

Revisit Team Report

for Accreditation in Journalism and Mass Communications

Name of Program: Department of Mass Communications

Name of Institution: St. Cloud State University

Revisit Date: October 28-30, 2012

Revisit Team Chair: Paul Parsons, Dean
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Revisit Team Member: Marie Hardin, Associate Dean
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Revisit Recommendation: Re-Accreditation

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE REVISIT TEAM: Add additional pages to this report as needed. Notify the ACEJMC executive director of the revisit team's recommendation. Send an electronic copy of the report in **word document** format to the ACEJMC office at sshaw@ku.edu.

Date of Original Site Visit: November 7-10, 2010

Recommendation: Provisional Re-accreditation

1. List each standard in noncompliance and the reasons as cited in the original team report. (Add additional pages as necessary.)

UNDERGRADUATE

Standard 3: Diversity and Inclusiveness

Reasons cited: The unit must develop a written diversity plan that clearly articulates goals, strategies and tactics and sets measurable targets of achievement and a timeline for achieving goals. The unit must demonstrate significantly more proactive efforts to recruit students and faculty of color, particularly U.S. racial and ethnic minorities, and demonstrate success in achieving a more diverse full- and part-time faculty and student population.

Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Reasons cited: The unit must develop a written assessment plan that clearly articulates goals, strategies and tactics and sets measurable targets of achievement and a timeline for achieving goals. In addition, the assessment plan should demonstrate that those measures have looped back and changes were made.

GRADUATE

The unit has withdrawn its graduate program from consideration for accreditation. The 2010 site team found the program in noncompliance in Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction; Standard 3: Diversity and Inclusiveness; and Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes.

2. Describe any other weaknesses cited by the site team in its report and any additional concerns cited by the Council in its letter to the unit regarding provisional status.

The weaknesses cited by the 2010 site visit team in **Part III: Summary** all related to either the diversity or assessment standards. In its Revisit Report, the unit cited seven additional concerns noted in the 2010 site team report:

Student advising too public. The site team wrote, “This advising takes place in the open space of the main office, raising a privacy concern because students air personal and school-related issues within earshot of staff, faculty and other students.”

Some broadcast faculty are not technologically current. The site team wrote, “Students noted that a few faculty members were not always up-to-date with rapidly changing production equipment, values and practices.”

Public relations syllabi lack learning outcomes. The site team wrote, “None of the syllabi indicate how the unit’s recommended competencies and learning outcomes are mapped to these courses, so it is not clear what competencies are emphasized and viewed as achievement goals in which courses.”

Too few PR electives. The site team wrote, “Electives in public relations courses are slim (only a summer COMM 430 Mass Communications Poland Program course open to all students, including PR students, is offered regularly). Other electives offered once a year include history and research methods courses.”

Too few PR alumni listed. The site team wrote, “It was surprising that even though public relations majors account for about 30% of the unit’s students, the list of alumni with distinguished careers included relatively few working in public relations.”

Not enough social media in PR courses. The site team wrote, “...students were not always exposed to or expected to produce social/new media products as part of a public relations plan.”

Too few PR and advertising student awards. The site team wrote, “Noticeably absent was any mention of awards won by advertising and public relations students; students in these two sequences/specialties account for 54% of the unit’s majors.”

3. For each standard that had been in noncompliance, provide a summary of the team's findings regarding corrections and an evaluation of compliance or noncompliance. (Present a separate narrative response for each of the standards in noncompliance. Add additional pages as necessary.)

Standard 3: Diversity and Inclusiveness

Summary of findings:

The Department of Mass Communications includes 12 full-time faculty and 16 adjunct faculty. Three full-time faculty are women and four are from outside the U.S. (International). None are U.S. minorities. Among the adjunct faculty, three are U.S. minorities and three are women. University data for Spring 2012 showed 527 students as intended or declared majors. Of those, about 20 percent are considered U.S. minorities or International by the university.

The unit has not addressed all issues raised in the 2010 site team report, but it is clearly moving in the right direction. For example, the unit has implemented a "diversity across the curriculum" approach that is paying dividends among students. Attention to topics of diversity in courses and through special events (such as panels, film screenings, lectures) has been infused across the unit. Furthermore, the unit has a Diversity "Action Plan" with clearly articulated goals, strategies and timelines. The plan covers curriculum, department-sponsored events, faculty recruitment, student recruitment and retention, the professional advisory board, and student media. The plan also includes strategies, tactics and a timeline for assessing the department's diversity-related activities. A diversity committee of three faculty members, along with the department chair, pitches and coordinates events.

The unit uses direct and creative ways to recruit African-American students – and, by the university's numbers, has improved. Examples include having more minority students in on-air programming, talking about mass communications with African-American students who have not declared a major, and reaching out to minority high school students in the Minneapolis area. (In 2009-2010, the unit reported 2 percent African-American enrollment; the university's African-American enrollment was 4 percent. University data showed African-American enrollment in the unit at 4.4 percent in Spring 2012.) The unit may want to consider integrating increased images of diversity on its website and other promotional images as a way to strengthen recruiting.

Conversations with faculty members and adjunct instructors and a review of assignments and syllabi indicate that this unit puts a high premium on the need for diversity-related coursework and instruction. Most syllabi include learning outcomes involving diversity, and the range of assignments in courses designed around these outcomes is impressive. Faculty members speak passionately about the need for such coursework in preparing students for the workforce and media environment they will enter upon graduation. One faculty member, who participated in a university-sponsored, multi-day workshop on "Anti-Racist Pedagogy Across the Curriculum" and who has organized extra-curricular events around diversity for the university community, said he saw diversity-related coursework as challenging but essential. "This is very important for me, personally, for my own growth," he added.

Furthermore, instructors of upper-division courses say students are arriving in their courses with an understanding and sensitivity to issues of diversity and inclusiveness – indicating that students are, indeed, moving steadily toward the unit's programmatic learning-outcome goals. A meeting with 40 students supported this observation. Almost all indicated that diversity-related content has

been part of at least three courses they had taken in the unit. They also saw assignments, classroom visitors and events outside of class as working together to give them a strong grounding in diversity and inclusiveness. “The professors really focus on teaching us sensitivity,” said a broadcast major, talking about the requirement in his class to diversify story sources. Others who had been in the program for two or more years said they had noticed a greater emphasis on multiculturalism.

The unit deserves commendation for starting a weekly Spanish-language TV newscast and for seeking and receiving a grant to begin a new webstream of Somali news, arts and music to serve the growing number of Somalis (7,000 and growing) in the St. Cloud area.

The unit also should be commended for exceeding its goals for diversifying its Professional Advisory Board, which provides expert evaluation of the unit’s programs. In Spring 2012, about one-third of the 11-person board was female and about one-third represented U.S. minorities.

In summary: As long as the unit keeps this as a front-burner priority, its “diversity across the curriculum” approach promises to be a model for other programs, especially if its well-designed assessment plan can document the pathway from coursework to strong diversity-related student outcomes.

The unit still has significant work to do in relationship to staffing. The 2010 site team asserted that the unit needed to redouble its efforts to diversify its faculty, and the unit has made progress. For instance, three African-American adjunct instructors have been recruited. The adjunct instructors commended the department chair for making them feel valued – and for unambiguously communicating the unit’s priorities around diversity and inclusiveness. One adjunct instructor said, “I could not feel any more welcomed than I do.... It feels like a warm bath.” Another, who has been familiar with the unit for several years, described the department chair as “energetic” and “clearly committed” to fostering diversity in the unit.

The unit has failed, however, to diversify its full-time faculty. It should have the opportunity to do so before the next reaccreditation review because of impending retirements, and it should aggressively seek to do so. Although diversity and inclusiveness cannot be addressed solely by staffing, hiring and retaining a diverse faculty is a key part of cultivating a culture that is truly inclusive, integrated, and appropriate for students who will graduate and work in an increasingly multicultural environment. Simply put, the faces at the front of the classroom matter.

A review of Fall 2012 courses exposes the challenge for this unit. Of the 31 undergraduate courses reviewed by the site team, 23 are staffed by U.S. majority (white/Caucasian) instructors; six by non-U.S. (International) instructors; and two by U.S. minority (African-American) instructors. The two African-American instructors teaching in the fall are adjunct faculty, meaning that students have little exposure to these instructors outside of class (unless the instructors, on their own time, visit to make guest lectures; all three of the adjunct instructors have done so). Another substantive concern is the fact that just six – about 20 percent – of the 31 courses are staffed by women. Again, this includes adjunct faculty, limiting the students’ opportunities for informal mentoring and advising outside the classroom. Meanwhile, the student body in the unit is 57 percent female. The team points this out as an issue that should definitively be addressed before the next full reaccreditation review.

Overall evaluation: COMPLIANCE

Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Summary of findings:

Since the 2010 site visit, the unit has put significant effort into improving its assessment of student learning. The unit adopted an Assessment “Action Plan” with strategies and timelines, revised its student learning outcomes, designated where in the curriculum the values and competencies are emphasized, and implemented a new direct measure (professional evaluation of capstone course projects) and a new indirect measure (professional advisory board evaluation of the program).

In its revisit report, the unit articulated 29 Program Learning Outcomes that it expects students to achieve. These learning outcomes include all of ACEJMC’s designated values and competencies except for ethics (clearly an oversight, since the unit’s assessment instruments do probe for an understanding and application of ethical principles). The unit would be wise to revisit the overarching values and competencies for the unit as a whole. ACEJMC focuses on programmatic assessment – what students should know and be able to do when graduating. Instead, the unit placed much of its focus at the course level, creating student learning outcomes for each course that sometimes overlap with the Program Learning Outcomes and sometimes do not.

The unit lists four direct measures, and three of them have been operationalized (the fourth is course-embedded assessment of all courses, which the unit has not implemented and which the unit may wish to reconsider since it is not an assessment measure at the programmatic level). These are the three direct measures being applied:

Professional evaluation of student capstone projects. The unit offers four sequences: Broadcast, News-Editorial, Advertising and Public Relations. The revisit report provided results of capstone project evaluations for three of them (not Advertising). The capstone evaluations were modest in nature, typically involving two professionals who rated up to five randomly selected student capstone projects in each sequence (or multiple tracks in Broadcast) on a rubric based on student learning outcomes. For example, the evaluation of five PR capstone projects resulted in a cumulative 4.0 (on a 5-point scale) for applying basic principles of public relations, and a 3.5 for writing correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the professions. In the future, this direct measure will need to move from the pilot stage to a larger and more robust measure involving more professionals and more student projects for results to meaningfully guide curricular and instructional improvement.

Internship supervisor evaluations. The number of student internships in the unit doubled in the past year, to 70 in 2012, and the unit revised its rubric used by internship supervisors to better reflect student learning outcomes. These twin developments make this a much better assessment measure. Results from a 2010-11 internship supervisor survey (28 responses) were highly positive, ranging from 4.37 (writing) to 4.59 (information gathering) on a 5-point scale. The faculty currently is discussing the desirability of making an internship a requirement of all students. If so, it would make this an even stronger measure of overall student learning.

Entry/exit examination. The entry/exit exam focuses on general and theoretical knowledge, with multiple-choice questions in areas such as media history, legal concepts and communication research. When last administered in spring 2010, entering students scored 46 percent and seniors scored 63 percent on the 60-question exam. The exam would have greater applicability if the questions were analyzed in terms of specific programmatic learning outcomes – for instance, if six questions focus on media law concepts, then it could provide evidence of student learning from point of entry to exit for the learning outcome related to understanding legal principles.

The unit lists these indirect measures:

Evaluation by the unit's Professional Advisory Board. In spring 2012, the department's advisory board provided the unit with substantive curricular feedback and direction. Specifically, the board recommended more convergence among curricular sequences and more teaching of web and social media skills. Overall, the board concluded that the department does a fine job of teaching students *about* multimedia and multiplatforms, but can do more to teach the skills themselves. The board also recommended requiring an internship by all students. In a meeting with all faculty, they indicated that the revision of ACEJMC's 80/65 rules will provide the needed flexibility to strengthen the curriculum and provide more convergence among sequences.

Student awards. St. Cloud State has strong student media, many with tie-ins to the department's courses. In 2012, the department's student-run television station won second place nationally for best student TV newscast in the College Television Awards (the collegiate Emmys) awarded by the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. The TV station, which produces three half-hour live newscasts a day to serve the St. Cloud community, won first place for best newscast in the 2011 Broadcast Education Association competition. In 2012, the unit's advertising team won third place in its four-state district in the National Student Advertising Competition, with the project being an advertising campaign to reach multicultural audiences for Nissan.

Alumni and employer surveys. The department conducts separate alumni and employer surveys on five-year cycles. Results from the 2008 surveys were included in the 2010 self-study. The alumni survey (331 responses) found that 90 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they learned basic skills for effective written, oral and visual communication, while 62 percent said the major gave them an understanding of the diversity of groups in a global society. The employer survey (15 responses) found that 93 percent agreed that graduates came out of St. Cloud State with basic skills for effective communication. The unit says it will conduct both surveys again in 2013.

One concern is that, sometimes, the revisit report used the word "will" when the word "did" would have been anticipated. One example is that the revisit report says "we will loop our programmatic, sequence, and course SLO's back to our overall curriculum." Curriculum change does and should take time, and the revisit report does include evidence of instructional improvement resulting from the 2010 site team's scrutiny of assessment. Examples include the addition of a multimedia course and the increased emphasis on diversity in courses. Still, for the next regular accreditation review, the unit should avoid saying what it *will* do and instead focus on what it has done.

With the unit's next self-study just a few years away, the department will need to ensure that it not only has methodically implemented its direct and indirect measures, but has taken advantage of the knowledge gained from assessment to build a better program for its students. This is a rising expectation, and the unit will be expected in the next accrediting cycle to have a more robust set of assessment results, with clear evidence of loopback into programmatic improvement. ACEJMC revised its guide to assessment in August 2012 that can serve the unit's future efforts.

Overall evaluation: COMPLIANCE

4. For EACH of the other weaknesses cited by the site team or concerns cited by the Council, provide a summary of the team's findings regarding corrections.

In its Revisit Report, the unit cited seven additional concerns noted in the 2010 site team report:

Student advising too public. Student advising now occurs in a private office.

Some broadcast faculty are not technologically current. The 2012 departmental budget allocates funds (\$1,300) for faculty to engage in continuing education in new technologies.

Public relations syllabi lack learning outcomes. All course syllabi now include learning outcomes.

Too few PR electives. The unit lists five courses as possible electives, in addition to a communications internship.

Too few PR alumni listed. The unit has updated the list to include a number of alumni working in public relations.

Not enough social media in PR courses. The department says all PR courses now have a social media component, social media is a required element in PR campaign assignments, and a new course in the unit introduces students to multimedia. The meeting with students showed that they continue to believe that courses do not have a sufficient emphasis on social media and newer media forms.

Too few PR and advertising student awards. PR and advertising students in the unit have had notable successes in recent years, including third place in its four-state district in the National Student Advertising Competition and top awards in the regional PRSSA Classics Competition.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The unit has made clear progress on both the diversity and assessment standards, and both continue to have room for improvement. In addition, the university needs to ensure that the Department of Mass Communications is poised for success in years to come. The department is a partner in an ambitious plan that would provide a substantive technology upgrade in the unit.

A point of concern is the diminishing number of full-time faculty positions, from 14 eight years ago to 13 when the 2010 site visit occurred to 12 currently (and one of those is on extended leave and two others are in phased retirement). All but one faculty member are tenured, and that individual is on fixed-term. As a result, the department currently has no faculty members on tenure-track. Also, the percentage of courses taught by adjunct faculty already is quite high. The university has an opportunity to infuse the department with new colleagues and to achieve the unit's goals to prepare students to enter the rapidly changing world of mass communications. Otherwise, the university may be jeopardizing accreditation renewal in the future.

Our meeting with 40 students revealed enthusiasm for the department. Students cited quality student media, a caring and accommodating full-time faculty, a strong core of adjunct faculty, and up-to-date technology as strengths. Asked to describe ways the department could improve, students cited the need for more faculty members with recent professional experience, instruction on current trends such as social media, and a need to develop student portfolios.