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M E M O R A N D U M

To:	Jamie Winebrake, Dean, COLA
From:	Jeremy Haefner, Provost and Senior Vice President
Subject:	MFA Digital Writing Concept Paper
Date:	May 1, 2016
Cc:	William Destler, Chris Licata

Dean Winebrake:

On behalf of President Destler and myself, I thank you and your faculty for the work you all do for the university, particularly as it pertains to the development of new academic programs. We know how much time and effort goes into writing an academic program concept paper and even more goes into the construction of an academic program. We also know that approving an academic program is an extremely serious commitment that the campus undertakes and so making sure that our review and decision-making process is as stringent as possible is a priority for me.

So thank you for submitting the concept paper for an M.F.A in Digital Writing.

By way of context, it is important to understand the recent activity with regards to new programs here at RIT. An analysis of the new program activity found on the Academic Affairs Academic Program Management website (http://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/academicprogrammgmnt/) indicates the following:

- Since 2012 (when the conversion moratorium was lifted), there have been 52 concept papers for certificate, bachelor, masters, or doctoral degree programs;
- Of those 52 concept papers, 11 (including yours) were submitted for approval this spring;
- Of the remaining 41 papers, 39 received an approval for further development;
- Of the 39, 20 have emerged as full proposals that are currently under consideration by NYSED for approval;
- Of the 20, 16 have been approved, are now operational, and all have appropriate resource demands; and
- Of the 16 operational, less than 40% are meeting their enrollment targets.

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Also, if we look at the new program proposal trajectory prior to the moratorium (2007-2012), there were 29 additional new programs approved by NYSED during that time period alone.

Finally, I anticipate at least one additional full proposal before the end of the year.

This activity demonstrates RIT's creativity, ambition, and agility when creating and considering new programs.

Adding to this context is the exciting new RIT Strategic Plan "Greatness through Difference" which articulates a number of bold goals and objectives that will place RIT in the forefront of higher education. While many goals could and will shape and impact the future programs we add to the portfolio, there are some that stand out. First, there are several goals that will push the university to becoming first among private universities for the production of STEM graduates – particularly, STEM graduates from underrepresented populations. Second, we wish to increase graduate student enrollments by 30% in a fiscally prudent manner. Third, we aim to develop "T-shaped" students with capabilities in interdisciplinary problem-solving and with a range of pivotal skills often found in the liberal arts and integrated across STEM curricula.   Finally, we wish to materially increase our student-centered research footprint. All of these aspirations require considerable resources and strategic decisions.

It is in this context that I met with the President, SVP Jim Watters and SVP Jim Miller to review program proposals.

With regards to your concept paper for a Digital Writing MFA program, President Destler did not approve this concept to move forward. While we felt there was general merit to such a program, we have concerns that the enrollments were low, that either the campus would need to increase financial aid than projected or that students would assume large financial debt from taking out student loans, that it does not significantly contribute to the RIT strategic plan given the context above, that the teaching loads of faculty would change and that there would be an increased use of adjuncts.

Moving forward, we continue to encourage faculty to be creative and innovative with new academic program concepts. As general guidance, we suggest:
- Undergraduate and graduate degree programs that have a minimum intake of 15 1st year students (not including transfers);
- Graduate degree programs that offer a non-thesis option so as to appeal to the student wanting to upgrade their skill set;
- A focus on degree programs that will materially allow the campus to reach its goals of being a leader in STEM degrees, but that also include important pivotal skills from non-STEM disciplines;
- Degree programs, particularly graduate degrees, that offer degree completion through a set of stackable certificates;
- Degree programs that can be offered online or in a competency-based format so as to reduce costs, particularly capital expenses; and

- A freedom to pursue innovative approaches to both content and delivery methods such as the MicroMasters degrees.

While I regret conveying this outcome to you and your faculty, I thank you for submitting this concept paper and the work that went into its development.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Haefner
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs