

# The Senate of Michigan Technological University

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**Implemented in 1-89b**

## **PROPOSAL 3-89**

### **COMMITMENT TO DEVELOP A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN RHETORIC AND TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION**

#### **PROPOSAL STATEMENT:**

The Senate of Michigan Technological University recommends the establishment of the program offering the Doctor of Philosophy in Rhetoric and Technical Communication.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

In December 1988, the faculty of the Humanities Department endorsed the Proposal to Develop a Ph.D. degree in Rhetoric and Technical Communication. The Graduate Council voted unanimously on January 19, 1989 to support the proposed program.

#### **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:**

##### Introduction

The Humanities Department is proposing a Ph.D. degree in Rhetoric and Technical Communication (RTC) as an extension of its successful undergraduate program in Scientific and Technical Communication (STC) and its master's degree program in RTC. The Ph.D. is considered the standard terminal degree in Rhetoric and Technical Communication.

The degree will prepare scholars to investigate the processes, systems, and contexts -- political, economic, cultural, technological, aesthetic, and historical -- of communication in the technological age. There is an acute shortage of scholarship addressing these issues. In their introduction to New Essays in Technical and Scientific Communication: Research, Theory, Practice (Baywood, 1983), well-known RTC scholars Paul Anderson, John Brockman, and Carolyn Miller point out that "scholarly research in technical and scientific communication has lacked both the theoretical rationale that provides problems and methods and the academic standing that provides motivation." (pp. 8-9) In response to this shortage, the Council of Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication notes that masters programs have quadrupled in the 1980's, and three other institutions are planning Ph.D. programs in RTC to compete with the two established programs at Carnegie-Mellon University and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

The proposed program is consistent with the MTU 2005 report which emphasizes the need for an increased graduate program and research effort. The Ph.D. degree program will enhance the Humanities Department's ability to attract high quality faculty and graduate students, which will also in turn benefit the undergraduate instructional program.

##### Admission

Applicants to the program who possess an MS/MA in STC, Communication, English, Graphic Design, or Journalism will be given first consideration. Students holding a BA/BS in STC or a related field, who evidence high levels of communication skills, and who have a B average or better, may apply directly to the Ph.D. program. In the first year of study, these students would be expected to complete the core courses for the MS in RTC. Applicants whose native language is not English must demonstrate English proficiency by scoring 600 or better on the TOEFL examination.

Students who wish to pursue a Ph.D. in RTC under the sponsorship of MTU faculty members in cognate areas and who have an MA/MS degree in an appropriate area must obtain special permission for admission from the Director of Graduate Studies in Humanities and the sponsoring faculty member. The student and the sponsoring faculty member must provide a description of the research topics to be studied, the qualifications of the advisor to undertake the study, and the means by which the student is to be supported - source of assistantship and tuition support. This information must be submitted to the Graduate Committee in Humanities, and approval must be in writing.

### Course of Study

Students are required to take the following courses as part of the Ph.D. program: Proseminar in Rhetoric and Technical Communication, Qualitative Research Methods (or Quantitative Research Methods if Qualitative Methods was taken as part of the MS core), and Advanced Foreign Language Seminar, along with an approved cognate course and an approved course in fine arts, literature, psychology, or philosophy. Students will also take other courses in RTC and cognate fields along with thesis credits will contribute to the total 45 credits of work required beyond the MS degree.

After a student is accepted, the Director of Graduate Studies will appoint an advisor to the student until the thesis committee is formed. The Director of Graduate Studies will appoint two graduate faculty members each year to give each entering Ph.D. student an advisory interview to determine his or her research goals, how those goals might be achieved within the department, and which faculty members might best assist the student in reaching his or her goals. The interview will be given after the student has completed one or two terms of study, and the two faculty members will submit a written report of their recommendations to the Graduate Committee.

At the completion of their coursework, each student will be required to take three comprehensive written examinations (typically 5 hours in length each) administered by the student's advisor and committee. They will design the questions and evaluate the results of the examination. Students may receive a test score of "pass with distinction," "unqualified pass," "conditional pass," (with conditions indicated in writing), and "fail." Students who fail may retake the examination the next time it is given. If they do not pass on that occasion, they will be dismissed. The examination will be given twice a year -- in the Fall and in the Spring terms.

After students have passed their examinations, they may constitute a dissertation committee to advise them in the preparation of the dissertation prospectus following Department of Humanities guidelines for format, content, length, and depth. Once the prospectus has been approved by the student's committee, the student may begin work on the thesis. The remaining research requirements, relating to the final defense, preparation of the thesis, residence requirements, and the like are those of MTU's graduate school as specified in the catalog and in other documents created by the graduate school, including "Instructions Concerning the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations."

### Research Area

Rhetoric and Technical Communication is richly interdisciplinary -- drawing on literary studies, psychology, philosophy, communication, composition, linguistics, intercultural studies, and visual representation. Building on research in these fields, scholars in RTC analyze the complex social situations in which texts (oral, aural, visual, and written) are produced and circulated.

The Humanities Department's research community is unique in its theoretical treatment of the complex environment within which texts are produced and circulated. Our emphasis on the development and on the application of theory most noticeably sets RTC at MTU apart from and a step beyond the two established programs; further, this emphasis enables us to develop the theoretical rationale that will motivate research in the field of RTC that is theoretically sound and critically engaged with the changing social realities of our age.

We have faculty active in and expect student to conduct research in the following areas: writing and editing in non-academic settings; theories of rhetoric and technology; design and evaluation of training materials; cultural studies; psycho- and sociolinguistic approaches to written communication; cognitive approaches to problem-solving in scientific and technical settings; intercultural technical communication; and ethical and legal issues in scientific and technical communication. Any current Humanities Department graduate faculty will be able to direct Ph.D. level research into problems that derive from their current specialties.

### **FUNDING SUPPORT:**

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

The Humanities Department, the College of Sciences and Arts, and the Graduate School have already made substantial commitments to providing support to graduate students: at the present time, the Graduate School provides 5 GTA's; the College contributes \$50,000 toward teaching assistantships and other forms of financial assistance; and the Department assigned \$17,000 in 1988-89 to support of graduate students. Program strength and growth will require a gradual increase in financial support, however. Successful hiring this year has brought the graduate faculty up to full strength, so the cost to the University of this program has been reduced by approximately \$50,000 and now totals approximately \$90,000 and includes ongoing support for our library needs.

### **RESOURCES AND FACULTY**

Because the MS in RTC has been in place for three years, most of the research faculty and laboratory facilities necessary to begin the Ph.D. degree program are already in place. Some readjustments of faculty loads and course assignments will occur. We expect no adverse impact on the quality of the undergraduate programs because current hiring along with the re-assigning of First-year English sections to GTA's will cover the modest increase in course offerings occasioned by bringing the Ph.D. on line. Twelve new doctoral-level courses will be added to prepare students for research in one of the several subspecialties that make up the interdisciplinary field of RTC, but all elective graduate courses will be taught on a rotating schedule, thus adding only approximately 4 courses a year to our current offerings.

**Adopted by Senate: 15 March 1989**

**Supported by Administration: 16 May 1989**

**See Proposal 1-89b**