

Dean's Response
Communication Department Review-Team Report
And Department's Response to the Report
October 29, 2010

On April 30, 2010, the review team for WSU's Communication (COMM) Department submitted its review report. Team members include: Professor Jon Smith (Southern Utah University); Professor Sue Harley (WSU: Department of Botany); and Professor Gary Dohrer (WSU: Department of English). On October 10, 2010, COMM Chair Randy Scott submitted the department's response to the report to me.

Reviewers offered four recommendations; the department agreed with all four:

1. The department will propose course fees to help support repair and replacement of classroom and laboratory equipment. Although reluctant to impose additional fees on students, the department recognizes that without ongoing funds, they will not be able to maintain classroom and lab facilities in Elizabeth Hall. I commend them on their decision to pursue course fees, and remind them that Accounting will take 10% of these fees (so the department should round-up its fee schedule by at least 10%).
2. The department will secure additional secretarial support. This need becomes more serious as the department gets closer to enrolling students in its graduate MPC program. The amount of paperwork (even e-paperwork) associated with running a graduate program is substantial, and much of the paperwork contains confidential information. The MPC director may be able to handle most administrative details through the summer of 2011, but it is my hope that some MPC clerical support can be found even before then. Currently, the English department has a staff person who is very familiar with WSU procedures; I suggest that any MPC support staff schedule some time to consult with the MENG staff member.
3. Financial support for faculty research and travel is insufficient (to say the least). During the last two years of budget cuts, I elected to cut the dean's contribution to departmental travel budgets rather than cut lines. While this election may have saved some individual faculty, it has meant ongoing hardship for those faculty who hope to further their research agenda by attending conferences or traveling to research sites. I commend the COMM department for considering the possibility of using funds eventually generated by the MPC program to help fund conference and research travel for faculty who teach in the program. I urge faculty members in COMM to continue to apply for RSPG funds available on campus; several departments make extensive use of these funds to support travel. In addition, the college's Development Officer and I have approached a trustee of one of our large trusts and asked for permission to use a portion of that trust fund's allocation to support faculty travel.
4. The committee recommends that the department continue effective assessment procedures, but also find funds to facilitate full programmatic evaluations. Assessment, evaluation, and student surveys will become even more important as the MPC comes on board. Careful tracking of graduates of the program is imperative for a wide range of reasons. I'm hopeful that as electronic survey and tracking instruments become increasingly easier to use (and less time-consuming to implement) the department will be able to take greater advantage of them. I'm

also hopeful that the department will develop connections with Associate Provost Ryan Thomas, who may be able to use the department to test various assessment options.

In addition to responding to the four recommendations from the Review Team, the Communication department notes that it is engaged in merging one emphasis (broadcast news) with Journalism. I continue to believe the department is trying to offer too many concentrations with too many emphasis areas. The number of options is confusing to both students and advisors. As the communication world changes almost on a daily basis, faculty need to be flexible, nimble, and open to change; within WSU's COMM department, change is bound to be difficult at least in part because of the nests of requirements associated with the different concentrations and emphases. Given how tightly both budgets *and* faculty energies are stretched, it makes sense to pull back on lower-enrolling courses and areas that add work for little return.

While recognizing the many, many differences between graduate and undergraduate programs, I wonder if it is possible to re-shape at least part of the undergrad curriculum so that it bears some resemblance to the elegant and simple structure of the MPC grad program.

A couple other observations:

--Congratulations to COMM on its retreat (and follow-up) work with Kym Wheatley. The department also deserves congratulations for developing the MPC proposal and having that proposal approved at all levels. Clearly, some very positive things are happening in COMM.

--As the college is able to return funding for faculty replacement hiring, it is imperative that the department engage in realistic planning and realistic hiring with an eye to the future. What areas could and should COMM be building and nurturing? What areas need to take a back-seat? Funding for lines will be scarce this year and in years to come.

--This fall, when asked to make an argument for tenure-track dollars, COMM reported 18 different priorities and made a pitch for two tenure-track positions. The pitch was couched around programmatic needs (new MPC program; popular undergrad area) but did not include strong numerical evidence. Two other departments in the college (which also have lost faculty) made very persuasive arguments for funding based on student numbers: that is, new majors are knocking at the door, sitting on floors because no more seats are available. I pretty much have to direct dollars in their direction. What should COMM be doing to compete successfully for faculty funding?

--As I've said above, I believe COMM has taken some very positive steps. Now the department needs to agree upon a realistic mission statement; it needs to scrutinize its many priorities and determine which are most consistent with its mission; it needs to focus on what it can do well and what its discipline areas are becoming in the 21st century. It needs to represent itself to potential students in ways students can understand and appreciate. I want to encourage the department to think positively, to loosen some of history's hold and to focus on the future.

--I've mentioned to the department that if they are interested in doing an external chair search, I support this possibility. From my vantage point, such a search might allow the department to see itself with new eyes. Or not—the department will need to decide if they are interested in pursuing this option. In either case, I want COMM to know that they play a valuable role in the college, university, and region. I continue to be impressed as I read about faculty, student, and alumni accomplishments. I will do what I can to keep those accomplishments coming.