

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Academic Program Review

DEPARTMENT/PROGRAM
Communication Studies

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

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CAMPUS VISIT:

November 5-7, 2014

The review team read the self-study written by the faculty in the department; reviewed the curriculum, course syllabi and evaluations; conducted class visits; interviewed faculty, students and staff; and met with the Dean, Associate Deans and other relevant members of the campus community. Prior to their visit, the reviewers were provided with USF's Vision, Mission, Values Statement, the department's self-study and other university materials.

1. How did the external review committee rate the quality of the program – excellent, very good, good, adequate, or poor? How does the program compare with benchmark top-tier programs nationally? Please provide a brief rationale for the external review committee's rating.

The reviewers agreed that the program could be rated as being between GOOD and VERY GOOD. According to the review team, the faculty and staff demonstrate an "extraordinary commitment" to their roles at the university, the students and the Jesuit Mission. "This commitment is not just a job for the faculty and staff, but part of a deep and abiding concern for providing students with the best educational experiences possible" (p. 1). The Communication Studies Department can experience a renewal and "national prominence" if it incorporates the proposals suggested by the review team and if the department takes advantage of its unique location (p.1).

2. What are the most important general issues that emerged from the external review process?

- The review team noted that faculty's commitment to the mission of the university, college and students. The report notes that "the Department's faculty is making important contributions to USF" (p. 6). This is evinced by the fact that over half of the full time faculty hold positions of leadership outside of the department (p.6). Additionally, students in the department praise faculty for their mission driven curriculum and for their commitment to students (p.1).
- Communication studies should develop an "identifiable brand, a vision and a sense of a unique purpose" in advancing forward. This project should expand upon the Jesuit mission and should operationalize of "a program that builds both social justice and career pathways" (p. 11).
- In moving forward, the review team recommends that the department reorganize its course offerings to offer "a sense of continuity within the broader norms of the field of Communication" (p. 9). Specifically, the department should address the core course sequence and reorder course numbers.
- The team recommends that the faculty look at "uniting all or at least some of the communication-related programs under one administrative umbrella" (p. 4).

3. What specific recommendations for improving the program's quality has the external review committee made to the Dean?

The reviewer team highlighted three issues the program is facing: curriculum and pedagogy, organizational structures in the College and Department, and workload load issue.

Specific recommendations included:

Curriculum and Pedagogy

- Create a 100-level course that is “required of all majors”. The department should “re-conceptualize the subsequent departmental core requirements” (p. 9).
- The curriculum should be restructured to include “consistency of offerings and a sense of continuity within the broader norms of the field of Communication” (p. 9).
- The faculty should launch an online component for its curriculum. The courses will offer “students some scheduling flexibility while helping with the rooming issue on campus” (p. 9).
- An outcomes assessment of core courses must be conducted. “Based upon the findings of the OA, course can be created and/or modified from benchmarks” (p. 9).
- Part time faculty should receive training to meet “the norms of the course content and workload” (p. 9). A tenured or tenure tracked faculty should be appointed to serve as a mentor to these faculty.

Organizational Structures in the College and Department

- *Multiplication of Programs* A plan should be developed that unites “all, or at least some, of the communication-related programs under one administrative umbrella” (p. 9).
- *Botched Branch Campus* The faculty in the Communication Studies department devoted significant energy to a branch campus program in Sacramento, which the review team described as a “failed” effort. The review team suggest “fence-mending around this issue” (p. 10).
- *Interdisciplinary Mission Creep* The College should “implement a fair, transparent, and consistent policy for rewarding such interdisciplinary work” and the opportunities should be directed at post-tenure colleagues (p.10).
- *Weak Leadership Structure* The review team suggests that College Administration work with the Department in changing the bylaws regarding the role of the Department Chair. The reviewers describe the current role as “an inefficient rotation system of powerless Chairs” (p. 10).
- *Program Assistant* The review team suggest that the Program Assistant receive a raise, and “the trust of the Dean’s office to do, and manage, her job as she best sees fit” (p. 10). The team also suggests the hiring of a second program assistant, “who can also help with advising to unburden faculty” (p.10).

Work Load Issues

- *Advising:* The Communication Studies Department should hire an administrative person tasked with advising work. This will alleviate faculty “from checking requirements and freeing them to build more meaningful relationships with students” (p. 10).
- *Class Size:* Core Courses should be capped at 25 students. The Department should hire “better and more qualified adjuncts” and should administration should hire a faculty member to “comprehensively strategize the long term teaching needs for a sustainable department” (p.10).
- *Service and Teaching Overloads* “The Administration should provide clear guidelines regarding expected service hours and teaching overloads, based on the CBA” (p. 10).

4. In the opinion of the external review committee is the program following the University's strategic initiative in that it is;

- a. *Recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty of outstanding teachers and scholars.*
The review team notes that “students were effusive in their praise of the faculty” and that students feel like the “COMS [faculty] embodies the social justice vision of a Jesuit education” (p. 1). Collectively, the faculty is making “important contributions” to the betterment of the College’s academic programming by serving in leadership positions (p.6).
- b. *Enrolling, supporting and graduating a diverse student body that demonstrates high academic achievement, strong leadership capabilities, a concern for others, and a sense of responsibility for the weak and vulnerable.*
In their conversations with students, the review team noted that Communication Studies students engaged in a variety of internships, service learning opportunities and volunteer opportunities with community-based groups. “The students therefore clearly understand and seek to embody the Ignatian commitment to the common good” (p. 8).
- c. *Providing the environment necessary to promote student learning in the program.*
The students noted that they were drawn to USF for its “small classes”, “social justice mission” and “open access to our professors” (p. 8). Of the core courses offered by Communication Studies, many include research-based skill building including “literary review skills” which “set them apart” and “better prepare[d] them for their future careers” (p. 6).

5. In what way is the program contributing to the goal of making the University of San Francisco a premier Jesuit, Catholic urban university with a global perspective that educates leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world?

Throughout their report, the review team praised the faculty for the integration of the Jesuit values into the curriculum of the degree. The reviewers also called upon the faculty to develop a marketing plan that highlights the undergraduate program’s unique location in San Francisco “where international marketing and development sit side-by-side with social justice” (p. 8). Additionally, the reviewers were impressed with the department’s focus on health education and encourage its melding of health education and social justice to be continued to be explored.

6. What is the timetable for the response to the external review committee’s recommendations for program improvement? What can the Office of the Provost do to appropriately respond to the review?

The next step is for the Dean to meet with the Communication Studies program to create an action plan and explore the creation of a Master’s Degree in Strategic Communication Program taskforce. The Office of the Provost could assist the program by: 1) providing resources for the task force investigating a Master’s Degree in Strategic Communication Program; 2) considering the possibility of combining different Communication related departments; and 3) providing funding for an additional support staff position.

7. What general comments or issues, if any, are crucial to understanding the reviewers report?