

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Communication Department  
Weber State University  
Fall 2014

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The following is a summary of the self-study document, highlighting important points. For complete information, please refer to the full, self-study document.

### **Mission Statement:**

The Weber State University Department of Communication curricula and programs are grounded within a liberal arts tradition and designed to help students live vital and successful lives in an ever-changing global environment. Communication is central to a democratic society and the free exchange of ideas. Therefore, the Department promotes the effective and ethical practice of human communication.

### **Curriculum:**

The Department of Communication provides or supports a range of programs, including minors, associate's degrees, Bachelor of Science degrees or Bachelor of Arts degrees, the BIS, and the Master of Professional Communication. (The MPC will be discussed in a separate report.) Seven emphasis areas in Communication are offered. Students may declare a minor or pursue one of the associated interdisciplinary tracks. They include: Civic Advocacy, Digital Media, Interpersonal & Family Communication, Multimedia Journalism, Organizational Communication, Public Relations & Advertising, and Communication Teaching. The Department of Communication three general education classes: COMM 1020 Principles of Public Speaking, COMM 2010 Mass Media & Society, and COMM 2110 Interpersonal & Small Group Communication. In all, the department offers 47 different undergraduate courses. Eight are lower-division while 41 are upper-division. In 2013, the curriculum underwent substantial revision to update offerings and make the program easier for students to understand.

### **Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment:**

In 2013, with advice from Weber State University's Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE), the Communication Department revised its department student learning outcomes to include objectives that are measurable and more closely aligned with what was being taught in most classes. They are listed below:

- 1) **Writing:** Write at a level expected of a professional communicator in a selected emphasis area.

- 2) **Speaking:** Speak clearly and persuasively in a one-on-one interpersonal interaction, and in front of small and large groups in a variety of contexts.
- 3) **Listening:** Listen actively to acquire and analyze information.
- 4) **Interpersonal/Small Group:** Facilitate successful communication in interpersonal situations and small group settings.
- 5) **Media:** Use and produce media to communicate messages.
- 6) **History:** Know the history of the communication discipline and its societal and professional implications.
- 7) **Research:** Find peer-reviewed or professional research studies, be familiar with a variety of research methods, and interpret and analyze research data.
- 8) **Theory:** Understand how various communication theories have been developed, applied, and evaluated.
- 9) **Law/Ethics:** Understand communication law and ethics to enable legal and ethical communication.
- 10) **Critical thinking:** Use critical thinking to analyze information from a variety of perspectives for understanding, persuasive argument or problem solving.
- 11) **Career Readiness:** Be prepared to enter a professional career or graduate school.
- 12) **Diversity:** Be sensitive to difference and discrimination in society and value diversity.

Because we revised our student learning outcomes for the program in 2013, we are still in the process of gathering and analyzing new assessment data. We are trying to build assessment into the regular teaching of our classes. We are using signature assignments and common test questions to obtain comparable data especially in the general education classes. We do an extensive review of the ePortfolio in the Senior Seminar class but need to do a better job of telling our students about this requirement early in the program. We are also considering some sort of review with working professionals. We obtain extensive data from internship supervisors and exit surveys from students. Data shows that internship supervisors are very pleased with the performance of our students, but the exit survey data shows that students feel less prepared. We also require students to pass a grammar/punctuation test in the beginning writing class and participate in national tests such as the Comprehensive Learning Assessment (CLA) test when available. Assessment procedures show that our students are gaining the skills and knowledge we are trying to teach but we know we have room for improvement.

### **Academic Advising:**

According to the Institutional Research numbers, the Department of Communication had 425 majors as of Nov. 15, 2014. This compares to an average of 255 during the years reported on in the 2009 program review. Majors are assigned to an advisor based on the student's emphasis area or whether that student is pursuing a minor or an associate's degree. Typically, each area has a single advisor with the exception of Public Relations & Advertising with three advisors and Digital Media with two advisors. Students are encouraged to meet with their advisor upon admission to the major to receive assistance in planning individual programs of study. Students can meet with their advisor as much as needed through graduation. If an advisor is not available, the chair helps out in all areas.

**Faculty:**

Currently the Department of Communication has 19 full-time faculty members. This compares to 16 full-time faculty members in the 2009 program review. Of the 19 full-time faculty members, 14 have Ph.D.s, one is ABD and four have master's degrees with significant professional experience. Fourteen are on tenure track while five are on continuing contracts. We are currently hiring an additional tenure-track person who will begin next fall, bringing the number to a record 20 full-time faculty members. The department is making significant advancements with both numbers and qualifications. Five years ago, only 10 full-time faculty had doctoral degrees. We also drew from 18 adjunct faculty members in the last few years. They are also highly qualified with two having Ph.D.s, one with a J.D., 11 with master's degrees, and four working on master's degrees. The adjunct faculty members typically teach the general education classes of COMM 1020 HU Principles of Public Speaking, COMM 2010 HU Mass Media & Society, and COMM 2110 HU Interpersonal & Small Group Communication. Each fall and spring semester, the department offers about 50 sections of these courses. In the last two years with increases in enrollment, several adjuncts have been called upon to teach COMM 1130 Media Writing and various public relations courses.

**Program Support:**

Dean Madonne Miner provides strong support for the program. We appreciate that she hired a college advisor for general education and our new associate's degree and arranged for local computing support. The Provost's Office and Continuing Education have also been supportive with instructional monies to help with the increased enrollment, especially in the last two years. Facilities in Elizabeth Hall provide modern, well-equipped classrooms with smart classroom technology.

**Relations with External Community:**

The Department of Communication maintains liaison with the external community in a number of ways, including having a well-established community internship program, teaching concurrent enrollment Communication courses to high school students in Northern Utah for 15 years, inviting community members to be guest speakers and serve as clients for hands-on projects in classes and for co-curricular organizations, having an extensive service-learning component in our curriculum, and by having faculty members maintain professional contacts and serve on community boards. In addition, our co-curricular activities reach a broad segment of the community, and we established an advisory board this year.

**Student, Faculty, Contract/Adjunct Faculty and Staff Statistics:**

|                             | 2009-10 | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | 2012-13 | 2013-14 |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Student Credit Hours Total  | 14,820  | 15,704  | 15,009  | 15,903  | 15,933  |
| Student FTE Total           | 494.00  | 523.47  | 500.30  | 530.10  | 531.10  |
| Student Majors              | 280     | 338     | 379     | 401     | 363     |
| Program Graduates           | 65      | 46      | 64      | 60      | 57      |
| Student Demographic Profile |         |         |         |         |         |
| Female                      | 165     | 170     | 192     | 219     | 203     |
| Male                        | 145     | 168     | 209     | 224     | 209     |
| Faculty FTE Total           | 22.42   | 23.38   | 24.3    | 25.17   | N/A     |
| Adjunct FTE                 | 6.23    | 7.37    | 8.84    | 9.71    |         |
| Contract FTE                | 16.19   | 16.01   | 15.46   | 15.47   |         |
| Student/Faculty Ratio       | 22.03   | 22.39   | 20.59   | 21.06   | N/A     |

**Results of Previous Program Reviews:****Recommendations from 2010 Review**

The recommendations from the previous five-year review concentrated on budget-related challenges. Those and additional funding related challenges continue.

**Recommendation 1**

The department needs to carefully monitor and implement future funding sources for student labs and resources. The ability of the department chair or the dean to reallocate funding in some areas of the budget and use for replacement, refurbishing, repair and remodeling seems unpredictable. The possibility of a here-to-for avoided course fee or department fee could be considered in order to help the department be more self-supporting.

**Action Taken**

We placed course fees ranging from \$5 for students in COMM 1020 HU Principles of Public Speaking to \$25 for students in media production classes such as COMM 4750 Advanced Audio and Video Production. We also received on-campus grants to establish another computer lab in Elizabeth Hall and to update our television studio with digital equipment.

**Recommendation 2**

Secure consistent and additional secretarial support to assist the existing staff and especially prepare for the additional demands of the graduate program admissions, committee coordination, curriculum, and student progress.

**Action Taken**

With tuition money collected from the Master of Professional Communication program, we hired a 30-hour-a-week administrative assistant. This person has been able to provide assistance in the front office to help when we are especially busy or if someone needs a day off. This person has also been able to help with website tasks.

### **Recommendation 3**

Financial support for faculty research and travel will be even more critical as the graduate program inherently demands higher levels of scholarly activity. The current practice of funding only one-quarter to one-third of the cost to travel to a national convention and to have faculty members personally pay for substantial portions of that travel is not consistent with a quality undergraduate or graduate program. As stated in the previous five year list of recommendations, additional funding would allow for the improvement of administrative support for a culture of scholarly and creative activity.

#### **Action Taken**

Since the last five-year program review, the dean for the College of Arts and Humanities has supplemented the travel of tenure-track faculty who are actively pursuing a research agenda with \$1,000 yearly. In addition, we have been able to award \$1,000 to about five faculty members to travel to a conference with funds earned from the COMM 2110 HU Interpersonal & Small Group Communication concurrent enrollment classes. If a faculty member gets all three forms of support, it adds up to \$2,400. However, this applies to a limited number of faculty members and probably still isn't sufficient to support scholarly activity.

### **Recommendation 4**

Continue effective assessment practices of EPIC and other methods but also find additional funding sources or released time to facilitate portfolio and alumni surveys to better accomplish full programmatic evaluations.

#### **Action Taken**

We have been unable to adequately address this issue. We are thus trying to resolve this issue by setting up assessment within classes that can be used for program review as well as for awarding grades.

### **Information Regarding Current Review Team Members:**

Alan G. Stavitsky, Ph.D., University of Nevada-Reno  
Sarah Partlow Lefevre, Ph.D., Idaho State University  
Azenett Garza, Ph.D., Weber State University  
Shannon Butler, Ph.D., Weber State University