Contact: Diana Gonzalez

REQUEST FOR A NEW PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA: BACHELOR OF ARTS PROGRAM IN INTERACTIVE DIGITAL STUDIES

Action Requested: Consider approval of the request by the University of Northern Iowa to establish a new Bachelor of Arts Program in Interactive Digital Studies in the College of Humanities, Arts and Sciences in the Department of Communication Studies.

Executive Summary: The proposed program will respond to growing student interest and business applications in digital technology. This proposal was reviewed by the Board Office and the Council of Provosts and is recommended for approval. No concerns were raised when it was presented to the Iowa Coordinating Council for Post-High School Education. The proposed program addresses the Board of Regents Strategic Plan priorities to "provide educational excellence and impact as well as economic development and vitality" and Goal #8 – "Iowa's public universities and special schools shall be increasingly efficient and productive."

Background:

◇ Description of program. The proposed program will be developed collaboratively with programs in Languages and Literatures, Computer Science, Music, Graphic Technology, Sociology, Marketing, and Education. This will allow students to collaborate on applied learning projects (including community outreach initiatives), promote a theoretical, cultural, and practical understanding of the digital world, and enable graduates to transform interdisciplinary knowledge of digital technology into best practices. New media communication includes e-books, interactive magazines and websites, mobile technology, video games and 3-D environments, social media, animated programming and special effects, music technology, and digital imaging. Program graduates will use digital technology in interdisciplinary collaborations with social, cultural, and ethical implications for creative human expression and for the future of digital communication.

The program of study will be structured around a set of core courses which focus on four areas of digital studies – production, theory, history/culture, and collaborative real-world project work. In addition to the core, students will select two concentrations within eight disciplinary areas – Interactive Data Visualization (Sociology, Communication Studies); Computation/Web Development (Computer Science); Digital Learning (Instructional Technology/Education); Digital Writing (Languages and Literatures/Professional Writing); Digital Music (Music/Music Technology); Digital Imaging (Graphic Technology); Digital Advertising (Marketing); and Social Media/Social Change (Communication Studies).

◇ Relationship to existing programs at UNI. The proposed program will be housed in the Department of Communication Studies but it will leverage its resources and enhance student outcomes through its interdisciplinary approach. The eight departments mentioned above will contribute course work and faculty support to the proposed program as students select their required concentrations.

◇ Unique features. The University of Northern Iowa will apply a unique interdisciplinary approach across departments and colleges. It will have a low start-up cost because a significant part of the required resources are already in place. The thriving digital industry in the Cedar Valley creates the community support for student internships and future employment.

◇   Duplication. The proposed program does not exist in Iowa. Elements of the program exist in other programs but do not have the same construct as UNI's proposed program. Iowa State University offers a Digital Media Minor in the College of Design and a Technical Communication Program in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. However, both of ISU's programs differ from the proposed program because they do not provide the same type of interdisciplinary approach that UNI's program does. The University of Iowa offers an Informatics Core/Art Cognate which is applications-oriented and emphasizes data manipulation. The Intermedia Area in the School of Art and Art History emphasizes conceptual skills and experiments rather than a balance with application.

◇   Student demand.   Students are increasingly involved in editing, manipulating, and animating digital images and audio, writing computer code, investigating interactive 3-D environments, and sharing digital creations with a global audience. The proposed program responds to student demand and the need for a more formal pathway for interactive digital studies at UNI.

◇   Need for proposed program.   Technological advances combined with the lack of a cohesive approach to an interactive digital program of study underscores the value of developing this program at UNI using an interdisciplinary initiative.

◇   Workforce need/demand. Discussion about the proposed program began in 2007 with local and regional digital companies and organizations that expressed a high demand for skilled employees. Digitally-focused industries have grown significantly in recent years and are expected to continue to do so in the foreseeable future. In fact, the Cedar Valley has been described as an emerging "Mecca" for digital enterprise. The following are representative of the digital technology companies in the Cedar Valley – Edgecore; Mudd Advertising; Spinutech; Phantom EFX, T8 Design; and Visual Logic.

◇   Resources. The Department of Communication Studies hired a new tenure-track faculty member in the area of Visual Communication in 2007 which resulted in curriculum development in visual and digital communication. A new course (Interactive Digital Communication) and two existing courses (Technology and Human Communication and Mass Communication and Society) will be used as core courses for the proposed program. Student demand for the program and for specific courses will likely result in the need for a new faculty member or increased instructional support within the next two years. In the Department of Marketing, a digital marketing faculty member was hired in 2011. Other courses in the proposed program are distributed broadly in six other departments; therefore, the need for additional personnel is not anticipated in the immediate future. The need for new facilities or equipment is not anticipated as a result of the proposed program.

◇   Cost. The proposed program will be implemented using existing resources. A new faculty hire in the second year will result in an expected expenditure of $50,703.

◇   Projected enrollment. The projected enrollment will include both program major and non-majors beginning with 10 students in each category in Year 1 and increasing to 40 students in each category by Year 7.

⬧   <u>Link to institutional strategic plan</u>. The proposed program emerged from student outcomes assessments in the Department of Communication Studies, through discussions between eight departments in different colleges, and in response to the University's 2010-2015 Strategic Plan. As digital communication has evolved and grown economically, culturally, and professionally, the curriculum has required a corresponding response. The proposed program responds to the department's Goal 4, Culture – "Understanding the interconnections among communication, community, and culture;" and Goal 5, Skills – "Understanding and applying professional and personal skills in relevant contexts." The proposed program also responds to the University's 2010-2015 Strategic Plan Goal 1 – "a rigorous and relevant undergraduate education experience; transformative learning experience; broad-based education that inspires critical thinking, creativity, openness to new ideas, and student responsibility for their learning; and infusing an interdisciplinary approach into teaching, scholarship, and engagement."