

Department of English
College of Arts
and Sciences

2201 Bate Building
East Carolina University
Greenville, NC 27858-4353

252-328-6041 office
252-328-4889 fax
www.english.ecu.edu

TO: Educational Policies and Planning Committee

FROM: Michelle F. Eble, Director of Graduate Studies

DATE: February 27, 2012

SUBJECT: Program Name Change—PhD in Technical and Professional Discourse changed to **PhD in Rhetoric, Writing, and Professional Communication**

Background

The PhD program in Technical and Professional Discourse was created during a particular historical context that included affordances (ECU and the College really wanted PhD programs) and limitations (UNC system policies frowned on duplication of programs). At the time, it seemed that unique, innovative and interdisciplinary programs were on the rise. The PhD program in Technical and Professional Discourse is 8 years old and accepted its first students in 2004. Over a year ago, faculty involved in teaching the required courses in the PhD program were invited to a preliminary meeting to discuss the PhD program, outcomes, and assessment. As a result, faculty in Technical & Professional Communication and Rhetoric & Composition engaged in a series of meetings over the last year. We reviewed and discussed the current PhD curriculum and its required courses, how the requirements compare to curricula at other similar programs in the field including our peer institutions, and how well the program addresses the needs of students in terms of preparing them for future academic employment. We compiled information on our graduates of the program to date and time to degree averages. I reported much of this information in the PhD reallocation proposal submitted to the graduate school back in October.

Name Change

The assessment related to the number and types of applications received over the last 8 years revealed that applicants don't always understand the purpose of the PhD program or erroneously believe they can concentrate within one area. Because discourse is a term used in a variety of disciplines, it is not clear from the title what discipline it belongs to. The description has also caused confusion. For example, many students apply to only one area of study when our program combines these areas, and we want to recruit students that want to work at the intersections of rhetoric, writing, and professional communication. In some cases, attrition (albeit a small number) can be explained by this misunderstanding of the program. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that potential applicants look at our program but don't end up applying. Potential applicants are not sure what kind of PhD program we have since it is different enough in name from other similar programs, and until relatively recently, we had very few graduates of the program to show placement. This is one of the things potential applicants look for when researching PhD programs. Based on this information, faculty in TPC and

Rhetoric/Composition propose the following name change from PhD in Technical and Professional Discourse to **PhD in Rhetoric, Writing, and Professional Communication**.

The following are reasons we arrived at this particular name:

1. We researched similar PhD programs and the number of applicants they receive (approximately 50-60 applicants for 8-10 slots; the largest number we have received to date is 16). The most common word among programs similar to our own included **rhetoric** in the title. We use the term **writing** in its most extended meaning to include composition/composing, new media, literacy, pedagogy, etc. We use the term **professional communication** as an inclusive term to account for technical, science, medical, and business writing as well as areas of study that go beyond written texts such as document/information design, visual discourse, content management, and editing. The new name will align us with similar programs at other institutions including our peers and help to increase the number of applicants.
2. The new program name also corresponds to many of the terms used in job advertisements since the proposed name names the specific disciplines of rhetoric, writing, and professional communication.
3. The CIP (Classification of Instructional Programs) code for the PhD program was changed in 2010. As a result, the PhD program was moved from CIP code 23.11 (Technical and Business Writing) to CIP code 23.1303 (Professional, Technical, Business, and Scientific Writing), which appears within the newly developed CIP code 23.13 (**Rhetoric and Composition/Writing Studies**).

The Doctoral Program Steering Committee (DPSC) approved the courses, curriculum revision, and program name change on November 25, 2012 and the Graduate Committee approved the courses, curriculum revision, and program name change on November 25, 2012. The graduate faculty approved these items on December 3, 2012. GCC approved the change on February 6, 2013, and Graduate Council will be considering it at its March 4 meeting.

Thank you for your consideration.