

**Faculty Response to Master of Professional Communication Program Review Site Visit
Weber State University
April 30, 2015**

A review team consisting of Kenneth Smith, University of Wyoming; Dan Lair, University of Michigan-Flint; Matthew Mouritsen, MBA Program Director, Weber State University; and Becky Jo Gesteland, English, Weber State University, conducted a site visit of the Master of Professional Communication program at Weber State University on March 4, 2015.

They noted the following **strengths**:

- A. The program has found an important niche serving the needs of working professionals along the Wasatch front.**
- B. Financial commitment from the dean and strong leadership from the department chair and program director have created a solid foundation to build upon for the future.**
- C. Curriculum changes based on an assessment of students' educational needs have shown a commitment to continuous improvement.**
- D. Academic advising and career counseling (within the program) help students graduate in a timely manner and find new or enhanced employment opportunities.**
- E. Committed faculty, who have adapted to the eight-week hybrid format.**

When the program was created, faculty in the department made a deliberate decision to create a master's program with an applied emphasis in professional communication. Faculty surveyed alumni and employers in the area and determined that a Masters of Professional Communication degree would be a more viable alternative to other degrees available along the Wasatch front.

During the three years covered by this program review, we created an MPC faculty advisory committee to facilitate decision-making, help with assessment, and periodically review curriculum on the recommendation of the program director. Before we created the faculty advisory committee decisions sometimes languished when we didn't have time to discuss MPC program issues in regular department faculty meetings. The MPC faculty advisory committee has allowed the program to be more responsive to the needs of students and to changes in the external environment.

Reviewers are also tasked with pointing out areas where improvements can be made. They noted the following **challenges**:

- A. A graduate program with a professional emphasis may face pressure towards conformity with more traditional Masters programs**
- B. The need to add a recruiting coordinator to work with employers in professional fields**

- C. **The need for career placement and advising at the university level**
- D. **The need to work with faculty in the Master of Leadership program to ensure that there is not too much overlap between the two programs**

The MPC faculty advisory committee has examined these challenges and provides the following response:

When advising students, the program director encourages them to explore all three options for their degree, which include completing a professional project, writing a thesis, or taking electives. We emphasize the idea that there is no one “best way” to complete the degree. All of the options are good and students are encouraged to choose the one that best fits their educational and career goals. Faculty use application papers and assignments in their classes to encourage students to apply theoretical and conceptual knowledge to professional contexts outside the classroom.

As resources become available, the MPC faculty would support the addition of a recruitment coordinator within the program or at the college level. Most of the other colleges with master’s programs have a recruitment coordinator. We would also welcome the addition of stronger career advisors at the university or college level. At present, the program director fulfills both the recruiting and career advising functions for the program, with some help from the administrative assistant.

The program director is also working with members of the graduate council and those who are exploring the proposed Master of Leadership program to ensure that there is not too much overlap in curriculum and encourage interdisciplinary collaboration.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

The program reviewers listed five overall recommendations.

- A. **Give priority to professionally oriented measures of assessment, rather than theses and academic presentations by students at conferences.**
 - **Action plan:** We currently track the number of students and alumni who get new jobs or promotions while they are in school and after graduation. We also track the number of students who present papers at academic and professional conferences. Our program review document may have inadvertently highlighted the number of conference papers more prominently than the number of new jobs and promotions. We will take more care to give equal weight to both kinds of student successes in future reports.
 - **Action plan:** We created a Facebook page for the MPC program that features news about current students and the successes of our alumni. The Facebook page allows us to show our students and alumni actively engaged in professional activities.

- **Action plan:** We have created promotional materials using our students and alumni as spokespersons to promote the program. We feature their name and professional job title to demonstrate the successes of our graduates.

B. Develop measures to assess the newly implemented coursework option in lieu of a thesis or project.

- **Action plan:** For students who choose the coursework option, we plan to assess a signature assignment in a core required course taken in the last semester (or two) before graduation. The program director will determine which course assignments to assess for graduating students who select the elective option. The program director will contact faculty teaching these courses and ask them to complete a short assessment instrument regarding the student's work after grades have been submitted for the semester. The assessment instrument will ask the faculty member to rate the student on writing, critical thinking, research methods (if applicable) and demonstrated knowledge in the subject matter. The assessment will be used for the purpose of program evaluation and will not affect the student's graduation status or grade in the course.
- **Action plan:** The MPC faculty advisory committee will continue to refine the assessment process and program curriculum based on data gathered.

C. Recruit a larger applicant pool. When resources become available for additional staff positions, hire a professional staff member to help with recruiting.

- **Action plan:** The program director plans to meet with employers in the area to build awareness of the program among organizations with a tuition reimbursement program. We are tracking the organizations where our students and alumni work to determine where to best focus our efforts. Marketstar, Intermountain Healthcare and the LDS Church are the three employers with the largest representation among our students and alumni and we plan to target those businesses first.
- **Action plan:** We sponsor the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) spring conference each year as a recruitment and promotion opportunity. The sponsorship includes a recruiting table at the event, along with inclusion of our name and logo on materials promoting the event. We are looking for other conferences to attend or sponsor that would be relevant for communication professionals along the Wasatch Front.
- **Action plan:** We have allocated a budget for marketing. Each year the program director purchases some advertising to market the program. We have tried magazine ads, direct mail campaigns and information sessions on campus. So far direct mail and information sessions have been more successful than magazine ads. We also communicate regularly through email with potential students who provide their contact information and we send announcements to large employers to include in their company newsletters. We

monitor the promotional strategies of other graduate programs on campus and our competitors to get ideas about how to reach our target audience.

D. Present evidence of the contributions of the external advisory board in the next program review.

- **Action plan:** As mentioned in the program review report, the external advisory committee was created in Fall 2015 and had only met one time before the report was due. Now that we have created an external advisory board, we will seek their input and report on their recommendations and subsequent actions taken in the next program review.

E. Allocate additional resources for student travel to present at conferences and for faculty to travel to professional conferences for professional development and to enhance teaching.

- **Action plan:** We have budgeted for student travel to conferences for the past two years. So far two students have used these travel funds. The program has some money for faculty travel, but has used it primarily to travel within the state for recruiting. We will create an application process so faculty who teach in the MPC program can apply for funds to attend professional conferences to enhance their teaching. We will announce the availability of funds twice a year so MPC faculty can plan to attend conferences. Right now we have funds that could be used for travel. As the program grows and adds a second tenure track line, the funding for this purpose may become more scarce.