

**Program Review  
Department of Communication  
Weber State University**

**Review Team:**

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**Summary of Findings:**

**Strengths**

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

**Challenges**

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

**Report on Standards:**

**A. Mission Statement**

Overall, the department mission statement and implementation are strong with some room for improvement. Expected outcomes of the program are adequately stated in the departmental mission. The statement could be further clarified to specify how students are involved. It does not state how the desired

accomplishments are evaluated as the rubric demands. However, it is clear from the self-study that the department is making a consistent effort and employing innovative approaches to assessment. The mission statement could be clarified by stating which constituencies are served by the program (e.g. students, faculty, Weber State University, the Ogden community, etc.). The definition of the program in the departmental mission statement is strong. The curriculum is appropriate to reach the stated goals. As strengths of the department, we recommend that the department find wording that reflects the excellence of the co-curricular activities including the radio station, the newspaper, the debate team, and PRSSA in the mission statement. Finally, the departmental mission statement exemplifies the values and principles outlined in the mission statements of both the college and the university. If any changes are made in this respect, we suggest adding diversity as a stated value in the departmental mission statement. Overall, the mission statement is between adequate and strong in fulfilling the standards for evaluation outlined in the executive summary.

## **B. Curriculum**

The curriculum is well organized and aligned with the departmental mission statement. The holistic approach to communication as reflected in the integrated core curriculum is particularly impressive. The department contributes to university general education by providing three courses, in public speaking (COMM 1020), mass media & society (COMM 2010), and interpersonal/small group communication (COMM 2110). A 2013 curriculum revision updated course offerings to reflect technological and industrial change in communication, and to make the program easier for students to follow. The department manages a broad range of undergraduate programs, from associate's degrees and minors to bachelor's degrees in seven emphasis areas. While it might seem challenging to offer this range of programs with the resources in a unit of this size, faculty and students report few problems managing the scope of the department. The integration of experiential learning through co-curricular experiences is noteworthy, and the initiative to develop a Weber Media Group that would converge these activities is forward looking and congruent with the goals of the 2013 curricular revision. A multi-year course projection provided by the department for 2013 to 2016 indicates that courses are offered on a regular basis to allow students to complete graduation requirements in a timely manner.

## **C. Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment**

The department should be recognized for the efforts extended to update student learning outcomes that are now clearly defined, measurable, and stranded throughout all course offerings so that, ideally, each outcome can be assessed in every course. The variety of assessment tools the department uses is commendable. Assessment of the learning outcome strands, particularly in the general education courses, has been improved by the department's use of signature assignments and common test questions. Faculty communicate confidence in ePortfolios as a major

assessment of student achievement at the end of the program, although streamlining or fine-tuning the process for evaluating the ePortfolios is yet to be accomplished. We encourage faculty and students to explore the myriad ways ePortfolios can be used for assessment purposes. Now that the department has these critical elements in place, using assessment data to inform and track curricular decisions and adjustments will be a necessary and ongoing process. Specific learning outcomes may need to be more closely monitored to ensure students are gaining the proficiency required in post-graduation employment. We noted that student writing, in particular, is a strand needing more attention as communication industries expand digital writing genres and expectations for professional writers. Additionally, informing students earlier in the program about the ePortfolio may encourage better student submissions and deeper self-reflection on achieved outcomes.

#### **D. Academic Advising**

The department has a clearly defined strategy for advising students, with students assigned to faculty advisers based on emphasis area. Each emphasis area has at least one adviser, with multiple faculty members assigned in high demand areas such as Public Relations & Advising and Digital Media. Students generally report satisfaction with access to advising and the quality of the advice they receive from faculty advisers. In some cases students reported seeking advising help from faculty with whom they were more comfortable, even if that was not their formally assigned adviser. General-education advising is handled at the college level by college-based advising staff. It's not clear that the department currently has a formal strategy for assessing the effectiveness of advising (beyond asking students their impressions in an exit-survey question); this should be an area for attention as part of the department's ongoing assessment efforts.

#### **E. Faculty**

The faculty should be commended for their committed and engaged teaching, which features community engagement, solid co-curricular activities, internships, and various individualized learning opportunities. Adjunct faculty are welcomed and well supported, with regular evaluation, informal mentoring by tenure-track faculty, and training opportunities through periodic adjunct workshops (though students report some concerns about inconsistency in the teaching and effectiveness of adjunct faculty). Overall, students generally report that faculty are knowledgeable, supportive, and teach them practical skills. Although we know that the department is not responsible for setting salary levels for new faculty members, we recommend that the dean explore ways in which higher salaries can be offered and other recruiting efforts may be applied to retain international and diverse faculty hires. In addition, it would be useful to explore how to deal with overload issues that occur for faculty who teach in the Master's program because their teaching load tends to be 13.5 credits rather than 12 credit hours. Productive faculty members should be able and encouraged to take sabbaticals on a more regular basis. The department

should be encouraged to continue to work on diversity issues, including incorporating relevant content in classes and co-curriculars.

### **F. Program Support**

The department should be commended for hiring a 30-hour per week administrative assistant to help with the additional workload resulting from the Master's program. The administrative assistant feels welcomed and supported in her position, though salary levels and professional development opportunities are a concern. However, this level of staffing (along with a work-study student) appears barely adequate for an academic unit of this size and scope. The move to Elizabeth Hall in 2008 was a major boost for the department in terms of space and technology. However, it would be useful to pursue new space for the video studio facilities in a more public and prominent location than the library basement, akin to the campus radio station and newspaper spaces. In addition, the department's active PRSSA group needs a larger space.

### **G. Relationships with External Communities**

The Department of Communication demonstrates exemplary commitment to community involvement through mandated internships, high school concurrent enrollment courses, co-curricular organizations, designated CCEL courses, and faculty service on community boards and organizations. The newly established advisory board consists of impressive and pro-active business and community leaders who desire to effectively engage students in community partnerships. Most impressive is the network of media outlets provided by the student-produced Signpost, radio station, and television productions in which students discover their voices and opinions concerning community issues, decisions, and values. These venues offer students substantial, authentic participation as informed citizens actively involved in civic affairs. Additionally, through the Debate series, student debaters are providing vital perspectives to community decision-makers. The growth of the PRSSA and its sponsorship of COMFEST and other activities directly involve students in nonprofit community projects. Such an abundance of community outreach will continue to need faculty and administration support and resources. One aspect of community involvement yet to be tapped fully is that of community research. Adding a research component to the internship experience may be one way to begin this endeavor.

### **H. Program Summary**

The program addressed all of the previous external review's recommendations. Overall, departmental reaction to the previous review has been strong but leaves some areas for improvement. First, the department met the requirements of *recommendation one* by implementing appropriate lab fees and seeking on-campus grant funding to support departmental labs and equipment. Class fees provide a more predictable stream of revenue allowing for future planning in regards to

equipment upgrades and improvements. Second, the department has generated funds for and established a 30-hour per week administrative support position to help with the demands of the graduate program and the website, among other tasks. Third, the department and the dean have worked to increase travel funding for faculty. However, the self-study notes, and we agree, that more work could be done in this area as the additional funding is only available to a limited number of faculty. Because funding is not sufficient to support scholarly travel for a majority of department members, the department and the college should seek to augment funding further. Fourth, *recommendation four* suggests that the department conduct alumni surveys and implement student portfolios. Based on our observations, several improvements have been and are being made in the departmental assessment. However, the self-study notes that they have not fully met the goal. Rather than focusing on a particular means of assessment such as a portfolio or alumni survey, we encourage the department to continue to seek the means of assessment that work best for the department and provide measurable results mixed with qualitative results. The move toward regularizing assessment in classes is a positive outcome of departmental efforts to improve assessment practices.

**Overall recommendations:**

- 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
- Continue to seek to increase course releases to allow faculty more time for scholarship
- 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
- Continue to develop the Advisory Board for student networking, internship placements, alumni philanthropy, and portfolio reviewing
- Build a framework for seeking increased external support for department programs and priorities, and to increase support staffing levels