

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Academic Program Review
College of Arts and Sciences

DEPARTMENT/PROGRAM
Department of Media Studies

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS
Professor Elliot King, Loyola University Maryland
Professor Anne Balsamo, The New School University
Professor Laura Castañeda, University of Southern California

CAMPUS VISIT
May 2-4, 2016

The review team read the *Self Study* written by the faculty in the department; reviewed the curriculum, course syllabi and evaluations; 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 also provided with a variety of materials about the College and the University.

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 committee gave the Media Studies Department an overall rating of GOOD. They noted that the department “has a hard working, dedicated and creative faculty” with an “impressive” commitment to “the Jesuit mission ... diversity, social justice, and interdisciplinary work,” and a “very promising” curriculum. However, the reviewers felt “several serious challenges” needed addressing to develop Media Studies into the “exemplary program” it “has the potential to be.”

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

- The university “does not have the resources to compete” with major film production programs, both in San Francisco and in the greater California area, and lacks “essential” courses in digital media production and culture.
- * The unusual arrangement in which studies related to mass media professions are distributed between two (or perhaps three) departments seems entirely linked to the idiosyncratic history of the department and not apparently driven by student needs or curricular coherence.

- * The “full-throated commitment to diversity and other aspects of the university mission” has raised tensions between prioritizing diversity and freedom to teach courses as one sees fit to teach them.
- * The mix between term and tenure/track faculty is an ongoing issue, as is the general size of the fulltime faculty; this is complicated by the fact that “at least three and perhaps one or two other fulltime faculty are seriously estranged from the work of the department generally”, which “breeds ill feelings among all or many of the faculty members.”
- * Many of the members who are still engaged in the departmental work of faculty also have significant commitments outside of the department; “it was not clear to the external review team, who, if anybody, saw the work of the department as their primary responsibility”. This situation will result in a “crisis in leadership within the next year or two.”

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

Curriculum

- More attention should be paid to “digital culture/digital media production” – “an essential component for a program of this type.”
- Review and restructure “the overall distribution of the professionally oriented sequences” (i.e. journalism, film, etc.), for better “curricular coherence.”
- Design the curriculum to accommodate evolving student interests over time, as within the current model “it is difficult to switch [from one course of study] to another,” i.e. from Journalism to Public Relations.
- Ensure “the range of courses students need to achieve their [career] goals is offered,” perhaps by “eliminating [older] courses that ... are no longer needed.”

Campus Media and Facilities

- Determine, in consultation with the university, “the expectations for the relationship between the department and campus media operations,” as these are currently unclear.
- The review team was surprised that the department still supports a 16mm film editing space that “is only used every other year for a full course and for part of a course in the alternative years,” especially since “digital video editing dominates in the field.”

Department Administration and Management

- Provide incentives for some faculty members to “rebalance their commitments to programs external to the department,” so as to “refocus on the internal needs of [their home department].”

- Streamline department administration, “such as reducing the need for separate coordinators for each minor.”
- It is the review team’s view that “major administrative positions” should be held by tenured, or minimally, tenure-track faculty.
- Consider hiring in an outside chair, ideally with expertise in digital cultural/digital media production to assist in “management issues,” to “provide breathing space to help heal faculty relationships,” and to “work to strengthen the common vision in the department.”
- With the new undergraduate curriculum being rolled out, and, with it, an increase in the number of required courses for the major, it may not be the time to launch additional new initiatives.

4. In the opinion of the external review committee, is the program following the University’s strategic initiatives?

- a) *Ensures that different voices and perspectives are present in curricula ... so that students engage the complexities and subtleties of human experience.*
The department “embraces and expresses” USF’s “commitment to social justice ... and interdisciplinary studies,” and is uniformly staffed by faculty that “consciously address issues related to diversity and power in their classes.”
- b) *Supports a faculty of teaching scholars whose pedagogy is informed by rigorous research and who engage in their disciplines, participate in scholarly discourse that constitutes serious inquiry, and involve students in their research.*
Reviewers noted that faculty not only “underscore the interdisciplinary nature of media studies itself” in their classes, but also engage in “broader interdisciplinary efforts” in their own careers. These include “Latin American studies, human rights, environmental studies, and other key areas of concern.”
- c) *Fosters the development of curricula that reflect the most recent advances within and between the disciplines*
While “serious challenges” stand in the way of the department meeting its “full potential,” its current curricular revision “appears very promising.” Reviewers noted that said revision reflects the department’s “awareness of the rapidly changing environment for communication generally, and Media Studies in particular.” The reviewers suggested that careful implementation of this new curriculum, with specific attention to the range of professional courses offered, will best help students “achieve their goals.”

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?

Reviewers noted that the Department of Media Studies shows an impressive commitment to the university's mission to [respect and celebrate] diversity on every dimension," "[commit] to social justice," and "[develop] men and women for others." Furthermore, the department's "combination of critical understanding and practical skills within a liberal arts environment" is "deeply rooted in the Jesuit educational tradition." Should the department continue to further "develop its own distinct offering" of criticism and practical skills, it could become "an exemplar program."

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 and Associate Deans to meet with the full-time faculty of Media Studies and discuss the Action Plan based on the *Self Study* and the *External Reviewers' Report*. Based on the agreed upon Action Plan, the Office of the Provost can assist the program by providing necessary resources to implement those actions.

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

No additional information needed.