stature as a research university and Ph.D. granting institution.

Humanities Department people and programs already bolster the reputation of the university. Recent examples of recognition include:

2005: undergraduate programs in Humanities and in Scientific and Technical Communication received the coveted Program of Excellence Award from the National Council of Teachers of English.

2007: the Writing Center received the National Program of Excellence Award by the National Council of Teachers of English. This made the department the only one in the nation to receive this award for three of its programs.

Other evidence of the department's support of this goal include:

The graduate program is recognized nationally as a leading producer of PhDs in Rhetoric and Technical Communication. The program has produced 76 graduates in its 20 years of existence, and it maintains a placement rate of more than 90% in tenure-track or

comparable positions. By comparison, the national average tenure-track placement rate for PhDs in English is only around 50%. In 2009, for example, the department graduated six PhDs, four of whom accepted tenure-track positions at other universities and two of whom were Tech employees who had completed their degrees as part-time students. Four students are projected to complete their PhD degrees in spring 2010 and three have accepted tenure-track positions at other universities.

Recent faculty accomplishments:

Professor Marilyn Cooper was named the Thomas R. Watson Distinguished Visiting Professor in Rhetoric and Composition at the University of Louisville for the spring 2010 semester.

Associate Professor Patty Sotirin is editor of the international journal *Women and Language*.

Professor Jennifer Daryl Slack received two National Communication Association Awards: Best Book in Critical and Cultural Studies (2006); and Outstanding Article in Critical and Cultural Studies (2008).

Assistant Professor Michael Bowler is principal investigator on a 3-year NSF research grant received by Michigan Tech to educate science and engineering graduate students in the responsible conduct of research.

Ongoing Activities:

The Humanities Department, in common with all units in the college, will investigate all appropriate ways of supporting graduate students with external funding. There are fewer opportunities in humanities than in the natural sciences, but contributions seem especially possible in program developments related to wider university initiatives in undergraduate education generally and STEM programs in particular. The department has approximately 35 graduate students who receive support through graduate teaching assistantships (27) and external funding, such as NSF grants (5), King-Chavaz-Park fellowships (2), and the Pavlis Institute (1). Appendix 9 shows the recent pattern of external funding in the department.

3.2 Promote economic and social development and innovation in Michigan the nation, and the world.

The department is involved in establishing industry partnerships. The department's program in Scientific and Technical Communication supports an Enterprise established with Marquette General Hospital as an industry sponsor for the Cin/Optic Communication and Media Enterprise. This is a substantial, longstanding commitment, so we do not plan to add more sponsors or develop more projects in the next couple of years. Other opportunities involving ties to the private sector are likely to develop because of the almost natural connection between industry and technical communication, and the rapidly growing use of new media in all sectors of society. The department will work with alumni to identify such opportunities.

3.3 Address societal needs through global partnerships.

TESOL Certificate Courses

The incorporation of ESL into the Humanities Department offers opportunities for diversity enhancement and for exploiting the international diversity of the campus. A key step in this direction is the development of five new courses in applied linguistics that will comprise the course work for an undergraduate Certificate in the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). These courses leverage the impact of the department's existing English as a Second Language program, integrating the existing language programs provided to non-native speakers of English across campus with a certificate program that will offer enhanced opportunities for career options in international settings and among diverse populations domestically for Humanities majors and other students.

Foreign Language Offerings

With its offerings in Foreign Languages, the department supports diversity and provides opportunities for students to gain awareness and access to other cultures. This year we have initiated offerings in Chinese with two new courses in beginning Mandarin. We have had continued success with our certificate, advanced certificate and, especially, minor and international minor programs in French, German and Spanish. Between 2002 and spring 2009 a total of 51 students completed modern language certificates and another 237 students completed modern language minors; of these, 75 students earned international minors requiring at least five weeks of study abroad in a Francophone, Spanish-speaking or German-speaking country.

Peace Corps International Master's Degree in RTC

In 2008 the department established a Peace Corps Master's program in Rhetoric and Technical Communication. The first student enrolled in the program in the fall of 2009.