

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

**REQUEST FOR A NEW PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA:
MASTER OF ARTS PROGRAM IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION**

Action Requested: Consider approval of the request by the University of Iowa to establish a new Master of Arts Program in Strategic Communication in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Executive Summary: The proposed program will respond to growing student interest and labor market demand. 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 focus on skills, concepts, and experiences most relevant to professional careers in communication, including corporate communication, organizational communication, public relations, integrated marketing communications, advertising, political and public affairs communication, health communication, and professional writing. The proposed program will stress a foundation of principles and platforms common to all disciplines (communication, leadership, social networking, multi-cultural diversity) while allowing students to focus on their career aspirations through elective courses.

The proposed program will require 30 semester hours and will include five core and five elective courses. Graduates will be prepared with technical skills as well as strategic and critical thinking skills required in the world of business. All courses will be available online. Depending on student demand, some courses will be taught online asynchronously with no set time; some will be synchronous, mixing students in a classroom setting, such as the distance education center in Des Moines or a classroom on the University of Iowa campus equipped with camera and microphone. A third option will be to schedule the class wholly online with set meeting times for group online discussion. All options will allow post-baccalaureate communications professionals to proceed at their own pace and in their existing location.

The proposed program will be housed in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. The School also offers a Ph.D. Program in Mass Communication and a Master of Arts Program (with thesis) in Journalism. The proposed program resulted from suggestions made by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication site visitors that the future for master’s professional education for the School should extend beyond Iowa City. The site visitors suggested that the concentration of professional opportunities outside of Iowa City has the potential to provide more internship and employment sites, a larger base of potential students, and greater resources.

- ◇ Relationship to existing programs at SUI. Letters of support were received from other University of Iowa programs ranging from business to political science. The School of Journalism and Mass Communication anticipates sharing expertise between the faculty in the proposed program and faculty in other disciplines, such as health, business, and political science. Ongoing discussions have occurred about how the proposed program can draw from faculty and curricula in disciplines which have a strong communications component.

The availability of the proposed program as an entirely online program will help serve as a template for the adoption of a model within the university to extend degree programs beyond Iowa City. As a product of an ongoing technological revolution in communications, the proposed program will help students adapt to new technology as well as employ that technology in its virtual classroom.

- ◇ Unique features. The School of Journalism and Mass Communication will use current faculty members with expertise in the field of strategic communication. Students near the Des Moines area will take classes at the university's existing distance education campus in Des Moines. Staff in the university's Center for Credit Programs have the expertise to deliver distance education and online courses and are available to assist the School's faculty teaching the proposed program both on- and off-campus.

- ◇ Duplication. Iowa State University offers two tracks for a Master of Science in Journalism and Mass Communication – Communication as a Social Science; and Communication as a Professional Field. The first track has more of an academic research orientation than the University of Iowa's proposed program. The second track has a different focus, specializing in "journalistic writing and reporting for the traditional and new media, visual journalism, advertising, and public relations."

The University of Northern Iowa offers a Master of Arts Program in Communications Studies with areas of concentration in Communication Education, General Communication, Mass Communication, Organizational Communication, Organization Communication-Human Resources, Performance Studies, and Public Relations. Neither ISU nor UNI offers an online program; neither has a specific concentration in strategic communication. It is likely that future students in the proposed program will be able to take one graduate course for credit from UNI.

Drake University offers a Master of Communication Leadership through its School of Journalism and Mass Communication in conjunction with its College of Business and Public Affairs. The difference between this program and the proposed program is that Drake's program emphasizes leadership and communication problem-solving; decision-making; and integration of business and the media while the proposed program has a focus on journalism and public relations. Drake's program has few online classes while the proposed program will be available totally online; it will be initiated from the state-of-the art Pappajohn Education Center in Des Moines. In addition, blended instruction will be provided in Des Moines and other locations either on site or through the Active Learning Classroom approach involving small groups at different locations. The University of Iowa concluded that a strategic communications program that emphasizes writing, multimedia, and social media skills is likely to be most attractive to potential students and employers it is seeking to serve.

- ◇ Student demand. The pilot courses offered by the School of Journalism and Mass Communication received strong support from students working in the field. The first two courses in Fall 2011 were filled to capacity and a third course in Spring 2012 generated even greater response. Many prospective students expressed an interest in enrolling in an online graduate program. Employers have been equally enthusiastic and have helped to shape the program through meetings and focus groups. Major companies have also provided tuition reimbursement for employees who completed the pilot courses.

Corporate response in helping to shape the program attests to the value that employers place on the skills emphasized in the proposed program. By stressing fundamentals, such as writing, leadership, and targeted communication, as well as technological innovations that have transformed the field of strategic communication, the proposed program will prepare students to make significant contributions across the spectrum of communication.

- ◇ Need for proposed programs. Other schools of journalism are facing the challenges of evolving professional and employment opportunities, shifting categories and revolutionary technology. The proposed program will address those changing requirements and will allow the School of Journalism and Mass Communication to align its program offerings with current employment demands.

- ◇ Workforce need/demand. As employment opportunities in traditional journalism decline, especially in print, the demand for skills and knowledge that journalism majors can bring to corporate, non-profit, and other organizations that employ strategic communication and media technology continues to grow. The proposed program has generated considerable enthusiasm from professionals who stress the need for better writing, clearer thinking, and stronger communicative focus by their workforce as well as from those who majored in journalism and want to keep pace with the significant changes in the media, technology, and employment landscape. The pilot courses attracted both those who work in communications and want to advance their careers and those who want to sharpen their skills and retool to increase their value within a professional marketplace that has changed rapidly and radically.

A recent survey of the job market in *U.S. News and World Report*, using statistical references from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, described a booming employment marketplace for those in public relations, marketing, corporate and non-profit communications and other fields that fall under the umbrella of strategic communications. These are professions in which journalism majors frequently find employment. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects "public relations specialists' employment growth at 22.5% between 2010 and 2020. During that time period, an additional 58,200 jobs will need to be filled."

- ◇ Resources. The Director of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication will be actively involved in the proposed program as well as many of the School's tenured and adjunct faculty. The proposed program will have a program director. Faculty and staff with expertise in distance learning will be available to advise faculty on- and off-campus; the School's administrative staff will help with the administration of the proposed program. The university's continuing education facility in Des Moines will be the primary site. All equipment for online communications will be provided by the university's Division of Continuing Education.

- ◇ Cost. The proposed program is projected to cost \$159,870 in Year 1, increasing to \$352,582 by Year 7. The projected new costs include \$84,295 in Year 3 and \$45,278 in Year 4 for new faculty. The projected tuition revenue is anticipated to be \$280,000 - \$350,000 per year depending on the number of classes offered each semester.

Graduate students will be supported through a combination of university resources and external funding, including corporate or institutional reimbursement and private payments. There will be no scholarships or fellowships offered by the university.
- ◇ Projected enrollment. The projected enrollment is 20 students in Year 1, increasing to 60 students by Year 7. University alumni are projected to be a significant source of students.
- ◇ Link to institutional strategic plan. One of the strategic priorities of the University of Iowa's 2010-2016 strategic plan is to "better futures for Iowans" by addressing the needs of each generation in the state, by expanding the university's public engagement to contribute to economic and cultural vitality, and by helping place-bound Iowans achieve their educational aspirations. The proposed program will address the changing needs of currently employed professionals in the field as well as aspiring journalism professionals. It will target university alumni and communication professionals who require the flexibility to take online courses or in the urban areas where they work without having to interrupt their professional careers to return to a university campus.