

North Carolina State University
Request to Plan a Doctoral Program in Communication, Rhetoric,
and Digital Media

Introduction

North Carolina State University requests approval to plan a doctoral program in Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media (CIP: 30.9999).

Program Description

The institutions has provided the following description of the program:

The interdisciplinary program in Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media (CRDM) will offer doctoral training that integrates the study of oral, written and visual modes of communication within the context of changing technologies and cultural relations. This integrated approach is a necessary response to the ongoing transformation of human communication practices as information and communication technologies (ICTs) evolve. The digital revolution has made possible new combinations of print, sound, and visual elements. And the convergence of various communication media—print, telephone, and television, Internet—has created new contexts, new problems, and new uses for human communication. These changes require an equally dramatic shift in theory, instruction, and research to address the influence of these technologies and to influence the process of their development. Integrating disciplines affiliated with written, oral, and visual modes of discourse and symbol use will produce a powerful academic program positioned to address the communication practices and problems of the digital age. A recent report by the President's Information Technology Advisory Committee identifies ten "Grand Challenge Transformations," the first three of which concern the way we communicate, the way we deal with information, and the way we learn.¹ These challenges will require research, theory, critical analysis, and the training of new specialists in the social and human sciences to supplement technical developments in materials, network engineering, and programming. Without attention to the human dimensions of information technology, its transformative potential will be incomplete and ineffective. The College of Humanities and Social Sciences can complement and enhance the ability of other research programs at NC State to make positive contributions to this new technology and the world that it is creating.

Educational Outcomes and Objectives

The CRDM program will graduate students who are highly qualified to provide national leadership in teaching, research, policy, innovation, and development in higher education, industry, and the nonprofit and government sectors. In higher education they will be qualified for positions in departments of English or Communication and in the increasing number of programs that combine instruction in writing and speaking with a focus on new technologies; such programs include

¹ President's Information Technology Advisory Committee. 1999. Report to the President. *Information Technology Research: Investing in Our Future*. <<http://www.hpcc.gov/ac/report/>>

introductory courses, writing and speaking across the curriculum, electronic/digital portfolio development, media studies, technical communication, organizational communication, computers and composition, and online instruction. In nonacademic contexts they will be qualified to conduct research, manage development, and analyze policy in the specific uses and more general social applications of new communication technologies. Graduates will also be qualified to participate directly in the design and testing phases of new ICT development by providing much needed human factors and user-centered design perspectives.

Doctoral students in this program will achieve the following objectives:

1. Pose and solve research problems pertaining to the uses and potentialities of new communication media and information technologies, especially as they are applied in emerging contexts in the 21st century, and with special attention to their impact on human interaction, human values, and human diversity
2. Work with faculty to produce a new synthesis of theories and concepts to form an integrated foundation for teaching and researching the problems and potentialities pertaining to the uses of communication technologies
3. Master the central theories and concepts from traditional disciplinary approaches to oral, written, and visual modes of communication
4. Acquire detailed historical and critical understanding of the changing relationships among communication technologies, theoretical perspectives, and rhetorical practices
5. Gain experience with a variety of research and analytical methods, both quantitative and qualitative, and understand their epistemological orientations and limitations with respect to communication in the context of new technologies
6. Prepare to be teachers who can effectively instruct undergraduates in the common principles and concepts that underlie oral, written, and visual modes of communication, the distinctly separate skills of performance in these three modes, and their interactions in the context of new technologies
7. Prepare to be professionals who are themselves exemplary communicators, effective members of interdisciplinary work teams, and experienced researchers.

Program Review

The review process for requests to plan is designed to determine if the proposal is developed to the stage appropriate for taking to the Graduate Council and if so what are the issues that may need further attention. Proposals to plan doctoral programs are reviewed internally. The concerns from the reviewers were summarized in a letter to the Chancellor prior to the presentation to the Graduate Council. That summary follows:

The reviewers had few concerns about the proposal, but one issue did arise and that is the relationship of this proposed program and the one proposed for establishment at ECU. One of the reviewers read both proposals and stated the issue this way:

“However, the proposal to establish [plan] this degree comes as a proposal is being considered for establishing a PhD in Technical and Professional Discourse at ECU. Although the two proposed degrees differ in focus (NCSU’s focuses on the impact of information and communication technologies, ECU’s on the study of discourse within various communities), both reflect the national trend toward establishing non-traditional

degrees in English and Communications which address the impact of new media on communications. NCSU's proposed degree differs from ECU's in that it is a collaborative program between two departments (ECU's "home department" is English) and is situated to draw on the advanced study of technology, engineering, and science, which is NCSU's historic strength. It focuses more directly on the implications of digital technology on communications, while the ECU program focuses more directly on discourse and cultural studies.

"Were both programs to be established, it is impossible to determine whether unnecessary duplication would be created. Both programs are likely to recruit nationally rather than within the state; neither currently has doctoral programs in the target or some allied disciplines. It is unknown whether prospective students would be drawn to one program or the other because of their unique focuses or how they would choose between two NC programs with some degree of commonality in their offerings."

I wanted to let you know that there is another proposal that may have some overlap with NCSU's proposal. Some communication between the campuses might be helpful to both as the proposals are developed.

Graduate Council

The Graduate Council had, as a basis for its consideration, the proposal to plan the program, the summary letter to the Chancellor, and a presentation to the Council by representatives of the program. In addition to the issues raised previously, the following concern was expressed by Council members: How can the interdisciplinary structure necessary for this program be established and maintained?

Response

NCSU provided a substantial written response to the issue of overlap and assured the Office of the President that there would not be substantial overlap in the programs. The establishment document will address this issue in more detail as the curriculum for this new program is worked out. Representatives from NCSU pointed out that their concern for establishing a context for successful interdisciplinary programs was long standing and NCSU had taken a number of steps to facility interdisciplinary work. The college is now appointing an Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Interdisciplinary Programs, and they are revising the budget allocation process in a direction to better serve interdisciplinary programs.

Recommendation by the Graduate Council

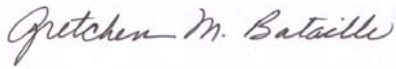
After consideration of the issues raised by previous reviewers and Council members, the Graduate Council voted, without dissent, to recommend approval for North Carolina State University to plan a doctoral program in Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media

Issues to Address in Planning

The two issues that will need attention are the potential overlap with other programs, and the plan for supporting an interdisciplinary program.

Recommendation

The Office of the President recommends that the Board of Governors approve the request from North Carolina State University to plan a doctoral program in Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media.

Approved to be Recommended for Planning to the Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and ProgramsA handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gretchen M. Bataille". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Senior Vice President Gretchen M. Bataille

November 3, 2003