

# ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW

## Fairmont State Board of Governors

Program without Special Accreditation

Degree Program BA in Communication Arts Date Submitted 1/15/26

### 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. Identification of the program for further development and/or expansion due to demand (e.g., providing additional institution commitment), with or without action.
2. Continuation of the program at the current level of activity; with or without action.
3. Continuation of program at a reduced level of activity (e.g., revise curriculum, reduce credit hours, merge programs, share courses, share faculty, develop a joint program with another institution) or other corrective actions.
4. Discontinuation of the Program (review for potential sunset)

#### Rationale for Recommendation:

Explore options for program title (e.g. Communication Studies vs. Communication Arts), using market information. Explore additional credential offering opportunities (e.g. microcredentials). Explore experiential learning opportunities for communication students. In collaboration with academic administration and the Enrollment Management Division, develop an enrollment plan that identifies student enrollment segments and market measures and targets for each segment. In collaboration with CMCS, develop a program marketing plan. Establish an Industry Advisory Council.

Aime Richards

1/28/2026

Signature of person preparing report:

Date

James Matthews

4/28/26

Signature of Dean

Date

[Signature]

5/18/2026

Signature of Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs:

Date

[Signature]

6/10/26

Signature of President:

Date

[Signature]

6/25/2026

Signature of Chair, Board of Governors:

Date



# Executive Summary for Program Review

(Provide a 2-3 page summary)

Program Name Communication

College/Department College of Liberal Arts/Humanities

Delivery (on-campus, hyflex, online) On Campus, online

External review(s) if applicable N/A

## Synopses of significant findings, including major strengths and key challenges

The Communication program at Fairmont State University plays a mission-critical role in fulfilling the University's general education requirements and supporting regional workforce needs. The program provides the entire Oral Communication core curriculum (COMM 2200, 2201, 2202), ensuring every undergraduate completes foundational communication coursework. Its mission aligns closely with the University's focus on engaged citizenship, ethical development, and workforce preparation.

Major strengths include:

- High-impact curriculum integrating theory, applied projects, internships, and a capstone portfolio.
- Strong assessment culture, with consistent use of common assignments in core courses and a rigorous senior portfolio process.
- Stable student success rates, averaging 83% or higher across five years.
- Strong financial health, with a 63% margin significantly exceeding national benchmarks.
- Extensive institutional impact, enrolling 500–700 non-majors annually.
- Clear regional workforce relevance, with graduates placed in media, marketing, public relations, corporate communication, and the nonprofit sector.

Key challenges include:

- Insufficient full-time staffing, with only one full-time faculty member for most of the review period, limiting capacity for program growth, assessment expansion, and faculty development.
- Space and resource constraints, including lack of adequate classroom and lab space for media-related instruction.
- Enrollment fluctuations, with declines during 2021–2023 mirroring university and national trends, followed by recent recovery.

Despite these challenges, the program has shown resilience, steady improvement, and increasing enrollment momentum heading into the next review cycle.

## **Plan for improvement, including a timeline.**

Years 1–3 (2025–2028):

### **1. Strengthen Curriculum and Alignment with Industry Standards**

Timeline: Years 1–2

- Integrate media production tools (video, audio, podcasting) more fully across the curriculum.
- Revise the major electives structure to align with common minors (Journalism, Graphic Design, Marketing, Theatre).
- Explore stackable micro-credentials in Adobe Creative Suite and related media competencies.
- Review course numbering, rotation, and sequencing for clearer student progression.

### **2. Expand Assessment Practices and Data Use**

Timeline: Years 1–31

- Add a mid-program assessment checkpoint to complement the senior portfolio.
- Develop more structured reflective prompts for portfolio entries.
- Conduct norming sessions to improve scoring consistency and ensure alignment with PLOs.

### **3. Enhance Student Support and Advising**

Timeline: Immediate and ongoing

- Standardize advising practices and implement advising “nudges” each semester.
- Increase early alerts and proactive monitoring of students at 30/60/90 credit milestones.

### **4. Strengthen Partnerships and Enrollment Pipelines**

Timeline: Years 1–2

- Implement COMM 2200 as a dual-credit offering with area high schools.
- Formalize internship partnerships with regional media agencies and nonprofits.
- Engage an advisory network of alumni and employers to provide ongoing feedback.

### **5. Improve Faculty Resources and Program Capacity**

Timeline: Immediate and ongoing

- Continue to build sustainable staffing
- Expand professional development in online/hybrid pedagogy, assessment, and course redesign.
- Advocate for improved classroom/lab space supporting digital communication.

## **Identify weaknesses or deficiencies from the previous program review and the status of improvements implemented or accomplished.**

In the previous program review, three major areas were identified for improvement, and each has been meaningfully addressed during this review cycle. First, the program was encouraged to streamline its curriculum, which previously included eight separate tracks such as Multimedia, Government, Health Communication, etc. These tracks required individual assessment and created an unnecessarily complex structure for both students and faculty. In response, the program undertook a comprehensive curriculum revision that eliminated the tracks entirely. Students now complete a unified Communication core and select from a flexible collection of major electives, allowing them to tailor the degree to their professional interests without the administrative and pedagogical burden of managing multiple tracks.

Second, the review highlighted the need for more systematic assessment practices. The program responded by incorporating common assignments across all sections of each core curriculum course. This structure enables consistent measurement of student performance, ensures comparability of data across instructors, and strengthens alignment with the Program Learning Outcomes. Finally, the program was encouraged to shift from a performance-based identity toward a more media-focused direction. Significant progress has been made in this

area as well. Courses such as Contemporary Storytelling have been redesigned to emphasize documentary and media production, new coursework in social media has been added, and students now gain hands-on experience with industry-standard media technologies. Collectively, these improvements address previously identified deficiencies and position the program for continued growth and relevance.

### **Five-year trend data on graduates and majors enrolled in the program.**

- Enrollment declined from 39 majors (2021) to 16 (2023), then rebounded to 27 (2025).
- Graduation numbers remained stable: 8 graduates in 2021 and 2022, 4 in 2023 and 2024, and 8 in 2025.
- Student progress milestones (30/60/90 credit hours) show variability due to small cohorts but demonstrate a positive upward trend beginning in 2024.

### **Summary of assessment model and how learning outcome assessment results were used for program improvement.**

The program employs a comprehensive, multi-measure assessment model:

- Common assignments in all COMM 2200, 2201, and 2202 sections to assess foundational PLOs.
- Advanced course assessments, including the Neely Persuasive Speaking Contest and upper-division research and analysis projects including a content analysis, provide direct measures of specialized competencies.
- COMM 4496 senior portfolio evaluates *all* PLOs using artifacts from across the curriculum plus reflective writing and an exit interview.
- Results show high achievement, with most PLOs met at or above the 85% threshold annually.

Assessment results directly informed:

- Course sequencing adjustments
- Revised scaffolding of research, writing, and presentation skills
- Enhanced reflective components
- Increased applied learning across the major
- Strengthened internship preparation and integration

### **Data on student placement, if available (e.g., number of students employed in positions related to the field of study or pursuing advanced degrees).**

While the program does not yet have a formalized tracking system, data gathered from faculty networks and student reports show graduates successfully working across communication sectors, including:

- Morning anchors, show producers, and reporters at WBOY and WDTV
- Public Affairs Mass Communication Specialist, US Army Reserve
- Assistant Director of Communications, Fairmont State University
- Sales and Marketing Specialist, Leaf Home
- Scheduler, National Captioning Institute
- Strategic Communications Manager (Viatrix, Fortune 300 company)
- MBA student at Fairmont State University

- Energy sector communications and outreach roles
- Freelance media production and digital content creation

These placements demonstrate strong alignment with regional workforce needs and confirm the career readiness of graduates.

The future of the Communication program is bright. Following our comprehensive curriculum revision two years ago, the program now has a clear and forward-looking direction that centers on media production, digital storytelling, and applied communication skills. This shift positions the program to meet the evolving demands of today's communication landscape while better preparing students for careers in media, marketing, public relations, corporate communication, and related fields. Our revised curriculum strengthens the balance between theory and practice, expands opportunities for hands-on learning, and aligns more intentionally with employer expectations across the region and beyond.

This momentum is further supported by the addition of a new full-time faculty member, which significantly enhances our instructional capacity, advising support, and ability to pursue strategic initiatives. We are also working collaboratively with the Journalism program to integrate more writing, reporting, and media production experiences that enrich our program. This partnership strengthens interdisciplinary learning and ensures students develop the versatile skill set required in contemporary communication industries. These developments provide a solid foundation for growth, innovation, and student success in the years ahead.

The Communication program's evolution aligns directly with Fairmont State University's mission to educate engaged citizens in a community distinguished by opportunity, growth, and achievement, delivering transformational impact for West Virginia and beyond. Through our emphasis on ethical communication, civic engagement, and practical skill development, the program prepares students to contribute meaningfully to their communities and to succeed in a rapidly changing professional environment. Our work supports the University's commitment to fostering opportunity, promoting personal and intellectual growth, and equipping graduates to make a positive impact both within the state and beyond.