

# The Senate of Michigan Technological University

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## PROPOSAL 1-89

### DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY RHETORIC AND TECHNICAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Senate of Michigan Technological University approves of the establishment of a Doctor of Philosophy in Rhetoric and Technical Communications.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

##### Need

The discipline of rhetoric and technical communication studies effective communication in the broad range of media and contexts characteristic in our technological society. It is both a theoretical and an applied discipline, investigating the nature of communication events and designing processes and structures to facilitate effective communication. The need for such research is crucial in light of the technological and economic transformations the world is undergoing.

##### Why MTU?

The Department of Humanities at MTU will be able to offer an attractive alternative to the two established doctoral programs in rhetoric and technical communication at Carnegie Mellon University and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, for the department has established a reputation for its applied theoretical research on the contexts in which communications are generated and used. Applied theoretical research in rhetoric and technical communication is practical in orientation: it synthesizes and develops theory in order to offer solutions to problems of managing communication systems and teaching communication strategies.

Faculty in the Department of Humanities have produced widely-cited analyses of writing-across-the-curriculum, computer-assisted writing, gender and reading, the "ecological" systems of writing, and the relationship between technology and society -- analyses that attempt to guide the use of writing as a method of inquiry in scientific and technical classes, the development of strategies for the use of computers in writing classes, the structuring of environments that facilitate writing, and the making of technological policy in the information age.

The proposed doctoral program does not duplicate current programs in the State of Michigan. Although several universities and colleges within the state offer undergraduate courses in scientific and technical communication, no other university within the state offers even a master's degree in rhetoric and technical communication.

##### Program Goals and Requirements

The Department of Humanities is proposing a doctoral degree program in rhetoric and technical communication in order to further research on the contexts of communication events within our complex technological society. The doctoral program will produce researcher for universities and consultant-trainers for industry, government, and media. The department's goal has been to begin enrolling doctoral students in the fall of 1989 and to achieve a pool of 20-25 doctoral students by 1994. With this pool and an expected residency of three to four years for students entering with a master's degree, 3-5 PhD's would graduate each year. This fall five students were provisionally enrolled in the doctoral program.

Applicants to the program who possess a master's degree in a communications related field will be given highest consideration. Applicants holding a bachelor's degree in a communications related field who show great promise may be admitted directly to the doctoral program.

During the first quarter of study, the Director of Graduate Studies in consultation with the student will constitute a three-member advisory committee, which will have the primary responsibility for helping the student to plan coursework and to design a research project that will lead to a dissertation. Students must complete 45 hours of coursework, including up to 15 hours of thesis credits. In addition to the purpose of stimulating research, doctoral students' coursework is designed to develop 1) general knowledge of communication; 2) general understanding of research methods currently used in the field and special expertise with those methods appropriate to their dissertation project; 3) basis proficiency in a foreign language and working knowledge of the cultures represented by that language; and 4) general understanding of communication contexts in technological societies. To help students achieve these goals, six courses are required: Proseminar in Rhetoric and Technical Communication (HU 601), two research methods courses, Advanced Foreign Language Seminar in Literature and Film (HU 670), and two cognate courses. The number of required courses is minimal in order to emphasize the role of the advisory committee in shaping each student's preparation to fit his or her academic background and research interests. For example, in the case of cognate courses, students with strong backgrounds in humanities and social sciences will be directed toward courses in scientific and technological areas, while students with strong backgrounds in science and technology will be directed toward courses in humanities and social sciences.

Upon completion of coursework and the foreign language requirement, students will take a written comprehensive examination. The examination will consist of three five-hour written examinations, each focused on a particular area of research. Each student's advisory committee will design the questions to be used in the student's examination and will evaluate the results of the examination. Students who fail the examination may retake it once; if they fail on this occasion, they will be dismissed.

After successful completion of the comprehensive examination, students will constitute a dissertation committee subject to the approval of the Director of Graduate Studies; the committee will normally include members of the student's advisory committee and one graduate faculty member from outside the department. The student will then write a prospectus for the dissertation. After the prospectus is approved, the student will begin work on the dissertation; when the dissertation is complete, the student will defend it in a final oral examination.

### Resources and Funding Needs

Most of the research faculty and facilities necessary to support the doctoral program are already in place, having been developed to support the master's program. With the hiring of three new faculty last year, the department achieved the critical mass of expertise necessary to direct doctoral work. Serial holdings in rhetoric and technical communication available in the library were increased substantially when the master's degree program was implemented. Ten new courses have been added, but only required master's and doctoral courses will be offered every year; elective courses will be scheduled over a three-year cycle, thus adding only approximately four courses a year to the current offerings.

Most of the funds required for program strength and growth have already been committed. The department's current level of GTA support is sufficient for 20-25 doctoral students if the master's program is reduced to 30 students and funds are shifted from the master's to the doctoral program. Additional funds in the form of doctoral teaching assistantships and research fellowships, library and computer support, and administrative support have also been committed.

Outside research support in humanities disciplines primarily takes the form of grants to individual scholars. Nevertheless, the Department of Humanities has received over the past five years an average of \$98,500 per year in external funding for research projects and program development, and the department will continue to seek funding for research projects that will support graduate students.

As a result, start-up costs required from the university are modest and are restricted to such needs as computer support and office and research space for doctoral students.

**Adopted by Senate: 19 September 1990**

**Approved by the Board of Control: 15 November 1990**