EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Academic Program Review
Communication Studies

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS
Dale Brashers, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaigne.
Barry Brummett, University of Texas, Austin.
Karen Tracy, University of Colorado, Boulder.

CAMPUS VISIT:
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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 felt that the program had "tremendous potential to be among the best undergraduate departments in the discipline of Communication".
   - The reviewers noted that some faculty already had 'substantial reputations' in the field and program graduates were entering important graduate programs.
   - While the reviewers rated the program as VERY GOOD, meaning that the program is at the level one would expect to find at a top-tier liberal arts college or university and that it has the potential to become an outstanding or excellent program, they emphasized that potential was the operative word and gave suggestions on how that potential might be realized.

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

   - The reviewers discussed the current configuration of the department (three divisions of Communication Studies, Rhetoric and Composition and English as a Second Language) and made some recommendations for change.
   - The review team looked in some detail at the structure of the Communication Studies degree program.
   - The reviewers had some concerns about department culture and procedures.

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

   a) Configuration of Current and Future Department
   - In the opinion of the reviewers, the three divisions already operate quite independently in terms of budget, hiring and curriculum.

- While there are no obvious tensions between the three divisions, the reviewers noted that 'relations were distant…and people outside of units did not necessarily know everyone else's name". People identified with their particular division and not the department as a whole.
- The review team therefore felt that there were "major advantages in making department boundaries correspond more closely to the already existing decision-making structures."

Recommendation
- *They recommended that the three division department be separated into two separate departments, a Department of Communication Studies and a department that included ESL and Rhetoric and Composition (that could be called Rhetoric, Language and Literacy for example).*
- The reviewers recognized that the character of the latter department would require sustained discussion.
- The reviewers recommended that the one semester public speaking course should remain with Communication Studies should it become a separate department, although they did not address the issue that many students currently satisfy their public speaking requirement through a one year linked course offered by Rhetoric and Composition.

b) Curricular Issues
- The Communication Studies curriculum covers three core areas in the discipline namely interpersonal communication, communication and culture and rhetorical studies and these areas are "instantiated" with three foundation courses at the sophomore level and a foundational research methods course.
- These courses are then followed by advanced area studies courses at the junior and senior level. This part of the curriculum is under development and it is clear that the faculty wish to add smaller seminars at the advanced level and a universal capstone experience. The reviewers concurred with these ideas.
- The review team was very complimentary about student participation in conferences and reported that students were pleased with the strong emphasis in the program on writing, with the broad range of courses they were exposed to and activities such as conferences and advertising presentations.
- However, many students were unhappy with rumors that an advertising and/or public relations minor was not being considered and the reviewers later noted in their report that some curricular decisions, including initiatives related to advertising and public relations, are made "without sufficient involvement and wide faculty input and participation."
- The review team was very concerned that students were being drawn into conflicts between the faculty and they felt that this level of conflict was "one of the most troubling things about which we heard on our visit." They noted that in a small department it is important that faculty members "appreciate and/or accept the value of different perspectives – or at a minimum keep students out of the fray."
- The reviewers also noted that students had been critical of advising, particularly career advising (which the faculty felt most unprepared for). The reviewers observed that of the divisions in the communication field, the department's emphases (on interpersonal, communication and culture and rhetoric) "probably provide among the least clear career paths", thus necessitating "more careful guidance". The students need more help translating the theoretical knowledge they acquire into practical career paths.

<u>Recommendations</u>
- *The reviewers recommended that faculty resolve differences and/or "learn appropriate boundaries between departmental business and student concerns and needs."*
- *They also felt that a network of alumni would help with career counseling (for both students and faculty).*
- *The review team felt the faculty needed "more resources to enhance their [career] advising skills."*
- *Finally, the review team felt the students needed to have a "place to voice concerns and questions about the division or department."*

<u>c) Department Culture and Procedures</u>

<u>Culture</u>
- The review team felt that the culture with the Communication Studies division had become dysfunctional.
- There are some personal and procedural conflicts. Some senior faculty feel under appreciated while junior faculty feel unable to discuss issues openly – gridlock is the result and this often communicates itself to students.
- Part of the problem is a *lack of senior leadership*. The department is "bottom heavy" and lacks "the usual leadership, institutional memory and guidance that would come from a critical mass of senior colleagues."
- Another source of the dysfunction is the *current pattern of granting leaves and sabbaticals*. There appeared to be a high number of people away, something that has consequences for advising and long-term departmental planning.
- In terms of *long term planning and hiring*, Communication Studies has failed to bring its recent faculty searches to fruition. The reviewers noted there had been no lack of qualified candidates (indeed some of the review team taught and some of the team hired candidates not offered positions at USF).
- The reviewers were struck with the how Communications Studies discussed and advertised faculty searches in terms of courses that need to be covered rather than in terms of intellectual, research and scholarly areas. There was a lack of understanding that departments are built through planning and management of intellectual areas not course coverage. The faculty also seemed unwilling to hire those who were prepared to teach courses already taught. These problems in hiring could have a detrimental long-term impact on the department's reputation in the field.
- There was some criticism of the "critical lack of mentoring of junior faculty" in Communication Studies. This is crucial to achieve faculty growth, diversity and empowerment.

<u>Procedures</u>
- The reviewers expressed concerns about *the stability and quality of staff support* for Communication Studies. This applies to both program assistants and funding for office operations.
- There was real criticism of the *lack of adjunct office space*. The reviewers noted that "a high quality undergraduate program simply cannot be guaranteed without adequate office space for adjuncts." This affects not only the adjunct faculty but also the students and the program itself.

- The review team was concerned about the _reliability and consistency of instructional technology_ particularly for public speaking classes which is "really below par for comparable schools and must be corrected."

Recommendations
- *Structural changes need to be made to foster a healthier divisional culture in Communication Studies.*
- *The Communication Studies division must be assisted with more senior leadership.*
- *There needs to be a strategic, long-term and inclusive plan for divisional and departmental growth – this includes a rational leave and sabbatical policy, collegially planned new curricular across the faculty and hiring based on fundamental scholarly planning not ad hoc course coverage.*
- *There must be more effective mentoring of junior faculty.*
- *Staff support, adjunct office space and program funding needs to be improved.*

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

   Recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty of outstanding teachers and scholars.
   - The review team noted some faculty already had "substantial reputations" in the field.
   - Students described their teachers as "phenomenal" and "amazing" and commented to the reviewers on the many strengths of the department.

   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.
   - Program graduates were entering important graduate programs.
   - Many students participate in conferences based upon their course papers or independent studies with faculty. The reviewers noted that this "provides visibility for the program and recognizes the quality of the students."

   Providing the environment necessary to promote student learning in the program.
   - The review team noted that the curriculum and its development was clearly a source of pride and commitment for the faculty and they appreciated their enthusiasm in defining the curriculum.

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?**

   - The Department of Communication Studies and its three divisions "have much promise, engaged faculty and students and a respect for the mission and tradition of the University of San Francisco."

6. **What is the timetable for the response to the external review committee's recommendations for program improvement? What can the AVP's office do to appropriately respond to the review?**

- Provide resources to enable the program to hire an additional faculty member.
- Support and help facilitate the department's effort to resolve differences and established appropriate boundaries between department business and student needs and concerns.
- Support and advise the program on its faculty and curricular changes.
- Provide resources for staff support, adjunct faculty office space and department budget.

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

- The reviewers noted that the Department of Communication Studies is an "unusual academic entity" and that "one rarely finds this particular combination of English as a Second Language, Rhetoric and Composition and Communication Studies. The review team noted that the three units were very different.