

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

A review team consisting of Al Stavitsky, University of Nevada-Reno; Shannon Butler, Weber State University; Azenett Garza, Weber State University; and Sarah Partlow Lefevre, Idaho State University; visited the Department of Communication at Weber State University on February 23, 2015, to review the undergraduate program.

They noted the following strengths:

- A. A collegial, collaborative, highly motivated faculty that works well as a team and is committed to student success**
- B. Dedicated leadership that has shaped a positive organizational culture, and provides useful feedback**
- C. Meaningful co-curricular opportunities that impact students, engage the community, and raise the institutional profile**
- D. A holistic approach to the discipline through an integrated core curriculum**
- E. Alignment with college and university goals and mission**
- F. Strong mentoring systems for new faculty**

The Department of Communication faculty appreciate the recognition in the six areas noted. Three of the recognized strengths center around curriculum and co-curricular organizations, and the alignment of these academic programs to the college and university's goals and mission. The other three strengths have to do with the quality and commitment of faculty.

The faculty have worked extremely hard in the last five years to improve the curriculum and co-curricular opportunities. The curriculum underwent an extensive revision in 2013 to update courses and make the program easier for students to understand. One co-curricular organization was added—Ogden Peak Communications—to provide a place where the students in the Public Relations & Advertising emphasis, by far the largest academic area in the department, could get hands-on experience with actual clients similar to the experience students get in Weber State Debate, The Signpost, KWCR 88.1 FM, and Studio 76/Wildcat ONE TV. In addition, Weber Media Group has been formed to converge the student media organizations and provide experiences even more in line with job opportunities in the today's changing media environment. The committee recognized the department's efforts to update student learning outcomes and assess classes and programs with clearly defined and measureable learning outcomes.

The faculty were recognized as collegial, collaborative and highly motivated as they work as a team to help students succeed. Coming first on the list of strengths, there is probably no greater compliment that could have been given to the faculty. A number of new faculty have

joined this team in recent years as the numbers of full-time faculty have increased by three positions since the last review. Two more faculty will join in the 2015-16 school year, bringing the number of Communication faculty to 21. Exceptional new faculty have helped to increase the reputation of the department in both teaching and research. They also are already performing important and visible service to the department, college, university, and academic discipline. The review team noted that existing faculty are providing strong mentoring for these new faculty members. Leadership was said to be providing useful feedback and support to the faculty and establishing a positive organizational culture overall.

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

- A. Hiring and retention of faculty given that salaries are not competitive for the market**
- B. High teaching loads considering the imperatives of the graduate program, co-curriculars and faculty research**
- C. The need to continue to promote diversity within the department**
- D. The need to provide better facilities for the TV studio and PRSSA**
- E. The need to continue to raise the department's profile through faculty research and through the impact of co-curricular activities**
- F. Ongoing financial sustainability for co-curricular programs**

On April 9, the faculty had a conversation about the challenges. The responses follow:

**A. Hiring and retention of faculty given that salaries are not competitive for the market**

Faculty agree that salaries are not competitive for the market. This is a challenge that may be beyond the department's control. The department will continue working with the dean and provost to make arguments for more competitive salaries. Small merit and cost-of-living raises in recent years have not been sufficient to make salaries competitive with industry or even with similar institutions of higher education. In the hiring process, the department has learned to make the salary clear to candidates during phone interviews in an attempt not to waste campus visits. However, some candidates still believe they can negotiate salaries up during their visit. Discovering this is not the case, we often have candidates who turn down our position offers simply based on salaries. Other colleges at Weber State University have been able to make market arguments to bump up salaries; however, this argument has not worked in the College of Arts and Humanities. We need to continue to make this argument. Salaries are also an issue in regards to retaining faculty. This is especially painful when we have carefully mentored and developed new faculty. For example, one faculty member left one year ago to take the exact position at Utah State University for a raise of more than \$10,000 a year. Another faculty member, in the competitive area of Public Relations & Advertising, left to take a position at a Research One institution with a substantial pay increase. Salaries are a major challenge for our existing faculty and in trying to hire and retain faculty. This is an urgent matter.

## **B. High teaching loads considering the imperatives of the graduate program, co-curriculars and faculty research**

The faculty also agree that they carry a high teaching load, especially considering the teaching in the graduate program, advising of co-curricular organizations, and requirements for faculty research and scholarship. This is a difficult challenge to address on a department level. Weber State University requires a four-four teaching schedule. However, this is balanced with a reasonable research expectation for tenure and promotion. In regards to the teaching in the graduate program, graduate classes are treated as 4.5 credit hours of workload. The additional 1.5 credit hours are compensated at the master's level of \$1,999 per credit hour. Faculty, therefore, receive \$2,500 extra for teaching in the graduate program, almost as much as they are paid for an overload class. However, faculty should have the option of teaching two undergrad classes and one grad class and not receiving the extra \$2,500, which could be used to hire an adjunct to teach the other undergraduate class. In regards to the co-curricular advising, faculty do get a kind of course release by having a course associated with this responsibility. The department chair attempts to assign other classes that align with the co-curricular. Faculty schedules are also established to work around the needs of the co-curriculars. Finally, some of the faculty have been able to conduct research as a class project. This has resulted in several publications. Another faculty member has published research with graduate students.

## **C. The need to continue to promote diversity within the department**

One area where the reviewers suggested the department could make a dedicated acknowledgment of the goal of promoting diversity is to add it as a stated value in the departmental mission statement. The faculty resolved to put this on the agenda for the Fall Retreat. Once this is added to our mission statement, we will continue to discuss how to effectively teach about diversity issues as a content area as well as discuss how we can best educate students who are members of underrepresented groups in our classes and at the co-curricular organizations. We will continue to build in required components about diversity issues in our classes, particularly the general education classes and classes required of all Communication majors. Steps have been taken to do this already with topics such as representation, privilege, and identity already covered in a number of courses. Faculty will receive training in how to work effectively with members of underrepresented groups such as in the summer COMM 1020 and 2110 retreats and other settings. Students will receive this training in annual retreats for co-curricular organizations. While many faculty members are doing a number of things regarding diversity, we will do a better job of highlighting those efforts. For example, we have Spanish content in The Signpost and KWCR 88.1 FM and have extensive faculty and student participation in diversity conferences and other campus and local initiatives. We will also discuss ways of how to recruit and retain diverse students. The faculty also resolved to write questions about diversity that all job candidates will be asked to see if potential faculty members are prepared to deal with a student body that is increasingly becoming more diverse at WSU. We will also continue to resolve to continue to try to hire racially diverse faculty candidates.

#### **D. The need to provide better facilities for the TV studio and PRSSA**

We recognize that we need better facilities for the TV studio and PRSSA. When Elizabeth Hall was constructed and the Union Building was recently remodeled, we lobbied intensely for facilities for these co-curricular organizations. In fact, we had hoped to have space where The Signpost, KWCR 88.1 FM, Studio 76/Wildcat ONE Television and Ogden Peak Communications/PRSSA could be combined to facilitate the convergence of the student media. However, we were told that we could not have that much space in Elizabeth Hall or the Union Building. Therefore, The Signpost and KWCR received remodeled space in the Union Building and Studio 76 stayed in its current location in the basement of the Stewart Library. Meanwhile, Ogden Peak Communications/PRSSA didn't even exist. The faculty are willing to seek funding to remodel space currently designated as a student study lounge in Elizabeth Hall for a location for Ogden Peak Communications/PRSSA. We will also seek to see if there is any space in the center of campus, even the basement of the library, where we could locate this group. This will require permission of Facilities Management and sufficient funding. At the very least, we may simply give Ogden Peak Communications/PRSSA part of the student lounge and purchase room dividers. We are open to ideas on what we can do to obtain better facilities for the video studio.

#### **E. The need to continue to raise the department's profile through faculty research and through impact of co-curricular activities**

Great strides have been made in the last three years to raise the department's profiles but more can be done. Faculty research and accomplishments of the co-curricular organizations are highlighted in a monthly email sent to all Communication majors, the dean, University Communications (the university's PR office), University News (distributed across campus), and the university alumni magazine. This has resulted in extensive coverage. This information is also posted in the newly redesigned department website. We need to continue to do this in order to counter the low profile the department had historically both on campus and in the community. We especially need to distribute this information in social media channels. We have resolved to assign this task to the office staff and work-study student. This summer we will take steps to raise our footprint on social media channels by increasing followers and posting information on at least a weekly basis. The department is also working to raise its profile by hosting an annual CommFest where we will highlight students' accomplishments, faculty research and co-curricular organizations. In conjunction with CommFest, we have launched a Speech Showcase to highlight the best student public speakers. Also since the last five-year program review, we have initiated a three-week summer camp for high school debaters. We have plans to sponsor a camp for high school media students. We also started hosting public debates and public speeches in front of the Ogden City Council. Finally, thousands of community service hours are donated each year by our students. With everything our department is involved in, it makes sense that we should be a more high-profile department.

#### **F. Ongoing financial sustainability for co-curricular programs**

Money is always an issue for our co-curricular programs that depend heavily on student fees and tuition waivers from the college for support. Our new organization—Ogden Peak Communications—has found it difficult as a startup to access student fees and tuition waivers. At the present time, we don't even have donor scholarships specifically donated to PR and Advertising students, the biggest group in the department. We have several ideas about how to augment our current funding. First, we will work with the college's new development officer, a graduate from our program, to raise scholarship donations and other funding. Second, in conjunction with our initiative to better track alumni, we will work with the development officer to mine this group for donations, even small donations that could add up. Third, the converged Weber Media Group hopes to sell advertising for the converged media site in an attempt to raise additional ad revenues to supplement those supporting The Signpost, KWCR 88.1 FM and Studio 76/Wildcat ONE TV. Fourth, camps for high school students such as the debate camp, can bring in additional funding. Fifth, we will continue to take advantage of every opportunity to get money from various pots of money on campus such as capital funding or ARCC.

## **OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS**

The program reviewers listed five overall recommendations. The April 9 discussion by the faculty came up with some ideas about how to address these recommendations. The conversation will continue. The recommendations and faculty ideas follow:

- A. Continue to develop a sustainable, long-term funding structure for co-curricular programs, including a model for debate and the Weber Media Group concept for the newspaper and electronic media**
  - **Action plan:** We will seek funding to remodel student study lounge space for Ogden Peak Communications/PRSSA. If funding cannot be found, discuss giving the current space to Ogden Peak/PRSSA or finding another suitable location in the center of campus.
  - **Action plan:** We will try to sell advertising for converged media site being developed by Ogden Peak Communications as additional funding for Weber Media Group organizations, including The Signpost, KWCR 88.1 FM, Studio 76/Wildcat ONE TV, and Ogden Peak Communications/PRSSA. Ogden Peak/PRSSA will try to raise additional money from this site by providing sponsored content, advertising/sponsorship money it has never had.
  - **Action plan:** Weber State Debate will try to devise funding structure for three-week high school debate camp in summer to provide additional non-institutional funding.
  - **Action plan:** Media organizations, especially The Signpost, will investigate hosting a summer workshop in summer to provide additional funding.
  
- B. Continue to seek to increase course releases to allow faculty more time for scholarship**

- **Action plan:** The department chair will work with dean to seek to increase course releases to allow faculty more time for scholarship. This will be a challenge at a four-four teaching institution, but we will investigate possibility of faculty teaching in the Master of Professional Communication program to teach three courses while teaching in the graduate program. The MPC could donate \$2,500 to the Instructional Wage budget, instead of paying it to the faculty member, freeing that faculty member's time. Other innovative ways of course releases will be investigated.

**C. Develop a written assessment plan and continue to extend assessment throughout the curriculum, increase "closing of the loop" of curricular revision based on assessment findings**

- **Action plan:** We will continue to develop our assessment of the department's three general education classes—COMM 1020, 2010 and 2110. Improvement will be made to common rubrics for signature assignments and common test questions. Student learning outcomes will be better aligned to the university's general education goals.
- **Action plan:** We will assess all of the courses required for all Communication majors, including COMM 1020, 1130, 2110, 3000, 3150, 4890 and 4990. Student learning outcomes will be revisited to ensure alignment with program objectives, as well as college and university outcomes to connect assessment goals at multiple levels.
- **Action plan:** We will improve the assessment of ePortfolios required of all Communication majors. Time will be devoted in COMM 3000, the first upper-division class required of Communication majors, to introduce the idea of ePortfolios so that students are not hearing about portfolios for the first time in COMM 4990. The department will continue to improve a common rubric used to measure the quality of the ePortfolio and will ensure that majors get feedback from both professors and professionals.

**D. Continue to develop the Advisory Board for student networking, internship placements, alumni philanthropy, and portfolio reviewing**

- **Action plan:** Now that the Advisory Board for Communication is established, the department will continue to use its membership for networking, internship placement, alumni philanthropy, and portfolio reviewing.

**E. Build a framework for seeking increased external support for department programs and priorities, and to increase support staffing levels**

- **Action plan:** Using social media, the WSU Alumni Office, and other sources of information, we will attempt to contact our graduates from the last 25 years to encourage philanthropic giving, connection with the department's Facebook page, and listing of where our graduates work on the department website.

- **Action plan:** Working with the development officers for the College of Arts and Humanities, we will try to establish additional scholarships, especially for Public Relations & Advertising students, and other donations.
- **Action plan:** We will more effectively use the work study student and the administrative assistant for the Master of Professional Communication program to assist the department's administrative assistant in tracking alumni and other responsibilities.