

ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW

Fairmont State Board of Governors

Program with Special Accreditation Program without Special Accreditation

Date Submitted 11/19/2020

Degree Program Communication

INSTITUTIONAL RECOMMENDATION Approved by the Board of Governors (§ 5.2.8)

The institution is obligated to recommend continuance or discontinuance of a program and to provide a brief rationale for its recommendation:

- 1. Continuation of the program at the current level of activity;
- 2. Continuation of program with corrective action (for example, reducing the range of optional tracks or merging programs);
- 3. Identification of the program for further development (for example, providing additional institutional commitment);
- 4. Development of a cooperative program with another institution, or sharing courses, facilities, faculty, and the like;
- 5. Discontinuation of the Program

Rationale for Recommendation:

Aimee Richards
Signature of person preparing report:

11-19-2020
Date

Chris Kast

Signature of Dean T. White

1-11-21
Date

Signature of Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs: [Signature]

May 10, 2021
Date

Signature of President: [Signature]

5/20/2021
Date

Signature of Chair, Board of Governors: [Signature]

5/18/21
Date

Executive Summary for Program Review

Degree Program:	Communication
College or School/Department:	College of Liberal Arts
Chair/Program Coordinator	Angela Schwer
External Reviewer:	Nancy Jackson, Marshall University
Reviewer Email:	jackso21@marshall.edu

Synopses of significant findings, including findings of external review (include the external reviewer(s) information).

Findings of the External Reviewer

Nancy R. Jackson
M.A. Communication Studies
Assistant Director of Forensics
Marshall University Thundering Word Speech and Debate
Smith Hall Room 270
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, WV 25755
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Strengths

1. Emphasis change from a performance-based program to a flexible program that allows students to choose tracks that develop knowledge and skills specific to their professional goals enhanced by coordination with departmental courses outside of their chosen fields.
2. A continuing focus on developing and emphasizing the digital media aspects of the program.
3. Supportive, helpful, approachable Dean and Chair.
4. Instructors who truly care about the students and their success, who are willing to constantly and actively analyze the program and instructional methods used to ensure the students are served effectively and efficiently.

5. A cohesive unit of faculty who collaborate and create new ideas in a supportive, mutually beneficial safe space. This is an invaluable resource.
6. Faculty who, as a cohort, create relationships with students so that they feel comfortable enough to ask questions and explore ideas.
7. A selection of stellar adjunct faculty who are the oxygen and sunlight of the department.
8. Establishing benchmarks throughout the program for preparing students for an ever-changing job market.
9. Crucial support assistance from the office staff of the departments of Performing Arts and Humanities.
10. Scholarship availability for students who participate in activities like the speech and debate team.
11. Opportunities to collaborate with faculty in Humanities, especially Journalism.

Weaknesses

1. Lack of full-time faculty
2. Lack of dedicated support staff
3. Lack of viable visibility of the department from the administration

Recommendations

1. Primary Recommendation: Another full-time faculty member must be added to the Communication Arts department. It is not the bottom line that is suffering, it is the student population.
2. Consider moving as many conducive to the format courses as possible to an online course format in order to attract non-traditional and commuter demographic students.

Wallis, L. (2020, August 11). *Growth In Distance Learning*. Retrieved from State of Oregon Employment Department: <https://www.qualityinfo.org/-/growth-in-distance-learning-outpaces-total-enrollment-growth>

3. Consider adding short general communications “modules” into the core curriculum service courses, following the National Communications Association guidelines, as a recruitment tool.

National Communication Association. (2020). *What Is Communication?* Retrieved from National Communication Association: <https://www.natcom.org/about-nca/what-communication>

4. Consider removing the word “storytelling” from public speaking courses. Retain for performance-based courses. It has a traditionally theatrical implication that does not fit well with today’s modern communications student.
5. Consider building a line of communication with the School of Business. If possible, collaboration with the School of Business would be long term beneficial for the students, the Communication Arts department and would make the School of Business more attractive to its majors. The link between employment and communications is a priceless commodity that could be capitalized on for ultimate valuation in the eyes of the administration.
6. Consider giving the physical office space and the social media space of the Communication Arts department modern updates. These might seem frivolous or extraneous expenses but do make a difference in the eyes of prospective students and parents who are considering which college to attend.
7. Consider “Open House Welcome to Our Department” gathering at the beginning of the semester to encourage interpersonal relations between faculty and students and student retention. “Comm Major Bring A Friend Day” gatherings as a potential recruitment method.

Concluding Remarks

Staffing reductions without the intent to replace in Communication Arts has stressed the capacity and resources of the department as well as the energy of the department’s faculty and staff. Combined with unanswered resource and staff requests since the last cycle review has exacerbated the depleting effects on a department pushed to its limits.

In the responses from faculty there was praise for Communication Arts: its talented, productive, and dedicated faculty; its excellence in pedagogy and pedagogical training. The future of students is bright indeed. I want to emphasize that their excellence, amply and multiply achieved, should not come under such trying circumstance, at the cost of such exhaustion and sacrifice. Reasonable minimum accommodations are essential for any successful department, especially one that is so valuable in the schema of the life of every student. Communication Arts is something of a hidden gem in a national context. The enrollment and recognition might be enhanced and widened, as it deserves, through a

legitimate set of implemented changes. Every student who is touched by Communications Arts, no matter their chosen discipline, will be significantly bettered for having been exposed and their future employers will thank you, the university, for it.

Plans for program improvement, including timeline

Transitioning classes within the major core to an online format is an ongoing endeavor. We have evaluated each course to assess its potential effectiveness as an online offering. We have successfully transitioned two classes to an online format and will be tackling two additional courses in the coming semesters. Using this format is beneficial in a few ways. It is convenient for our majors and minors. The classes have limited prerequisites and are attractive to students who prefer an online format. Finally, our limited faculty forces us to use adjunct instructors. Online courses provide a way to find qualified instructors who are not available to teach a midday face to face class. We also offer online options for all three of our service courses.

Faculty are in the process of crafting a curriculum revision to reduce the required hours for both our major and minor. This program streamline will take our required core hours from 46 to 40 and reduce the required hours for our minor from 24 to 18. The plan is for the curriculum proposal process to be completed and the changes be implemented by Fall 2022. We are also evaluating our concentrations to ensure that they are relevant in terms of preparing students to enter the professional world or graduate study and directly align to Program Outcomes.

Our program improvement plans also include a continued increase in the level of technology integration. The pandemic has provided us with the opportunity to examine how we can prepare our students for a different type of academic and professional world. We are working to incorporate the mastery of applications such as the Microsoft Suite elements of Teams and SharePoint into our major courses. In addition, we continue to add opportunities for students to work with video and audio production and editing. These skills will be crucial for job hunters in fields related to communication such as social media marketing and publicity.

The Communication department will continue to seek ways to foster community within our department as well as to seek new students. We are working with students to develop our department club, FalComm into a more active organization. This will be a way for us to incorporate the external reviewer's idea for events to aid with retention and recruitment.

We will continue to make progress in assessment through examination and streamlining of course objectives, curriculum mapping and systematic collection and evaluation of data from service courses. We are also in the process of designing a system for tracking our graduates to obtain data related to their placement in graduate programs and professions related to their Communication degree.

Finally, in addition to suggestions from the external reviewer, the Communication faculty have actively been exploring ideas to improve our program for our current students as well as

ways to draw new ones to us. One such idea is to collaborate with other programs to create efficient pathways for double majoring. A degree in Communication can lead to a wide variety of career paths. Pairing it with an additional, compatible degree could make a graduate stand out in today's job market. The next several months will be spent examining which programs could be done in tandem with Communication without delaying degree completion and connecting with stakeholders within those programs.

Identify weaknesses or deficiencies from the previous review and describe how these have been addressed

The following weaknesses were reported in the 2016 Program Review:

1. Low enrollment of incoming freshman
2. Low graduation rate
3. Fall retention fluctuates. Spring retention was not given.
4. Technology
5. Sufficient, permanent, full-time faculty
6. Incomplete assessment plan
7. Insufficient tools for adjuncts
8. Scholarships

Our faculty worked together in considering these weaknesses and developing a plan to address them. The following chart includes the suggestions/goals offered in the 2016 review and how the Communication Arts program has addressed them.

LOW ENROLLMENT OF INCOMING FRESHMEN	We have dedicated time as a department to recruiting. Participation in Maroon and White days, reaching out to students via provided lists, visits to high schools and participation in the School of Fine Arts Exploration Day are ways we have engaged in recruiting incoming freshmen.
LOW GRADUATION RATE FLUCTUATING FALL RETENTION RATE	Both of these items have been addressed through a closer focus on advising.
TECHNOLOGY	A dedicated computer lab has been created. The lab contains Mac computers used to do audio and video editing for podcasts and digital storytelling projects.
SUFFICIENT FULL TIME FACULTY	We continue to lobby for more faculty. In the meantime, we work hard to address all the needs of our students. Since the previous review, we have lost another full time faculty member.

Compliance with WV HEPC Series 10 Policy Regarding Program Review (§ 5.2)

INCOMPLETE ASSESSMENT PLAN	<p>We continue to improve our assessment plan. We have standardized our senior's capstone course evaluation via a Portfolio Presentation rubric and Neely Persuasive Speaking evaluation rubric. Data from which is compiled in Taskstream. We have also standardized key assignments in our service courses and continue to collect data from all sections.</p> <p>We have also been conducting regular department assessment meetings to streamline course outcomes for all courses and create comprehensive curriculum mapping.</p>
INSUFFICIENT TOOLS FOR ADJUNCTS	<p>Since the previous review, we have focused on ensuring our adjuncts have sufficient tools for success. We have accomplished this through the following efforts:</p> <p>1-Dedicated department coordinator for Communication (previously one coordinator had served both Communication and Theatre). This coordinator handles scheduling and serves as a point of contact for adjuncts.</p> <p>2- We have created uniform assignments for our service courses. Adjuncts are provided with all instructional and assessment materials.</p>
SCHOLARSHIPS	<p>The department offers several scholarships and Participation Grants. We have worked to make sure students are aware of these and are encouraged to apply.</p>

Five-year trend data on graduates and majors enrolled

			HEPC Series 10											
AY	*Enrollment	**Degree Awarded	Productivity Standards Programs are required to meet at least one of the indicators listed below.											
2019-20	54	7	<p style="text-align: center;">Average of Five Most Recent Years</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Degree Level</th> <th>*Enrollment</th> <th>**Degree Awarded</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Baccalaureate</td> <td>49</td> <td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Masters</td> <td>NA</td> <td>NA</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Degree Level	*Enrollment	**Degree Awarded	Baccalaureate	49	7	Masters	NA	NA
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Baccalaureate	49	7												
Masters	NA	NA												
2018-19	66	5												
2017-18	43	7												
2016-17	58	9												
2015-16	24	7												
5-YR AVG	49	7												

The number of majors in the Communication Arts program has remained stable over the last five years. The number of graduates has also remained stable, ranging from 5-9 over the time period. The goal of five graduates per year has been met or exceeded in each of the last five years. The Communication faculty has established a retention strategy focusing on advising and the reworking of the Sophomore Seminar to center on communication career exploration as a means to increase our graduation rate going forward.

Summary of assessment model and how results are used for program improvement

Program level outcomes are assessed via a portfolio review midway through the senior year. The program outcomes are evaluated via a written portfolio document and presentation as well as an accompanying exit interview. More information and the rubric used for the assessment are included later in this document.

Course level assessments have been made more clear by the development of and data collection from common assignments in the service courses. Instructors submit results from their section to be collated into data supporting success or identifying a need for improvement in the satisfaction of course outcomes.

The faculty has been meeting regularly to implement ways to expand our assessment model. Evaluation instruments continue to be created, analyzed and improved. Course outcomes are in the process of being streamlined and comprehensive curriculum maps are being created for each course outlining how outcomes at each level relate to each other.

Data on student placement

Over the last five years, our graduates have gone on to pursue graduate degrees in communication fields such as integrated marketing, sports management and community health fields. Some have secured positions in nonprofit administration, public relations and marketing and sales. We are currently devising an organized system to track graduate placement in continued academic endeavors and/or communication related professions. This tracking will also allow us to tap them as a resource for current students as we purpose to prepare our majors even more directly and explicitly for the world of work.

One case in point is a 2020 graduate who completed an internship with the global communications department at Mylan, Inc. in Pittsburgh in the summer before her senior year at Fairmont State. She was able to use her skills in digital storytelling to produce a weekly mini podcast for the company's internal social media. She went on to land a job at MLS Group, a global public relations firm in New York City. Another student completed his Master of Sports Management at WVU and is now employed at a television station as an account executive. He is preparing to enter a doctoral program. Yet another student recently completed her Master of Health Promotion after excelling in the Health Communication track within the Communication major here at Fairmont State University and is fielding multiple offers for positions in community health. These are just a few of the students who have gone on to successful graduate study and careers in communication. This data is anecdotal but is indicative of the path our students take after graduation. One of our goals is to systematically collect this data going forward.