

The University Senate of Michigan Technological University

PROPOSAL 8-04

THE ROLE OF NON-ENGINEERING DISCIPLINES AT MICHIGAN TECH

The 1984 planning document "2005: Two Decades into Michigan Technological University's Second Century: A Long-Range Plan" committed Michigan Tech to making the transition from an engineering school to a technological university; that is, to a university that maintains a strong technological focus, but that is comprised of a more disciplinarily complex student body than that typical of the traditional engineering school. (A copy of this plan is on file in the MTU Archives in Collection # MTU - 008, Box 2, folder 2.1B.) Traditional engineering schools include the Colorado School of Mines and Worcester Polytechnic Institute; technological universities include MIT, Georgia Tech, and Rensselaer.

Such diversification should help Michigan Tech to weather the cyclical nature of engineering enrollments, which fluctuate with the job market for engineers (see, for example, "Engineering Degrees Rising and Demand Falling -- A Forthcoming Crisis? And What Will Be the Impact on Enrollment?" <http://www.engtrends.com/IEE/0503/C/Default.asp>). As with personal financial planning, diversification is essential to the long-term vitality of the university.

Despite this intention, the last of the six points defined as "Our Guiding Principles" on page 1 of Michigan Tech's 2000 Strategic Plan reads as follows: "Engineering, science and technology, and the business of technology, will remain the focus of our university. We recognize that success in this focus requires vital programs that contribute to the cultural development, social skills and well-rounded education of our students."

This guiding principle (which was added by a Board of Control Member, not by the Strategic Planning Working Group) defines the Departments of Humanities, Social Sciences, Fine Arts, Education, and Physical Education and faculty in economics not as ends in themselves but only as means to someone else's ends. These departments are seen not as valued and equal partners in the university's mission, but only as service departments that add "polish" to other departments' majors.

Humanities, social sciences, fine arts, and physical education have long been central to the Western idea of a liberal education. As such, they are properly considered valuable complements to an education in science, engineering, and other fields. However, the humanities, social sciences, fine arts, and physical education should also be viewed as disciplines in their own right, capable of making valuable contributions to the university with their own degree programs, both undergraduate and graduate, and both current or potential. Hence, this guiding principle should be revised to reflect the more central role that the Departments of Humanities, Social Sciences, Fine Arts, Education, and Physical Education do play and can play in the long-term viability of Michigan Tech.

Therefore, the University Senate proposes that principle number 6 in the 2000 Strategic Plan be revised to read as follows:

"Engineering, science, and technology remain the focus of our university. We recognize, however, that the School of Business and Economics and departments such as Humanities, Social Sciences, Fine Arts, Education, and Physical Education not only provide valuable complements to an education in engineering, science, and technology, but also make valuable

contributions to the university with their own degree programs. These programs can play a vital role in the long-term viability of Michigan Tech."

Adopted by Senate: November 19, 2003

Revised in Proposal 7-05