

East Carolina University
Request to Establish a Doctoral Program in Technical and Professional Discourse

Introduction

Following a recommendation from the Graduate Council and from the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs approved on November 11, 2002 the request from East Carolina University to plan a doctoral program in Technical and Professional Discourse. East Carolina University now seeks approval to establish a doctoral program in Technical and Professional Discourse (CIP: 23.1101) effective August 2004.

Program Description

The institution describes the new program as follows:

The Ph.D. in Technical and Professional Discourse will prepare researchers and scholars to assess discourse critically, to develop innovative and interdisciplinary approaches to serving discourse needs, to function as research experts in discourse, and to serve as faculty at various educational levels. Based on a study of common theories and principles, students will be able to contribute to the advancement of professional and technical discourse as an emerging discipline. Graduates will be able to conduct original research and to collaborate in interdisciplinary projects. Their knowledge will be enriched through collaborative studies with affiliate departments and schools; through interdisciplinary research among these areas; and through a rich knowledge of the role of technologies in creating and disseminating knowledge. Dissertation research will prepare graduates to contribute to the body of communication and discourse knowledge. Graduates will be prepared to fill positions as researchers, administrators in professional communication programs and corporate information development and research departments, policy analysts in communication issues, and faculty at many levels.

To help graduates achieve such promise, the program relies on current faculty strengths and quality in three major emphases: Discourses and Cultures, Writing Studies and Pedagogy, and Technical and Professional Communication. Although these three areas constitute the primary focus of the degree, students will be able to take advantage of other East Carolina University faculty strengths, both within and beyond our department, through cooperative agreements with affiliate departments, elective courses, advising, collaborative research, and dissertation committees.

Doctoral education in technical and professional discourse at East Carolina University will build on preparation in the current master's program, which prepares students to evaluate and apply existing theory and research in the field. Since its inception in 1929, our master's program has conferred over 650 master's degrees. Professional communication courses were incorporated into the graduate program in the late 1960s and the first graduate degree in that field was conferred in 1976. Since 1995, the department has conferred 291 master's degrees: 33 in Creative Writing, 64 in

Literature, 20 in Multi-Cultural Literature, 66 in Rhetoric and Composition (including the Master of Arts in Education and Teaching English as a Second Language), and 108 in Professional Communication. Student quality has also improved in the past decade. In the 2001-2002 class, nearly sixty percent of our applicants scored over 1400 on the Graduate Record Examination; six applicants scored above 2000.

Based on these strengths and successes, our department yearly offers over fifty graduate courses on-campus to serve approximately 110 students who are actively pursuing the M.A. in English. In addition, we offer online courses to support Multi-Cultural Literature, Teaching English as a Second Language, and online versions of the M.A. in English with a concentration in Professional and Technical Communication and a post-baccalaureate Certificate in Professional Communication. Although the department's focus remains on serving the people of the region and state, students in these programs come from a variety of academic backgrounds and many regions of the country, as well as abroad.

In the past decade about ten percent of our master's graduates have pursued further study at the doctoral level at such universities as Carnegie-Mellon University, Iowa State University, Ohio State University, Syracuse University, Texas Tech University, the University of Connecticut, the University of Maryland, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the like. The proposed doctorate will provide a venue for both the best of our current students and qualified students from similar programs elsewhere to advance from the level of intellectual engagement typical of master's programs to the creation of new, innovative approaches to both theory and practice based on participation in ongoing faculty research, through participation in graduate colloquia, and through their own original research programs.

Implicit in offering such a program is the premise that a new view of communication needs an intellectual center in which to flourish. That center should be a doctoral program based in an institution that has strong professional programs already in place and one that has a strong commitment to the economic development of its region. Such a degree would have as its *raison d'être* the study of discourse as mediated by professional and cultural contexts and by rapidly changing technologies. Given the variety of professional programs at East Carolina University, the degree will incorporate courses from many professional departments and disciplines, and any of the conceptual content or research venues of participating academic units will be suitable subjects for dissertation material.

The program will be housed in the Department of English, the primary department, because it has well-established courses to serve as the program's primary focus of study, a focus which will be supplemented with courses from within the department and from other departments within the College of Arts and Sciences, as well as from other departments, schools, and colleges; currently, ten schools or departments have agreed to participate as affiliate faculties. Such a broad-based interdisciplinary effort has the promise of engaging students in studies that span many fields while focusing

on the complex interactions among discourse, rhetoric, and professional communication.

Program Review

The review process is designed to surface strengths and weaknesses in proposed new degree programs. Proposals to establish new doctoral programs are reviewed internally and externally. The concerns from the two review processes were summarized in a letter to the Chancellor prior to the presentation to the Graduate Council. That summary follows:

While the reviewers found many positive features in the proposed program, there were a number of concerns raised. I will summarize and in some instances connect the concerns. The proposal indicates that funding for the program will come from internal reallocation plus eventual enrollment growth. At the same time, the reader is assured there will be no impact on the other programs such as the MA in English. Both external reviewers thought the salaries suggested for faculty were likely low at the junior and the senior levels. In light of one reviewer's concern that more senior faculty be hired, it would be helpful to reanalyze the connection of the cost of the program, reallocation, and the expected lack of impact on other programs.

Another set of concerns revolved around the interdisciplinary nature of the program. While courses are available from several departments it is not clear that these will be structured specifically for this doctoral program, nor is it clear that any new courses in affiliate departments will be developed to specifically serve doctoral students in this program. Another issue is the level of courses in departments without doctoral programs. Would those serve the advanced nature of the program? One reviewer was quite concerned that the proposal did not address well enough such issues as technology and visual technology. Concerns such as this might be addressed by specifically designed course from other programs to serve doctoral programs. Finally, it would be very helpful to explain the ECU policies on graduate and undergraduate students in the same class, since the rule as articulated might allow a doctoral student taking a course in an affiliated department to end up in such a course.

One of the reviewers read the program to have quite a large number of faculty who could directly participate in the program and the other reviewer interpreted the proposal to mean that only a small number of faculty would be primary faculty, particularly for directing dissertations. I suspect the difference in reading may be traced to the three tracks. Another reviewer raised the issue of why start with all the tracks at once? The view was that it might be better to start with a more focused program and add tracks as the need arose over time. This is also connected with the assessment of the number of senior faculty needed for the program and the inquiry about Rubens' status as a full-time member of the ECU faculty. This connects as well to the concern about the two-tiered direction the department is heading in for faculty assignments and whether that could be sustained over time without causing difficulties in the department.

There is a lot of evidence that more faculty are needed in this field, and that there is industry opportunity as well for doctoral-trained students in this field. Questions were raised about the exact scope of the need and how students from different proposed tracks in the program might meet that need, both in the academic arena and in industry. With a number of new programs recently started in this area, what is the pipeline for meeting these needs in a few years?

Both reviewers raised the issue of support for graduate students and it would be helpful to have a summary of the expected levels of funding and the sources of funding for graduate students.

I might add that NCSU has a proposal to plan a new doctoral program in Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media. As the proposals are developed it may be mutually beneficial for the two campuses to consult with one another.

Graduate Council

The Graduate Council had, as a basis for its consideration, the proposal to establish the program, copies of the outside reviews of the program, the summary letter to the Chancellor, and a presentation to the Council by representatives of the program. The need for additional faculty and support for graduate students was discussed further.

Response

The campus has allocated three new faculty positions to this program and expects to have enrollment growth funds to build a pool for supporting graduate students. One of the positions is at the senior level and has already been filled. Since size and level of faculty and support of graduate students were the major concerns raised by reviewers, the campus has taken the appropriate steps to allay those concerns. The Council was also assured that doctoral students would never be in courses that included undergraduates.

Recommendation by the Graduate Council

After consideration of the issues raised by reviewers and Council members, the Graduate Council voted, without dissent, to recommend approval to establish this doctoral program in Technical and Professional Discourse.

Need for the Program

The program has identified an area that is distinct from other doctoral programs available in the State, and provides evidence that graduates will have opportunity both for faculty positions and for employment in business, industry, and government.

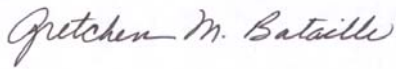
Resources

ECU has made the reallocations needed to support this new program, including three new faculty positions. Since the reallocation of faculty positions has already taken place, ECU expects enrollment growth funds to contribute to support for graduate students.

Recommendations

The Office of the President recommends that the Board of Governors approve the request from East Carolina University to establish a doctoral program in Technical and Professional Discourse effective August 2004.

**Approved to be Recommended to the Committee on Educational Planning, Policies,
and Programs of the Board of Governors**

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gretchen M. Bataille". The ink is dark and the signature is written on a light-colored background.

Senior Vice President Gretchen M. Bataille

November 3, 2003