

## Interdisciplinarity@WMU- Phase One planning Template

1. **Brief Overview:** Provide a brief overview of the proposed interdisciplinary initiative. What types of questions would the initiative ask? What types of complex problems would it seek to solve?

Initiative:

Business, Engineering, and Technical Communication Excellence Initiative (BETCEI)

Initiators:

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We are proposing the creation of the Business, Engineering, and Technical Communication Excellence Initiative (BETCEI) which would be an interdisciplinary, collaborative partnership between the Haworth College of Business (HCOB) and the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences (CEAS). This initiative would provide business and engineering undergraduate and graduate students with customized professional and technical assistance in their development of oral, written, digital, and visual communication skills. It would also serve as a cutting-edge business and technical resource center that would assist faculty in the development and delivery of courses that include the skills mentioned above. As just one example, the BETCEI would help maintain the quality of capstone senior design presentations in CEAS by offering help during the writing and presentation components of the process. Similarly, another example would be support for HCOB students in their capstone courses such as BUS 4750.

The foundation and proof of concept for this initiative is the HCOB Communication Center which has worked with Business Broncos in enhancing their professional communication skills for the past seven years. Unfortunately, the HCOB Communications Center has been temporarily closed since June 30, 2019 due to COVID-19 and budget cuts. These services could be reinstated with pooled resources by expanding them into the CEAS. Given the similar size, mission, and professional skill set required in both colleges, this is a natural fit. The cost-sharing as well as shared faculty experience in business and technical communication skill development make this an attractive initiative.

2. **Impacted units:** What existing units, programs, and colleges would be involved in the proposed initiative? What other possibilities for collaboration across campus or in the broader community might exist now or in the future?

The Haworth College of Business, Department of Business Information Systems, the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences, and the Department of Industrial and Entrepreneurial Engineering and Engineering Management would be the collaborating partners focusing on the specialized business and technical communication needs and skill set required in business and

engineering fields. These departments currently house the business/technical communication courses and associated faculty in their respective colleges. We would welcome an expansion of the collaboration with the WMU Writing Center and possibly, the Department of English in the future.

- 3. Impact on teaching, learning, and curricula:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on teaching, learning, and curricula. How might this initiative help to grow enrollment, including by reaching new audiences of learners through continuing education, dual enrollment, or professional certification? How will the proposed initiative positively impact the training of undergraduate and graduate students? How does it enhance our institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

The BETCEI would strive to offer customized workshops focused on helping marginalized groups and international students in the business and engineering colleges. It could also be used to assist faculty with course delivery. This might include visiting classes to give presentations on such topics as oral presentation technique, presentation design and formatting and style, visual reporting, and resume writing. The intent would be to increase academic success rates and internship placement for all students. This would increase retention, thereby boosting enrollment.

The initiative would also strive to train graduate students in professional skill development. This could come in the form of online communication, leadership, problem solving, and conflict management modules, for example. These factors in team dynamics could be used to improve team interaction during the senior design process.

At CEAS the BETCEI would help students succeed in the technical communication class (IEE 1020) required for all engineering, technology and aviation majors and in capstone senior engineering design classes. The BETCEI would facilitate the collection of assessment data and use that data to guide continuous improvement efforts. It would also offer assistance in report preparation writing and oral presentation assignments in WMU Essential Studies (WES) communication courses. Overall, the initiative would provide support for students as they meet the WMU Essential Studies SLOs associated with communication which are integrated across the curriculum.

Additional support would also be provided to introduction to engineering courses as needed as well as support to the visual effectiveness of Innovation Day projects. In both HCOB and CEAS, the initiative would offer RSO collaboration to prepare for national competitions. The BETCEI would also offer business and engineering students assistance in scholarship applications, graduate school applications, and interview preparation.

- 4. Impact on research and creative activity:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on research and creative activity. How will this initiative promote discovery and creative scholarship? How might it result in increased external funding?

Though the creation of this innovative and collaborative initiative, the co-directors and consultants could explore new research areas since this partnership is unique. The researchers could explore best practices in collaboration with faculty, working with marginalized students, and delivering business and technical communication consultations. Through client exit surveys and faculty questionnaires, we can use the data to drive improvement in consultations, needs, operations, and workshop offerings. We might also be able to form local business partnerships.

In this regard, we could include the advice of local managers and business owners to help students meet expectations in the realm of business skills including positive communication habits. We would also look to bring in representatives from local businesses, including engineering firms, to mentor and tutor our students needing assistance with professional communication skills. Creating collaboration between HCOB, CEAS and local businesses/corporations increases the likelihood for external funding.

- 5. Efficiencies and/or cost savings:** How might the proposed initiative contribute to increased efficiencies and/or cost savings, for example by reducing administrative positions (e.g. chairs/directors), sharing staff support services and/or by sharing facilities?

The Business, Engineering, and Technical Communication Excellence Initiative (BETCEI) would serve approximately 5000 undergraduate and graduate students in both HCOB and CEAS while utilizing expertise from both colleges. We would be able to share support services, faculty and graduate student consultants and classroom space. Floyd Hall and Schneider Hall both have an existing classroom and a breakout room that could be utilized for the center's operations without adding anything to the existing layout of either room. The BETCEI would also feature an option for virtual consultations for all business and engineering students. The overall goal would be to make business and technical communication of higher quality.

- 6. Impact on course offerings and workload:** At present, proposed initiatives will only be feasible and sustainable if they can be supported by existing resources, including instructional capacity, faculty and staff time, and facilities. Will the proposed initiative streamline existing course or program offerings? Could the initiative help create more equitable and sustainable workload for faculty, for example, by reducing the need to offer under enrolled courses, reducing the frequency of course offerings or eliminating the need to teach some courses?

As mentioned above, classroom space is available in both Schneider and Floyd Halls. At least one breakout room on the second floor of Floyd Hall has enough room for tutoring and the hardware for practicing oral presentations. In Schneider Hall, the former HCOB Communication Center (consisting of 2 classrooms) is still intact and would require no new investment in order to reopen. Moreover, this initiative would enhance the process of preparing written and oral reports of all types, thus alleviating pressure on faculty to assess written communication in particular: a process that is extremely time consuming. Overall, the initiative would enable students to develop higher quality written reports and oral presentations that can be appreciated instead of corrected.

In the past, it has been difficult to staff BCM 1420 and IEE 1020 courses. Since these two courses share common threads, the initiative could create a system for cross training BCM 1420 and IEE 1020 teachers in a way that the course loads could be shared among the two colleges. It could also offer cross collaboration to enhance these courses individually, which may result in joint appointments and/or guest joint appointments between BIS and IEE. This would inevitably result in both colleges sharing and streamlining best practices in communication. In the long run, this could also create teachers who can move fluidly between business communications and technical communications. Moreover, if students are unable to register for one course or the other, they could take an open section of BCM 1420 or IEE 1020, thus possibly expediting the time it takes them to earn a degree.

**7. Additional Information:** What additional information would you like to provide in support of this proposal?

Overall, this initiative would:

- serve as a recruitment tool by showing perspective students that HCOB and CEAS offers a personalized environment that cares about students and wants to help them to be successful.
- assist with retention through helping struggling students with the one-on-one assistance with their coursework by partnering with faculty in the development of plans for success for students who need extra support.
- work with high-performing students in garnering prestigious awards, scholarships, and funding. (GVSU recently hired staff to work exclusively on these types of things.)
- be unique in its offering of business and technical communication skill development. Very few colleges and universities in the US offer such services in this way. Based on a fairly comprehensive analysis, the Online Business and Technical Communication Resource Center at the Colorado School of Mines is the only significant one. This would certainly be a marketing opportunity for WMU, HCOB, and CEAS.
- offer a welcoming, inclusive environment where all students can thrive and succeed and contribute to WMU's diversity, inclusion, belonging, and equity goals.
- assist business and engineering students in a wide range of essential professional skill development in courses and workplace.
- collaborate with business and engineering faculty in the delivery of robust, innovative curriculum and assessment that utilizes best practices.

**8. Contact**

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