New Degree Summary Proposal (White Paper)

Degree name: M.A. in Technical Writing and Digital Rhetoric
Department: English
College: Humanities and Social Sciences

1. **Strategic alignment.** Cite specific examples of how the program aligns to the DSU strategic plan, mission, and goals. Are there aspects that make the proposed program unique or enable it to stand out from similar programs? How?

   **Response:**

   The master’s program in Technical Writing and Digital Rhetoric focuses on the intersections between technology and composition and thus aligns with DSU’s mission to be a “comprehensive university dedicated to rigorous learning.” The program will prepare graduates to contribute to the modern workforce as expert practitioners in writing and rhetoric in ways that are different from but complementary to other important fields—business, health sciences, and innovative technologies—at DSU. Our program is well-matched to the developing economy of Southern Utah, and our graduates will be primed to enter established and emerging markets locally or globally.

   The Technical Writing and Digital Rhetoric master’s program aligns with three goals in the strategic plan: Goals 1, 2, and 5. (Below, Strategy = S, Outcome = O, and Action = A)

   **Goal 1: Promote student success and increase retention and completion rates at all degree levels.**
   
   o Our program will promote learning communities (O2a), service learning (O2b), research with a faculty member (O2c), and field experience (O2d)
   
   o Our program can be included in recruiting and marketing campaigns that focus on providing “unique academic opportunities and experiences” (S1, A8 and A11), encouraging “academically prepared students to come to DSU campus” (S1, A10), and “highlighting the University’s academic strengths” (S1, A13).

   **Goal 2: Broaden and enhance academic programs to facilitate growth.**
   
   o Our program will help maintain the momentum of three master’s programs by 2020 (O3).
   
   o Our program will enhance the “profile of a full university where students can expect to be able to major in a degree within their area of interest,” even at a graduate level (O8a).
   
   o Our program answers the call to “develop new programs or areas of study” (S1).
   
   o Our program aligns with the spirit and intent of “Interdisciplinary Innovation” as it naturally and necessarily intersects STEM fields with the humanities. Our graduates will be able to respond to and assert their skills in a “tech-centered employment market characterized by unpredictable and sudden developments in science and technology,” and, as students, they will be tasked with reaching across disciplines and out to the community (S2).

   **Goal 5: Engage with Southern Utah Region to strengthen civic, cultural, and economic life.**
   
   o Expanding the types of degrees offered on campus has the potential to increase local interest among potential community mentors to assist DSU students (O1)
   
   o Our students and graduates will be encouraged to work with community partners as often as possible to enhance their engaged learning experience (O2, O3, and O4).

2. **External demand.** What need(s) will this program help fulfill for our DSU footprint and stakeholders in Washington County? What impact would the program have on existing programs in the state? Bordering states? Justify how projected employment opportunities are reasonable. Include both local and national statistics on potential employment of graduates. Justify how the program will meet projected future demand, growth, and economic trends. How?
A strong job market for graduates in the field of technical writing and digital rhetoric currently exists. This degree will equip 21st century graduates with innovative composing skills that satisfy both current and future market demands/trends, leading toward economic growth in Washington county, the state of Utah, and the nation at large.

First, the degree will meet 21st century demands for innovation and research in higher education. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, “Digital humanities are one of the few growth areas in today’s dismal academic job market” (Cassuto, 2017).

Second, the Monthly Labor Review claims that "a need for highly educated workers to do professional and technical occupations has emerged ... workers with graduate degrees appear to have a direct, competitive advantage over other college graduates when it comes to getting well-paid jobs” (Soyars, April 2015).

Third, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH), “Employment of technical writers is projected to grow 11 percent from 2016 to 2026, faster than the average for all occupations. Employment growth will be driven by the continuing expansion of scientific and technical products. An increase in Web-based product support should also increase demand for technical writers. Job opportunities, especially for applicants with technical skills, are expected to be good.” For the OOH summary of prospects for technical writers, see the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quick Facts: Technical Writers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016 median pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typical entry-level Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience in a related occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-the-job training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of jobs in 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job outlook, 2016-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment change, 2016-26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Internal demand.** What is the enrollment and graduation outlook over the next two, five and ten years? State compelling evidence of student demand at the county, state, national, international levels. Are there other DSU programs (including GE) that will rely on this program for instruction and support? Are there other internal demand factors this program will help meet?

**Response:**

There has long been a need to provide a graduate program in English in southern Utah:

1. [https://www.bls.gov/ooh/media-and-communication/technical-writers.htm](https://www.bls.gov/ooh/media-and-communication/technical-writers.htm)
For the last five years, the English Department has graduated 48-63 students each year. Further, the English Department has, at any given time, between 145 and 176 declared majors. Every year, approximately 10-15 of those students consider graduate school. A master’s program in Technical Writing and Digital Rhetoric would invite current English majors and students across other disciplines in Bachelor’s programs to continue into a graduate track at DSU.

Lacy Hope, another English graduate and current Ph.D. student at Washington State University, states, “I’m so excited to hear about the department’s pursuit of a MA. To put it simply: yes, I would have eagerly considered a position in that type of a program. In fact, it actually aligns with my current research interests and speaks well to most of the research I’ve encountered on academic Twitter and at conferences like Computers & Writing. Based on the more recent discussions I’ve had with my chair (Julie Staggers) and the 402 syllabi I’ve seen from the other instructors here, a thoughtful coupling of technical writing and digital composition/rhetoric seems like the next step in both the academic and private sectors. Also, given the scholarly pursuits of the department's faculty [. . .], I firmly believe that any student in such a MA program would receive both the technical and theoretical know-how to succeed regardless of future pursuits.”

Stephanie Millett, one of our English graduates and a current Ph.D. student at Texas Tech, states, “If a teaching assistantship had been offered, I would have chosen DSU over the online program at NAU, since it would have diminished the cost and given me experience.”

Beyond students pursuing graduate degrees in English, this degree also would appeal to students in multiple technical and professional fields (Engineering, Sciences, and Business) to broaden professional opportunities to study the rhetorical aspects of communications while sharpening the ability to communicate in a professional environment. This master’s program would appeal to current bachelor’s students because it would provide an avenue for studying rhetoric and writing. This degree would provide an opportunity for pedagogical training to teach composition courses, and it would be launching station to other PhD programs. With the teaching experience and subject matter, this degree could help students advance into managerial positions within technical and professional companies in the area.

Another distinct advantage to this program would be assistance with teaching lower division composition courses. Not only would we be able to train and employ graduate teaching assistants, but many of our graduates end up taking the online program at NAU because they cannot move anywhere to complete a face-to-face program. An M.A. program here at DSU would enable us to retain students who want to make academia their career.

### 4. Quality/Costs of the program/Future costs.
What costs will be incurred over the next two, five, and ten years? What will be the cost per student credit hour? Justify how the costs and budgets will be sustainable for potential future program growth and expansion? Are there adequate plans for student support/assistantships? Will the current and future faculty be able to deliver a quality program? To support and appropriately instruct the projected student enrollment? Why? What are the credentials and reputation of the faculty? Are there adequate equipment, facilities (research space), & library resources? Is the proposed administration for the program appropriate and adequate? What other factors will influence quality?

**Response:**
The English Department has sufficient expertise and resources to staff three graduate classes per semester. We employ 18 faculty with Ph.D.s. Our faculty has a strong background in rhetoric (including digital
rhetoric), technical writing, and pedagogy. The faculty conducts research, publishes, and presents at conferences, so the department will be able to provide a quality experience for graduate students.

The main impact of the new degree would be that since current faculty must teach graduate classes, they would not be as available to teach composition (around three classes per semester). However, after the first year, graduate students would not only be able to make up the difference, but provide more classes, helping the department meet the need for more composition classes every semester.

The first year will be a balancing act between offering sufficient composition classes and sufficient graduate classes. Students with just a bachelor’s degree would not be able to teach composition classes until after they have had training.

To mitigate this issue, we propose offering composition training classes over the two summer semesters so that students are ready to teach and take classes in the fall. We would need to incentivize this program by offering tuition waivers, scholarships, and/or stipends.

We have sufficient library resources and staff to support this program.

5. **Revenue and other resources generated by the program.** What revenues (tuition, grants, other) will this program generate in two, five, and ten years? What kind of grants are anticipated? Is there adequate support for research grants? Other sources of revenue?

Response:

The primary revenue generated by the program would be tuition. Weber state currently charges about $325 per credit hour for their M.A. in English. If we charge $325 per credit hour and have 25 students in the program taking an average of 10 credit hours per semester (fall/spring) by the second year of the program, the estimated revenue generated would be $81,250 per semester and $162,500 per year ($325 x 25 x 10 x 2).

Part of this revenue would need to support the graduate teaching assistantships. However, graduate teachers produce revenue as well by allowing us to offer sufficient composition classes to meet the growing need.

6. **Research/program design/other.** Will this program create research and creative opportunities for our faculty and students? How will these research opportunities help our faculty? Students? Is the program a partnership or collaboration with a private organization, USHE or other institution, or standalone? What are the merits of it being a partnership or standalone? What is the percentage of face-to-face, online, hybrid, evening, or weekend time spent in this program? What other instructional innovations/delivery methods are being proposed for this program? Are there other opportunities that this program will create? Develop new markets? How will the program adapt to changes in technology, trends, student populations, and/or employer needs?

Response:

The program has a built-in research component for those pursuing further graduate options; however, opportunities for individual and collaborative research will be extended to all interested students. We envision close collaborations with faculty mentors who will present opportunities for research and guide students in the completion of their projects. Graduate Teaching Assistants may be encouraged to work with the Writing Center and conduct research that assesses the effectiveness of this resource at the intersection of technology and pedagogy. Such projects may result in ideas and data for research articles for faculty and
may serve as a basis for student theses. Interacting with students who do research will offer new insight for faculty and potentially provide assistance with data collecting and processing.

We see our graduate students being engaged with technical innovations that happen on campus as vital members of the Technology, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship Center team who can offer advice and help produce written documents necessary to publicize and present new projects to the public and the professional community. We also see our graduate students contributing to development and production of potential in-house publications in partnership with the Undergraduate Research Office. Students who take the opportunity to participate in research projects will learn how to function as members of research teams, assuming roles of lead researchers, assistants, publication editors, and possibly mentors to undergraduates.

The M.A. in Technical Writing and Digital Rhetoric is unique among those USHE schools offering Master’s degrees in English because it explores the intersections of composition and technology. It will be a standalone program; however, we look forward to establishing meaningful partnerships that could benefit our students. The program can build upon the strengths of Dixie State University by leveraging resources and expertise from and encouraging interactions with established campus and department units (The Dixie Sun, The Southern Quill, Library Special Collections, etc.).

The program is intended primarily for face-to-face delivery. Based on perceived student demand, some classes may be offered in alternative formats such as online and/or hybrid courses and evening classes to accommodate working professionals and Graduate Teaching Assistants. We will not conduct any program-related instruction on weekends.

As a program that explores composition in digital spaces, the proposed M.A. will deliver a significant portion of instruction through technology-mediated methods. In addition to typical classroom instruction, students will learn while exploring and potentially contributing to existing digital humanities projects like Project Gutenberg, Internet Archive, Oxford English Dictionary Online, Emily Dickinson Lexicon Project, Around DH in 80 Days, the newly created Juanita Brooks digital collection at DSU library, etc. We also envision that our students will develop digital composition projects unique to DSU. Students will have opportunities to engage academically and creatively with a variety of on-campus organizations and offer technical writing support through one-time projects or on-going collaborations.

Students who take advantage of the Graduate Teaching Assistantship will gain valuable teaching experience that will transfer well into future careers in education or add value to their applications for doctoral degrees. While the program is not anticipated to create new markets, it aligns with the existing demands for writing professionals who understand and can manipulate digital environments yet have a strong foundation in rhetorical theory. As the dependability on technology continues to grow, it will become even more essential to employ professionals who are not only familiar with new interfaces but can easily analyze and use new and existing digital spaces for effective communication and promotion of the company’s goals. By nature, the program is responsive to changes in technologies that shape modern technical writing experiences. As such, course offerings that deal with technological aspects are flexible and will be adjusted as the need arises.

One of our goals is to produce graduates whose knowledge is significant enough and whose skills are flexible enough to adapt to the rapid changes that are a feature of digital spaces. Changes in student populations are inevitable, and the proposed program includes several features that could easily adjust to accommodate the needs and interests of various students.
For instance, if more students come into the program with the goal of advancing their careers in education, we can increase the number of Graduate Teaching Assistantships offered to provide more opportunities for these students to practice as educators. If the student population’s focus shifts to research, we can answer the demand with additional research mentors and an increased number of thesis class sections to accommodate those future graduates who wish to pursue a doctoral degree. In case of a student demand for a class that explores a particular topic that is not offered, topics classes will be adjusted to develop a new course. If changes in student population mean lower numbers, and there are not enough students to justify offering both Option A (Portfolio) and Option B (Thesis) for graduation requirements, one of the options can be temporarily eliminated to conserve department resources.