The University Senate of Michigan Technological University

Proposal 21-14

(Voting Units: Academic)

Proposal to Change Degree Title from "Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Technical Communication" to "Ph.D. in Rhetoric, Theory and Culture"

1. General description and characteristics: This is a modification of the title to reflect the program's alignment with emerging trends of the discipline.

2. Related program in Michigan: PhD in Writing and Rhetoric at Michigan State University

3. Rationale: Over the past 40 years, Michigan Tech's Humanities department has twice developed innovative programs that had broad national impact —we established the first "Writing across the Curriculum" (WAC) program in the late 1970s, and we established the nation's first PhD degree in Rhetoric and Technical Communication (RTC) in the late 1980s. In each of these instances, we were in a better position to respond to changing conditions than other departments precisely because we are an interdisciplinary Humanities department in a STEM-focused research university. Now we are in a strong position to lead the profession once again, and this name change reflects that strength.

   In changing our name we have retained the key word "Rhetoric." To educators in the Humanities, this term implies "communication," and signals our commitment to understand communication in relation to its "historicity" and systemic functions.

   Our second term—"Theory"— indicates our program's focus on issues of the relationship between humans and their technologies. For scholars in the Humanities, the term invokes a tradition of scholarship concerned with the modern world's changing relationships among individuals, our languages and social structures, and our physical environments. Networked environments and social media such as Facebook and Twitter are profoundly changing the ways people communicate in all areas of work, family and social life. These developments call for new ways of communicating that incorporate visual design with conventional text, and deploy various rhetorical strategies across different delivery platforms such as mobile phones and tablets. The fast-paced developments in digital media require the teaching of new skills, and new ways of teaching. The term "Theory" expresses our commitment to explore and develop these methods and to prepare our graduates to take them into their future classrooms and workplaces.

   Our third term—"Culture"—reinforces our emphasis on communication and social interaction. The term also refers to our expertise in areas such as diversity and globalization. Globalization is transforming our workplaces and our societies. Students who can recognize and understand cultural differences will be better equipped for the job market and for their future lives.

   In the late 1980s, the name "Rhetoric and Technical Communication" was a shot across the bow of traditional English and Communication graduate programs. It signaled our intention to prepare graduate students for an emerging but under-served sector of the academic marketplace. Now, there are 76 PhD programs that use "Composition" or "Technical Communication" in the titles. Nearly 70 of them are housed in English departments. Something that sets our program apart from these programs is our interdisciplinarity. We are the only department offering this kind of degree from a faculty that includes nationally recognized scholars of Rhetoric and Composition; Technical Communication; Communication; Culture and Media Studies; English; Linguistics; Modern Languages (Chinese, French, German and Spanish); and Philosophy. We have scholars working at the leading edge of technological change and globalization. And we have maintained our traditional strengths in Rhetoric, Composition Studies and Technical Communication. Our new name retains the initials "RTC" with the intention of emphasizing the continuity of the program. Just as the designation "Rhetoric and Technical Communication" was the herald of a

significant movement twenty-five years ago, "Rhetoric, Theory and Culture" will mark our program's leadership in the discipline during the next twenty-five years.

4. Curriculum design: There are no "White Binder" changes necessary for the name change, although we do plan to add one new course next year (see #5 below). Internally, we plan to expand the number of required areas of study for both the PhD and MS from three to four.
5. New course descriptions: We are developing a new course entitled "Critical Approaches to Globalization," which will be submitted in the White Binder process next fall. Please note that this course would have been proposed regardless of the title change.
6. Additional resources: Requires no additional resources.
7. Accreditation requirements. No additional accreditation requirements.
8. Planned implementation date: The proposed change will be implemented in the 2014-2015 academic year.

Approved by vote of the Humanities faculty April 8, 2013.

Approved by Chair of the Humanities Department April 8, 2013.

Approved by College of Sciences and Arts Dean

Approved by Provost

Introduced to Senate: 05 March 2014
Approved by Senate: 26 March 2014
Approved by Administration: 03 April 2014
Approved by BOC: 02 May 2014
Approved by State: 05 June 2014