

Revisit Team Report
for Accreditation in Journalism
and Mass Communications

Name of Program: School of Journalism and Mass Communication

Name of Institution: University of Iowa

Date of Original Site Visit: October 10-13, 2010

Recommendation: Provisional Reaccreditation

Revisit Date: February 12-13, 2013

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Revisit Recommendation: Reaccreditation

INTRODUCTION

In October 2010, the School of Journalism and Mass Communication was poised between paralysis and the potential to recover its stature as a storied program in the field. The site team sought to capture that uncertainty in its final comment:

...nagging contradictions in detail undermined an otherwise comprehensive and effective self-study, frustrating the site team and stirring its concern that the School was not in sufficient command of its business.

The team judged the School out of compliance on Standard 2, Curriculum and Instruction, and Standard 9, Assessment of Learning Outcomes, and recommended provisional re-accreditation.

In its January 2013 revisit report, the School listed the circumstances that had contributed to disarray and discontent:

- *There were five separate directors of the School who served during the years 2000 to 2009. The longest serving director was very ill during the last year of her term.*
- *The director from 2007 to summer 2009 was a professor from another, no-communications department and thus the unit could be considered to have been in effective but unofficial "receivership." His brief was internal management and establishing a calm atmosphere in the school in the wake of fractious internal difficulties. Except for presentation-driven Professional Advisory Board meetings he was not charged to conduct alumni and industry outreach. Thus, the UI-SJMC lacked that all-important "tell-it-to-the chair" feedback loop of employers and graduates of many generations.*
- *The Director of Resource Center Services, who coordinated our Internship and Assessment program, left in summer 2007 and was not replaced; she would have been able to help with C&I processes and assessment surveys.*
- *The School saw the retirement or departure of several senior faculty members and no new tenure-track hires.*
- *Of some relevance as well to the function of any system of procedural oversight, the School moved into a new building in 2005 but then the river flood of 2008 forced its evacuation for a semester.*
- *No one from the School had been in touch with ACEJMC or kept track of the evolution of accreditation standards, especially those in assessment.*

In February 2013, the revisit team was impressed to find that, in painful financial times, the University and the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences (CLAS) had enough confidence in the leadership and the largely reconstituted faculty and staff of the School to invest in its future. Between 2010 and 2013, the School hired seven new faculty members. The provost and the dean praised the vision and leadership of the director and the collegial activism of the faculty and staff for seizing on the opportunities given them to transform the culture and content of the School. Especially reassuring was the new dean's appreciation for a professional program, a focus and distinctiveness sometimes at risk in a liberal arts college, especially when the possibility of a merger with more academically focused communication units is being considered.

REVISIT FINDINGS

Standard 2, Curriculum and Instruction

2010 Site Team Report

The School reports that 98 percent of the School's graduates were in compliance in academic year 2009-10 with the requirement that 80 or more semester credits be taken outside the major, and 100 percent were in compliance in 2008-09.

The School also reported it was in 100 percent compliance in both the last two academic years with the requirement that at least 65 semester credits be earned in the liberal arts and sciences. However, it has no formal tracking system to ensure that requirement is being met. Advising forms in students' files do not list this as a requirement advisers monitor, nor are there any data the School can point to that it used to certify compliance with the liberal arts and sciences standard. The School provided the team with files of eight students who graduated in spring 2010 with majors in journalism and mass communication and entrepreneurial certificates from the College of Business. Of the eight students, only 50 percent had met the standard that at least 65 credits be earned in the liberal arts and sciences.

It is apparent the School's report about the number of students who had met this standard was speculative rather than based on any data.

The School does not show evidence that it counsels students about the necessity of meeting the 65-credit requirement for courses in the liberal arts and sciences, nor does it track whether that requirement is met. Advising forms provided to students make no mention of the requirement, its web guide to major requirements does not explicitly list it and the graduation checklist in each student's file has no place to tally liberal arts credits. Though the School stated it was in 100 percent compliance with the liberal arts standard, it could not provide evidence of how that assessment was made. A check by the team of students who had graduated in spring 2010 with a second concentration in courses in the College of Business found that half did not meet the liberal arts standard.

Actions Taken, 2011-13

80-65 Rule

The School

- worked with the College to define which courses outside CLAS are liberal arts and sciences equivalent courses, particularly in professional units such as business and education
- created a full-time undergraduate associate director position (replacing a faculty volunteer)
- hired a new half-time educational adviser to advise students about curriculum requirements, sequences and options within the 80-65 rule
- educated faculty and staff about ACEJMC compliance standards and the status of courses within and outside the 80-65 rule

- developed a new system of checks and reminders for students, including USB wristbands from fall 2012 on with all the advising information previously distributed on paper.

The revisit report included a range of forms covering application, major requirements, advising, and course registration, all of which have a section on the 80-65 rule.

In a meeting, students showed little awareness of the 80-65 rule, at first. As we reminded them of its requirements, they recognized its import from the advising materials and other documents that the School has developed for them since 2011. They praised the detail and clarity of these materials in enabling them to meet their degree and major requirements, make informed elective course choices and graduate in four years.

The School reported that since it began advising students about compliance with the 80-65 rule in spring 2011, graduates have been in 100 percent compliance with the 80-hour and 65-hour requirements for every semester, including summers, except for 97 percent compliance in spring 2011.

The faculty is aware that ACEJMC is replacing the 80-65-hour with a 72-hour rule and has discussed whether and how to adjust to it. Because of the School's much improved system of information, advising and checking, current 100 percent compliance should be even more certain with the 72-hour rule.

Internships for Credit

The 2010 team report said:

The School must refine and sustain the program of internships for credit, including the maintenance of reliable records of student performance.

After the Director of Resource Center Service left in summer 2007, the School did not replace her until 2009. The School has since upgraded a half-time internship coordinator position to a full-time careers and internship and high school outreach coordinator position.

The coordinator informs majors about jobs and internships through *Hot Ledes*, a weekly listserv that also circulates among a growing number of alumni. He also organizes a speed networking event each semester that attracted 25 professionals in fall 2010 and 30 in fall 2012.

The School does not require internships. Students do not have to take them for credit. Students who take internships for credit must submit weekly reports and a final essay and participate in an ongoing e-mail dialog with the coordinator.

The revisit report included the current internship evaluation form. In a meeting with the coordinator during the revisit, he showed us a draft of a new evaluation form that is a significant improvement in rigor and effectiveness.

Students in October 2010 were delighted with the guidance and assistance of the coordinator. Students in February 2013 were even more enthusiastic and grateful for his attention, concern and assistance.

The School has responded to ACEJMC's concerns about curricular information, requirements, advising, monitoring and record keeping and about internship supervision and analysis with an impressive commitment of action, time and resources.

COMPLIANCE

Standard 9. Assessment of Learning Outcomes

2010 Site Team Report

The School does not have a credible assessment plan, valid and reliable measures, and a system of information gathering, analysis and action. It seems that not much, if anything, has been accomplished since the previous site visit.

Actions Taken, 2011-13

Because the School was essentially starting an assessment program from scratch after the 2010 site visit, the two-year period of provisional re-accreditation was not long enough to enable the completion of plan, application of measures, analysis of results, and action to address any weaknesses in learning outcomes. Nevertheless, the School has made significant progress since 2011.

The School adopted a five-part plan of direct and indirect measures with a timeline for their application. The assessment program was designed to begin with the entering class in fall 2011.

The School administered a law and ethics survey as a pre-test in the introductory Media Uses and Effects course but discovered it could not administer a post-test in the Ethics courses, as initially proposed. The School is considering alternative options.

The School collected out-of-class writing assignments from the Journalistic Reporting & Writing class and final course papers in seniors' writing courses. A committee of faculty and a panel of three members from the Professional Advisory Board evaluated the work in spring 2012.

The School administered a survey to about 30 alumni (from a graduating class of 150), received ten responses and tabulated the results in spring 2012. The experience confirmed the University's difficulty in maintaining up-to-date addresses of alumni.

After these experiments with assessment measures, the School is considering the development of a basic "Professional Communication" course to cover best writing practices and one or more capstone courses. The School has also concluded that it needs "an improved system of gathering, filing and storing data, making analyses and then making sure follow-up processes are actually followed." It planned to revise the system, starting in summer 2013.

The past two years have been a valuable learning experience, which should enable the School to present an effective ongoing assessment program by the next accreditation visit in 2016-17.

NON-COMPLIANCE

Other Weaknesses

2010 Site Team Report

Slow curricular and instructional adjustment by some faculty to changes in communication technology, audience information-seeking behavior, and professional practice.

Actions Taken, 2011-13

- Ten faculty, staff and graduate students attended a one-week tech, digital and social media training workshop in summer 2011
- The faculty retitled 11 courses and updated descriptions to reflect increased emphasis on multimedia, digital and social media in fall 2011
- The director and a new faculty member designed a new introductory survey course, "Social Media Today," first taught in spring 2012
- The School received a gift to create an excellence and innovation fellowship "to help faculty innovate or update the undergraduate curriculum via new technology projects" and made the first appointment in fall 2012
- The School hired seven new faculty members, most of whom have expertise in new media and multimedia

SUMMARY

ACEJMC's judgment of provisional re-accreditation provided an impetus for impressive improvement in administrative leadership and management and in faculty and staff energy and engagement with the changing communications environment. The School has benefited from a significant investment in its future by the College and the University and has, apparently, earned the respect of the administrators to whom it reports. While the School is only part way in the development of its assessment program, it has demonstrated that in spring 2013 it is in thorough command of its business in the areas of concern to the 2010 site team.

Overall Recommendation

Re-Accreditation