

The University Senate of Michigan Technological University

PROPOSAL 47-04

BA IN COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE STUDIES WITH A CONCENTRATION IN COMMUNICATION IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

1. Executive Summary

Communication is a field in great demand. Numerous job paths are open to those with degrees in communication, and large numbers of students choose the communication major where one is offered. We plan to establish a major in Communication and Culture Studies to grow enrollment and provide alternatives for students at Michigan Tech who choose a non-engineering path. In this way, we can offer much needed options for Michigan Tech students, promote diversity, aid in student retention, and provide an opportunity for student recruitment to a traditionally very popular major. This degree will draw on the well-developed strengths of the Department of Humanities that include minors in Communication Studies, Journalism, Media Studies, Philosophy, Modern Languages, and majors in Liberal Arts and Scientific and Technical Communication.

2. Need for Proposed Degree

The need for the BA in Communication and Culture Studies originates from many directions: from the internal need of the university to enhance enrollment, from the need of the university to offer a curriculum that responds to contemporary demands for communication proficiencies, from the needs of students for meaningful program options at Michigan Tech, and from the needs of organizations to recruit college graduates savvy in the ways of communication.

Key components of Michigan Tech's Strategic Plan are 1) to aggressively recruit and retain a larger and diverse student body and 2) to offer programs in new areas, particularly interdisciplinary areas. The BA in Communication and Culture Studies would contribute significantly to these goals.

The proposed degree would offer opportunities to increase enrollment numbers generally and to diversify the student body more particularly. Typically, programs in communication attract large numbers of students, many of whom are women, minorities, rural, urban, business, and graduate school-bound students. So, for example, of the 56,910 degrees in communication conferred in 2000, 34,847 were awarded to women (<http://www.natcom.org/ComProg/Stats/earned.htm>). At many universities of comparable size to Michigan Tech, a large percentage of students major in communication. For example, of the 7,500 students at Millersville University, 450 students major in Speech Communication. Of the 28,931 students at Western Michigan University, 1100 students major and 400 minor in Communication. Of the approximately 25,000 students at Virginia Tech, a peer institution, 750 students major in Communication (as of September 2003).

Apart from attracting new students to Michigan Tech, the major will help the university meet its retention goals. Retention has been a major focus at every level of the university. One critical aspect of retention, as recognized in the strategic plan, is the need to provide alternatives to the "engineering-only" reputation that impedes both recruitment and retention. The proposed degree in Communication and Culture Studies will contribute to retention rates by offering a high quality alternative that draws on current strengths within the university.

The uniqueness of this major is its interdisciplinary nature and its focus on the cultural contexts within which practices of communication matter. Communication programs throughout the country, even within Michigan, vary somewhat in the "complexion" of their curricula. Each has its own emphasis. For example, some programs will emphasize more mass media, speech communication, media production, interpersonal communication, and journalism. What is unique about the proposed BA is its cultural orientation, that is, its emphasis on the larger cultural context within which practices of communication matter. In foregrounding this emphasis we offer students a unique and timely orientation to communication in a changing world, while at the same time offering a degree that is clearly recognizable to other educators and practitioners in the field as a degree in communication. Students learn the complexities and possibilities of communication modes and practices, including familiarity with a second language and culture, so that they are well prepared to take up leadership positions in their communities, country, and world. While the proposed program offers skills in such areas as oral and visual competencies and media applications, there is considerable emphasis on developing conceptual understandings that give students an edge in not just using communication but in shaping communicative practices and future possibilities. The degree is unique in yet another way: Because the interdisciplinary contributions of linguists, rhetoricians, modern language scholars, and so on, are located *within* the departmental structure, we can assure a level of coordination and cooperation that is rare in communication degrees.

Beyond the internal need of the university to build a diverse student body, there is a consistent demand for communication professionals. In 1998 the *Wall Street Journal* reported that excellent communication skills were the premier characteristic sought out in prospective employees. Industry representatives who have visited Michigan Tech have consistently told us that the skills they most value are savvy communication skills. These skills involve more than the basic ability to read, write, and speak effectively. They also involve the cultivation of the knowledge and communication skills that are increasingly demanded by a changing, global environment: the ability to negotiate in diverse cultural contexts, to work constructively in complex organizational settings, and to imagine and institute creative solutions in a fast-paced and rapidly changing world. These are all matters that the BA in Communication and Culture Studies emphasizes.

The career paths open to graduates of a degree in communication are many. Positions such as the following are possible: communication coordinator/consultant, information specialist, facilitator/mediator, community relations director, speech writer, grant writer, lobbyist, company spokesperson, fund raiser, customer service specialist, multi-cultural specialist, print and radio journalist, and related positions in fields such as sales, education, human resources, tourism, and entertainment. (For an expanded list of such options, see Appendix I: National Communication Association graphic: "What Can You Do with a Communication Degree?")

As a first step toward responding to the need for an emphasis on Communication and Culture Studies at Michigan Tech, the Department of Humanities established the minor in Communication Studies two years ago. The minor has already successfully attracted a diverse student population. The BA in Communication and Culture Studies will build on this success and permit students to more fully prepare for the changing communication environment of the future.

3. Degree Objectives:

The following objectives have been identified for the BA in Communication and Culture Studies:

- To provide students with a broad-based, humanistically oriented education focusing on **primary communication contexts** in a changing global, cultural environment.
- To provide students with a **solid theoretical background** to the issues and challenges that characterize the changing communication environment.

- To provide opportunities to develop a **variety of skills** that characterize the changing communication environment.
- To provide students with the ability to **individualize their program** to correspond to the many career paths open to students of communication.
- To provide students with an education in communication that will prepare them as **workplace leaders** and **responsible citizens**, and provide them with the option of **graduate studies** in communication or related fields.

4. Programmatic Resources

All of the faculty and courses necessary for this degree are already in place in the Department of Humanities. Faculty in areas such as Communication, Cultural Studies, Linguistics, Modern Languages, New Media, and Rhetoric have been consistently offering courses that have addressed the goals of the Communication and Culture Studies major. Until recently these faculty and these courses have been *perceived* in terms of contributing solely to programs such as Scientific and Technical Communication or to the General Education curriculum. In recent external department reviews, the capacity and desire of department faculty and staff for another major degree program has become increasingly evident. By creatively organizing how a student can bring current course offerings together that takes advantage of existing faculty expertise, the Humanities Department can readily support the proposed degree program and contribute to the education of communication professionals.

The Humanities department currently has 26 full-time tenured and tenure track faculty, many of whom teach in the areas that constitute this degree: Communication, Cultural Studies, New Media, Journalism, Rhetoric, Linguistics, Modern Languages, and Philosophy. (See Appendix IV for faculty profiles.) Communication courses have been offered consistently since the establishment of the undergraduate degree in Scientific and Technical Communication in 1984. Focused courses in communication and culture studies have been added in the intervening years in response to the demands of the changing and challenging communication environment and for the benefit of students in the Scientific and Technical Communication, Liberal Arts, and General Education programs. As part of these programs, Communication and Culture Studies has grown, but we have come to recognize the need to and value of developing a focused degree that foregrounds matters of communication.

The masters and PhD in Rhetoric and Technical Communication, established in 1985 and 1989 respectively, have also contributed to the growing expertise of the faculty in the area communication and culture. Graduate faculty currently teach courses in communication and culture, cultural studies, communication theory, organizational communication, interpersonal communication, documentary communication, intercultural communication, risk communication, communication ethics, linguistics, applications of media, communication and community, and communication technologies and culture. All of these areas provide a rich ground from which to provide undergraduates with a quality education that takes advantage of the expert knowledge developed by graduate faculty. Notably, as part of a recent revision of the curriculum in the graduate program in Rhetoric and Technical Communication, three new courses were added that focus on fundamental areas of scholarship, one of which is HU5004, Communication in Cultural Contexts. This course, proposed by the communication faculty and piloted by those faculty members during the first two years, offers graduate students an introduction to humanistically-oriented scholarly work in communication and culture and attests to the centrality and availability of such perspectives and expertise among Humanities faculty and within the curriculum. In short, the Department of Humanities has the resources in place to support the undergraduate major in Communication and Culture Studies.

5. Relationship to Existing Programs

The proposed BA in Communication and Culture Studies draws on programs that have developed within the Department of Humanities: the BS and BA in Scientific and Technical

Communication (STC); the BA in Liberal Arts; and courses developed for the general education mission of the department. However, the BA in Communication and Culture Studies differs significantly from the degrees offered by the department. Although the term "communication" appears in both the proposed major and the STC majors, the two programs take different orientations and are designed to produce different kinds of graduates. Because both draw from the Humanities area and depend on Humanities faculty expertise, there are bound to be commonalities. However, the BA in Communication and Culture Studies is distinguished by its emphasis on communication *per se*. While STC educates and prepares students for the specific technically-oriented career paths of technical communicators, Communication and Culture Studies educates and prepares students to work across a broader range of applications with an especially rich understanding of communication theory and practice in diverse cultural contexts.

The proposed core curriculum of the BA in Communication and Culture Studies differs from the core of STC. The only shared core course is HU2830 Introduction to Speech Communication; and the STC BA option, like Communication and Culture Studies, requires a year of language. What is unique about Communication and Culture Studies is first, its core, and second, its organization into concentrations. The core, with two lower level courses and one capstone senior project will provide students with common tools of analysis and a sense of identity in the field. The three concentrations ensure that students will be extensively exposed to concentrated and coherent study of widely-acknowledged areas of importance in the field of communication.

STC and Communication and Culture Studies major share courses in media. The media area is a critical area of knowledge and skill in the world today and students must have an understanding of new media to compete as either communication generalists or as technical communication specialists. The STC degree requires 6-12 credits in this area and students choose from 7 courses to fulfill this requirement; the Communication and Culture Studies degree includes 5 of these courses and some additional, but not the 2 courses focused on technical communication. Notably, other programs across campus such as Business also require Humanities media courses in recognition of the critical nature of this area.

STC students currently do have options that allow them to avail themselves of some, but only some of the courses offered in the Communication and Culture Studies degree. A student in the STC BA option can take courses from one of the Communication and Culture Studies concentrations to fulfill their 24-credit concentration requirement. They can even take a minor in Communication to meet 12 of their concentration credits. (We currently have students doing this.) However, the requirements of the STC degree (in either option) and the particular range of options open to them prohibit students from putting together a profile that would be equivalent to the BA in Communication and Culture. Consequently, STC core requirements, its range of options, and the limited opportunity to take courses in Communication and Culture Studies clearly differentiate STC from the BA in Communication and Culture Studies. Students graduating with these different degrees will look significantly different than one another.

6. Institutional Impact

Given the established appeal of the Communication minor and Communication majors at other universities, we anticipate that new enrollments in the BA in Communication and Culture Studies would be significant within a few years once this major is offered. (See Appendix II: Resource Analysis.) We anticipate that the degree will increase the university's total incoming freshmen enrollment by attracting students whose interests have not been so clearly addressed up to now. Given the diverse student body attracted to the study of communication nationwide (see National Communication Association: <http://www.natcom.org/ComProg/Stats/earned.htm>), the major in Communication and Culture Studies should contribute significantly to helping Michigan Tech achieve its diversity goals. In addition, offering a home for undeclared students and those who wish to transfer out of other degree programs will contribute to university retention rates.

No new courses and no new faculty are required for this degree. Given the popularity of degrees in communication, a conservative estimate of enrollment within 6 years would be 50. The addition of these students will be the primary impact on the Department of Humanities. Given that some upper level Humanities courses have been under-subscribed since the institution of the General Education curriculum, the added enrollment of students in Communication and Culture Studies would make use of currently under-utilized resources and still keep the student/teacher ratio in Humanities at an acceptable level. We expect to achieve sustained enrollment figures of 35 by year 4. At that point, we recommend the addition of one new faculty line to assist with advising and course delivery. (See Appendix II: Resource Analysis). This added expense would, however, be more than offset by the increased enrollment.

7. Schedule For Implementation

Because this degree program is based on existing faculty, courses, and the current scheduling of courses, it can be implemented as soon as it is approved. Thus, we would initiate the degree in the Fall of 2004.

We recommend that Admissions recruiters begin an outreach program during the fall of 2004 to recruit students for the fall of 2005.

8. Outside Reviewer Comments

Utilizing a number of professional electronic networks in communication, we asked communication scholars to read and comment on the soundness of the proposal for the BA in Communication and Culture Studies and on its likelihood for success. We received assessments from department chairs, graduate program directors, the previous director of the National Communication Association, distinguished professors, and a number of highly reputable scholars in North America from institutions such as University of North Carolina, University of Massachusetts, Arizona State University West, Miami University, Virginia Tech, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and University of Washington. (See Appendix V for reviewer comments).

We here highlight comments received from Dr. William Keith of the Department of Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Professor Keith, who has experience a major engineering school, Oregon State University, speaks specifically to the need for this degree in Communication and Culture Studies at MTU in the following way:

This major is also part of a trend across schools which were founded as "tech schools" to broaden their mission and majors. I don't know what schools are the peer comparators for MTU, but schools like Purdue, RPI, Virginia Tech, Colorado State, Oregon State, and Washington State all have well developed undergraduate communication majors. Instituting this major confirms MTU's place among these schools.

...

I particularly like the combination of core tracks with interdisciplinary offerings; that's a rough tough thing to put together, and you've done a great job balancing breadth and depth. I'd say that this curriculum would be recognized as cutting edge at almost any school in the country.

9. Curriculum

Based on the program objectives outlined above, the course requirements of the proposed degree in Communication and Culture Studies emphasize the following:

- a core set of humanistically oriented, theoretically sound courses in communication

- communication skills appropriate for a specific career path
- expertise in language and culture
- three concentration options within the degree

Areas of Concentration:

- Communication in Contemporary Culture
- Communication in Human Interactions and Global Contexts
- Communication Media

Students take at least 27 credits in their concentration. At least 6 credits must be taken in each of the other concentrations (called secondary areas) to insure adequate exposure to the range of issues of importance in Communication and Culture Studies. An additional 9 credits are chosen from either the concentration or the secondary areas.

Communication and Culture Studies with a

Concentration in Communication in Contemporary Culture

CORE REQUIREMENTS (15 credits)

HU2820 Communication and Culture (f) 3

HU2830 Introduction to Speech Communication (f) 3

HU4890 Project in Communication and Culture 3

HU 2 courses in a Modern Language (for at least 6 credits) 6

CONCENTRATION IN COMMUNICATION IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

(27 credits including the three required courses designated with stars **.)

Communication in Contemporary Culture

HU3840 Organizational Communication (s) 3**

HU3850 Cultural Studies (s) 3**

HU3890 Documentary (s) 3**

HU2920 Language and Society (s) 3

HU3130 Rhetorical Theory and Criticism (s) 3

HU3151 Rhetoric of Everyday Texts (s) 3

HU3324 Visual Media Analysis (s) 3

HU3701 Philosophy of Technology (s) 3

HU3860 Popular Culture (s) 3

HU3870 Communication Technologies and Culture (f) 3

HU3880 Communication and Community (alt f) 3

HU3910 Language Issues in the World (s) 3

HU4625 Risk Communication (s) 3

HU4703 Communication Ethics (s) 3

SECONDARY AREAS (12 credits)

At least 6 credits must be taken in both of the secondary areas from among the starred courses, for a total of 12 credits.

Communication in Human Interactions and Global Contexts

HU3261 Intercultural Communication (f, s) 3**

HU3545 Literature Across Borders 3**

HU3820 Interpersonal Communication (f) 3**

Upper Division Language Courses Up to 9

HU2130 Introduction to Rhetoric (f) 3

HU2910 Language and Mind (f) 3

HU2920 Language and Society (s) 3
HU3130 Rhetorical Theory and Criticism (s) 3
HU3150 Reading and Writing (f) 3
HU3262 Topics in Francophone Cultures (f, s) 3
HU3263 Topics in German Speaking Cultures (f, s) 3
HU3264 Topics in Spanish-Speaking Cultures (s) 3
HU3850 Cultural Studies (s) 3
HU3870 Communication Technologies and Culture (f) 3
HU3880 Communication and Community (alt f) 3
HU3910 Language Issues in the World (s) 3
HU4625 Risk Communication (s) 3
HU4703 Communication Ethics (s) 3

Communication Media

HU3150 Reading and Writing (f) 3**
HU3701 Philosophy of Technology (s) 3**
HU3870 Communication Technologies and Culture (f) 3**
HU2324 Introduction to Film (f, s) 3
HU2631 Fundamentals of Photography (f) 3
HU2645 Graphic and Information Design (f) 3
HU2650 Introduction to Web Site Design (s) 3
HU3324 Visual Media Analysis (s) 3
HU3621 Introduction to Journalism (f) 3
HU3642 Introduction to Multimedia Development (f) 3
HU3860 Popular Culture (s) 3
HU3890 Documentary (s) 3
HU4630 Teaching with Technology Across the Curriculum (f) 3
HU4642 Special Topics in Advanced Media Development (s) 3
HU4703 Communication Ethics (s) 3

COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE STUDIES ELECTIVES (9 credits)

9 additional credits from either the concentration or the secondary areas

APPROVED ELECTIVES (9 credits)

Approved electives are any academic courses determined by the advisor of Communication and Culture Studies to contribute to a student's major program. Excluded are ROTC, PE, and Fine Arts performance.

FREE ELECTIVES (9 credits)

GENERAL EDUCATION (44 credits)

UN1001 Perspectives on Inquiry (3); UN1002 World Cultures (4); UN2001 Revisions (3); UN2002 Institutions (3); Distribution Courses (15); Science and math (16) (minimum one semester lab science and one math class at the 1000 level); Co-curricular Physical Education (6 half units)

TOTAL CREDITS 125

Adopted by Senate: 28 April 2004

Approved by Administration: 4 May 2004