

Docket Item:

University Program Approval: Oregon Institute of Technology (OIT), Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree in Professional Writing.

Summary:

OIT proposes a new degree program leading to a B.S in Professional Writing. Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) staff completed a review of the proposed program. After analysis, HECC staff recommends approval of the program as proposed.

Staff Recommendation:

The HECC recommends the adoption of the following resolution:

RESOLVED, that the Higher Education Coordinating Commission approve the following program:

B.S. degree in Professional Writing at Oregon Institute of Technology.

Oregon Tech seeks the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission’s approval to offer an instructional program leading to a Bachelor of Science degree in Professional Writing.

1. *Describe the purpose and relationship of the proposed program to the institution’s mission and strategic plan.*

The Professional Writing program advances Oregon Tech’s mission to “meet the emerging needs of Oregon’s citizens as well as reaching a national audience with rigorous applied degree programs in engineering, engineering technologies, health technologies, communication, and arts and sciences” (emphasis added, Oregon Tech website). It merges six major areas of the institution’s primary focuses: communication, writing, technologies, engineering, health, and science. Providing a university experience across three campuses for students is a primary goal of the institution. The proposed degree will build the framework to provide a common education between Klamath Falls and Wilsonville campuses and incorporate a small online component. Students will work closely with academic advisors to design personalized degree paths.

Reducing barriers to receiving an education is also a goal for the institution. The proposed degree will provide an experience where students can move around the world or stay close to home in order to receive an undergraduate education. The program coordinators will work with industry leaders to create internships to help prepare Oregon Tech’s professional writing students. Communication is one of Oregon Tech’s major areas of focus. The Communication Department can focus on any major program’s content. Professional writers understand many subjects and explain this content to any audience. Offering this degree will continue to place Oregon Tech as a leading innovator in Oregon education. Growth is a strategic priority for Oregon Tech, and this program provides opportunities for students who want to work in many different content areas but also who want to (and are able to) write. This population of students has never before been recruited to Oregon Tech.

2. *What evidence of need does the institution have for the program?*

Writing professionals find employment in a variety of areas including law, publishing, the arts, government, corporate communication, finance, health organizations, community advocacy, education, and journalism. Upon graduation, students will have created a portfolio showcasing their unique talents and skills as writers as well as the skills that they have developed enabling them to work in many settings and with many types of teams. Increasingly, technical information is being delivered online, and technical writers are using interactive technologies of the web to blend text, multidimensional image, graphics, sound, and video. All of this will be part of the training that students majoring in Professional Writing at Oregon Tech will receive. Researching the market need for writers is challenging since all industries and professions need and use writers, just in varying degrees of

autonomy and training. Some industries rely on contract work; others hire staff technical writers; still others expect the trained professionals in major content specialties to be able to write all the prose needed for the job.

Employers are looking for people whose abilities (and training) extend beyond working with word processing and document layout applications. They search for professionals whose broad arrays of technological tools as well as content knowledge support the ability to write well. Many bachelor's degree programs in writing focus (at least in part) on creative writing including poetry and fiction. Oregon Tech's professional writing program may include some of this, but it will also provide practical courses in techniques and platforms required by the careers that demand high quality writing skills in technical settings. Experience with content management systems, such as WordPress, will allow students to master the skills of publishing, editing, modifying content, organizing, and maintaining documents from a central interface. Project management courses will also train these writers and editors to manage workflow and document production in collaborative environments. These days, careers in professional writing require not only expertise in writing but also expertise in communication, management, information technology, and digital media.

Students in this field will work as technical writers and editors, information architects, instructional designers, technical illustrators, usability and human factors professionals, visual designers, web designers and developers, and trainers and E-Learning developers. Technical communicators share a user-centered approach so they can provide the right information, in the right way, at the right time to make someone's life a bit easier, perhaps safer, and certainly more productive. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) states if the job prospects in the field of professional writing are linked to computers, healthcare, engineering, or science, job growth could grow at an average of 29% over the next eight years. Occupations related to computer and information technology, including those who write with and for these professionals, may grow at a rate of 22% over the next eight years. This program's underpinning in these technical fields will help students prepare to work with these growth industries.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median pay for writers and authors is \$55,940/year or \$26.89/hour. Jobs including editors, public relations specialists, reporters, and technical writers are expected to see a 15% (faster than average) job growth over the next eight years. The Bureau has no category for writing jobs related to the computer industry, however, and no mention of writing specifically related to the health care fields. Writers in these areas average an estimated \$65,500/year or \$31.49/hour (BLS). These are areas that this program is designed to help students enter. Technical communicators prepare instruction manuals, journal articles, and other supporting documents to communicate complex and technical information easily. They develop, gather, and disseminate technical information among customers, designers, and manufacturers. Technical writers routinely work with other technology experts. If job occupations related to public relations are included in the job outlook, then the prospect is also bright, with a predicted 13% job growth, and a \$95,450 annual salary or \$45.89/hour (BLS). Public

relations managers plan and direct the creation of material that will maintain or enhance the public image of the employers or clients. Fundraising managers coordinate campaigns that bring in donations for their organization. For public relations and fundraising communication positions, a bachelor's degree in public relations, communication, English, or journalism is generally required. Courses in advertising, business administration, public affairs, public speaking, and creative and technical writing can be helpful. The following are types of skills built into the Professional Writing major: communication, leadership, organization, problem-solving, speaking and presentation, and writing.

3. *Are there similar programs in the state? If so, how does the proposed program supplement, complement, or collaborate with those programs?*

Although few universities in Oregon currently offer a bachelor's degree in this area, most job openings related to professional/technical writing in the Portland area indicate that starting jobs require a bachelor's degree in communication, writing, or a related field. This degree can help prepare students to fill these jobs.

All appropriate University committees and the Statewide Provosts Council have unanimously approved the proposed program. The Oregon Tech Board of Trustees approved the program on February 24, 2017.

Recommendation to the Commission

The Statewide Provosts Council recommends that the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission authorize Oregon Tech to establish an instructional program leading to a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree in Professional Writing, effective Fall 2017.

Institution: Oregon Tech
Program: B.S. in Professional Writing

Action: At the February 2, 2017 meeting, the Statewide Provosts Council approved a new program for Oregon Tech, B.S. in Professional Writing, to move forward to the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission for its review and approval. The Oregon Tech Board of Trustees approved it at their February 24, 2017 meeting.

Eastern Oregon University

Sarah Witte, provost

Approved
 Opposed
 Abstained



Oregon Health & Science University

Elena Andresen, interim provost

Approved
 Opposed
 Abstained



Oregon State University

Ron Adams, interim provost

Approved
 Opposed
 Abstained



Oregon Tech

LeAnn Maupin, acting provost

Approved
 Opposed
 Abstained



Portland State University

Sona Andrews, provost

Approved
 Opposed
 Abstained



Southern Oregon University

Susan Walsh, provost

Approved
 Opposed
 Abstained



University of Oregon

Scott Coltrane, provost

Approved
 Opposed
 Abstained



Western Oregon University

Steve Scheck, provost

Approved
 Opposed
 Abstained

