

**Academic Program Review**  
**Advertising Program, University of San Francisco**

Report Submitted by

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## ***Introduction***

The Advertising Curriculum Review Team was charged with reviewing the Advertising Program at the University of San Francisco for the purpose of identifying issues and opportunities that shape the future success of the undergraduate program. Two external reviewers visited the campus on February 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of 2016 to conduct on-site interviews with administrators, faculty, students, and staff who held an affiliation with the Advertising Program. This report documents the Team's conclusions and presents its recommendations for managing the growth of the Advertising major.

## ***Background Summary***

The Advertising Program at the University of San Francisco began in spring term of 2009. It offers an interdisciplinary major and minor housed in the Department of Communication Studies. According to the Self-Study, student interest in the program began slowly, with four students declaring Advertising as their major in 2009. However, enrollment quickly increased in the years since its inception, with approximately 160 declared majors at the current time in 2016.

The Advertising major at USF is the only bachelor's degree awarding program of its kind within a 50-mile radius and is well-situated to educate students and facilitate opportunities for industry employment for those who seek careers in the field. Some of the Advertising Program's best qualities include the caring administrators and faculty who are invested in its quality, and the bright, enthusiastic students who are eager to learn. However, the program's proximity to both world-renowned advertising agencies and other marketing organizations in the Bay Area and across the state of California represent its greatest strength and greatest opportunity, if USF elects to leverage this unique advantage. Nonetheless, realizing this opportunity will require compromise and collaboration to overcome past disagreements in program structure in order to better serve the student interests.

The team offers three overarching recommendations: 1) cooperative assessment of the program's mission and goals, 2) internal review of the current current curriculum for the purpose of generating tighter alignment with the goals of the program and 3) tighter advisory of the Advertising Program in the effort to provide systematic opportunities for internal accountability of the program's mission. The recommendations from this assessment are organized into sections below, and they emerged from the review of the present curriculum and interviews with faculty, staff, and students affiliated with the Advertising Program.

## *Assessment Review and Recommendations*

### 1. Clarify the mission.

- Make the mission more visible and accessible. Faculty and students alike within the Department of Communication Studies and across external departments expressed uncertainty about the mission of the Advertising Program. Its mission should center on preparing students to be men and women for others in a world where they will need to be thought leaders, critical thinkers, and persuasive communicators with strong professional skills. Students must also be able to provide a moral compass when ethical dilemmas arise and possess skills that meet industry standards so that they are competitive with graduates of other programs. Their education should not only prepare them for their first job in advertising, but their last job.

Students interviewed were committed to the major, but they were concerned about their preparation for future industry employment. An exploration of the web page and online materials suggest the need for a more comprehensive statement of mission with greater assurance that students will gain a strong skillset from the program.

### 2. Align the program curriculum to highlight skills applicable to the advertising profession.

- Eliminate the existing tracks and redefine the curriculum. The program's maturation and expanded enrollment numbers demand a different approach, given that the current tracks do not fully address the foundational skills needed, nor do they provide Advertising majors with access to specialized advanced-level courses that are reserved for majors in other disciplines.

The most prominent criticism of the the Advertising major is that it represents a sequence of courses cobbled together and loosely tied to the profession. The early champions of the major admit that the assembly of courses selected to create the major was born from the cooperation of interdisciplinary partners and the accessibility of courses outside the Communication Studies department. Because the department has lacked the resources to offer an extensive array of courses, the natural inclination has been to look for partners in other disciplines. However, the result is a patchwork of courses assembled based on availability rather than curriculum planning. For example, the inclusion of ART courses offers students a path that many are interested in following, but several issues resulted: 1) the demand for courses is greater than the supply, thus creating frustration among students who want to follow the program but can't get in, 2) the limitation of two courses fails to provide enough depth for students who want careers as designers in advertising,

and 3) the faculty in ART are frustrated that they are devoting valuable resources that they need for their own majors and minors (e.g., the hiring of part-timers to teach the classes to the advertising students and the use of studio space). Their frustration makes the partnership between ADVT and ART faculty problematic regarding the offering of two courses; however, the ART faculty are open to providing the minor to students who seek it.

Likewise, the reliance on computer science courses for non-majors has its own issues, the most visible one is that the students don't go deep enough into the discipline to have a competitive skillset. In both cases—ART and CS—students with genuine interests in these fields should do the full minor because the 8-credit track is not delivering what students need. Partnerships that the advertising program might build in the future should be developed thoughtfully and strategically to be sustainable.

Most students have ample room to do a full minor and fit these courses into the total 128 hours with room for additional electives. A minor in these areas or others (e.g., marketing, foreign language, anthropology) will serve students better than courses taken at random and will add a better credential to their degree. In place of the ART and CS tracks, we propose track names and track structures that better address student and faculty expectations with the Advertising Program's mission. The new tracks should be named to signal the demarcation of specializations in the advertising field and the skills required. Initial recommendations might be as follows: 1) Advertising Planning Track (focused on consumer understanding and strategic planning in advertising). This particular track could also represent the General Track in a two-tier track system; 2) Audience Analytics (or Research) Track (focused on media, research, and analytics-based planning in advertising); and 3) Creative Track (focused on copywriting, art direction, graphics & design skills), if resources permit. We anticipate that students will be able to do this by taking the ART minor in graphic design in combination with the ADVT class in copywriting. By doing the ART minor, students should be able to avoid the caps currently placed on the ART classes. However, some limits on the number of students in that track may be wise, given that the career opportunities in copywriting and design are limited and, thus, are highly competitive.

- Establish required advertising courses for the general major. At a minimum, most advertising programs require: 1) a Principles of Advertising course that provides a broad overview of the field, 2) a Strategic Thinking course that helps students understand the process of advertising strategy development, 3) courses in Creative Strategy/Copywriting, 4) Media Planning, 5) Research, and 6) a Capstone. Within the curriculum, topics such as audience analysis, target marketing, analytics, social media,

management, marketing, and ethics also should be covered, either in the context of the major course anchors or as independent courses. Furthermore, requiring an internship is an option that could easily work at USF, since programs located in major cities are often able to provide enough internship opportunities for class credit.

- Create a true capstone class with foundational courses as prerequisites. The Advertising Presentations class has served as a capstone; however, the program should develop a required senior capstone course that can pull together all the skills learned in earlier classes. The Advertising Presentations title does not identify the course as a capstone and should be changed. Other programs typically use Capstone in Advertising or Advertising Campaigns as a title.

Some programs use the National Student Advertising Competition (NSAC) case for their client in the capstone course, whereas others use local clients or non-profit organizations. Our understanding is that USF uses the NSAC as an opportunity to give students structured, real-world experience. Participation in NSAC offers exceptional opportunities for the students presenting at the district and national competition, but it also presents constraints depending upon the client and the nature of the campaign, as well as inconvenient deadlines and travel expense that some programs find cumbersome. USF's integration of an Advertising Capstone course would give its Advertising Program freedom to contribute its student talent to a local client in the fall and continue its participation in the NSAC case competition in spring. Local clients could include non-profit organizations, which also would count as service learning courses. Other local clients could include for-profit companies that lack the resources to pay a professional ad agency, which also would provide a service to the community.

A second option related to the latter opportunity is to administer the capstone course using local clients in both fall and spring and to develop an elective course that uses the NSAC case as a separate opportunity from the capstone. This suggests that only students who either volunteer for the NSAC competition or who are selected for team participation would be part of it. Under this scenario, the NSAC course would become an elective course rather than a mandatory requirement. A possible title is Integrated Communication Strategies—something that suggests it covers more than presentations. (Avoid the title Integrated Marketing Communications since the Marketing Department has a course by that title).

- Consider allowing students to receive elective credit for a second internship. Since internships have become so important to finding a job upon graduation, many programs

allow a second internship for class credit. Beyond that, students should do internships on their own without receiving class credit.

- Make Controversies in Advertising (now ADVT 341) a regular standing course since it tends to promote learning outcomes associated with professional ethics, social responsibility, and the ways in which service and character is applied in advertising.
- Rewrite the bulletin descriptions to clearly and accurately describe the courses. For example, the description of the the ADVT 344 Social Media class appears to describe a social marketing class instead of a social media class. The bulletin description of the ADVT 343 Advertising Planning and Placement course should provide a much clearer description of what is covered, and the course should add the word Media to the title (e.g., Advertising Media Planning and Placement) to avoid confusion between media planning and account planning. The goal is greater accuracy so that not only students know exactly what the courses cover but also potential employers, admissions counselors for graduate programs, and others who are evaluating transcripts.
- Renumber the courses to sequence them so that they build upon each other. The Principles course should be renumbered to stand as the first course in the sequence for second semester freshmen or sophomores. The writing class and the creative strategy/copywriting course could be 200 level courses. Media planning could be a 300-400 class and the capstone should be a 400 level class taken after the other courses have been completed.
- Advise students regarding minors and elective courses based on their interests in order to give them tangible course selections that offer grounding in the major. A survey of recommended courses offered across disciplines within the USF community would address this concern. The presence of a list that can offer further options for students not only assists faculty and staff advisors to Advertising majors, but it further establishes the mission of the major in the minds of interdisciplinary partners and stakeholders. For example, since advertising is a discipline that is based on the understanding how people think, behave, and process decisions in a mediated landscape, relevant topics are addressed by courses in persuasion, anthropology, pop culture, social psychology, and marketing.
- Revise the minor so that it has greater flexibility. Requiring ADVT 341 (Principles), ADVT 340 (Creative Strategy and Copy) and ADVT 343 (Media Planning) plus two additional ADVT courses as electives would give students the basics and allow them some choices in areas to explore.

3. Strengthen the Advertising curriculum by integrating other courses into the major that support the goals of the discipline.

- Develop new partnerships in the future. The reliance on ART and CS courses offered students interdisciplinary opportunities in the past, but the skillset derived is not deep enough unless students do the full minor. Partnerships that the Advertising Program might build in the future should be developed thoughtfully and strategically to be sustainable.
- Incorporate marketing content/courses into the ADVT major. Advertising is a component of marketing promotions, and, as a discipline, should be understood in the context of marketing. Advertising majors should have this grounding, even if their career interest is in copywriting or design. The Introduction to Marketing and Consumer Behavior courses are currently recommended as electives that majors have an option to take. However, in order to take marketing courses, Advertising majors should meet specific prerequisites (BUS204, MATH106, etc.) required by the School of Management. Enforcement of these prerequisites has been inconsistent in the past, and students have found ways to circumvent the requirements either by declaring Marketing as a minor, which is a loophole to bypassing core prerequisites, or by convincing marketing instructors to waive the prerequisite requirements. Lacking the prerequisites puts students at a disadvantage; thus, the marketing department intends to enforce the prerequisites going forward.
- Help students understand strategic marketing communications through the eyes of the audience, which is critical to the advertising field. This bolsters the justification for adding analytics to the curriculum. The Advertising and Social Media course (ADVT 344) appears to address this recommendation most robustly to date, so the course could be the natural point of entry for bolstering students' audience analytics skillset. This is apparently the most popular ADVT elective and serves the program well.
- Eliminate or revise RHET 216 Writing for Advertising so that it is more applicable to skills appropriate for industry professionals. Interviews with students found that students believe the course duplicates the copywriting course. Replacing the course with a different type of writing course could serve the major well. Some programs offer a course in writing across the mass media (print and broadcast news, advertising, and public relations); however, an alternate idea is to develop a course that addresses the types of business writing that students will need to know to do including executive summaries, professional email messages, press releases, etc. The course should be developed for both advertising and PR students.

- Continue to keep COMS and ADVT as separate majors. Counting a limited number of ADVT courses in the COMS major and some COMS courses in the ADVT major is beneficial, and offering separate majors provides better options to students. Eventually, the college may want to offer a Public Relations major, and at that point it may be necessary to re-explore the efficiencies of putting Advertising and Public Relations in its own department.

#### 4. Create an Advisory Board for the Advertising Program.

- Develop the Advisory Board to function as an independent committee charged with championing the interests of the program insofar as the challenge to maintain academic standards while also recognizing the interests of the advertising profession in readying majors to enter the field. The advantages of such a board are many, not least of which is that it places the shared ownership of the program into the hands of a body of stakeholders who represent constituencies with a vested interest in the program's success. The structure of the Advisory Board is not pre-set, so efforts to make it real should allow for flexibility in the vision of what is or is not appropriate. For example, the vision for an Advisory Board at one institution may consist only of faculty and staff representatives who work within the institution full- or part-time. For a different institution, the Advisory Board is a collaboration between professional industry board members who represent alumni and former business partners through course client work or internships. It is also acceptable to negotiate a template between these extremes, where faculty, staff, students, and professionals are invited to the group.

The Review Team strongly recommends that the the new director of the Advertising Program, at least one faculty member from Communication Studies, a faculty member from any outside discipline represented in the major (e.g., business), one or two alumni who have successful careers in the Bay Area, and a student in the Advertising major be represented in the initial group. Regardless of how the selection is made, the process for specifying selection criteria and the means for invitation should be transparent to the faculty and administration that supports the effort.

It is also important to understand that the role of the Advisory Board is advisory, meaning it does not dictate or mandate the will of the department, College, or University in advancing recommendations that may benefit the program. Nonetheless, it is also crucial that the group's role is treated with respect, that its opinions are weighed seriously, and that feedback and exchange with the group occurs regularly and systematically if the relationship is to work. The Board should assist the Program Director in Advertising to

make the best choices for the curriculum, the hiring of full- and part-time faculty, etc., which would allay persistent concerns about such decisions being unilaterally at the discretion of any one individual.

In addition to meeting with the advisory board, the program director and all full- and part-time advertising faculty should meet once per semester to discuss curriculum issues.

5. Invest in the Advertising Program's social capital within the USF community.

- Put the past aside and agree to move forward. There is a complex history that provides a context for the understanding the current situation. However, holding onto the past at a time of change will make the role of the incoming program director more difficult. Specifying the Advertising Program's mission as a discipline, re-framing the major tracks, and establishing the Advisory Board to provide input for program improvement will initiate the process of letting go of distractions from the past. The more that faculty in the Department and across the discipline can be open to change, move on, and not be drawn to the past, the better.
- Work toward changing the views held by faculty who see the Advertising major in conflict with the Jesuit mission of the university. It will be beneficial to counter this view among members of the COMS department as well as faculty in other disciplines on campus who regard the use of persuasive strategies in the selling of goods and services at odds with social justice and Ignatian pedagogy. Strengthening the curriculum may go a long way to improve the standing of the Advertising Program, especially if there is a service learning component and includes some coursework with non-profit clients. The School of Management appears to be above this criticism, and the Advertising Program should be afforded the same level of credibility and respect.
- Tackle other issues that have tarnished the reputation of the major. One is the heavy reliance on part-time faculty and the resulting turnover. Several part-timers have taught for an extended period of time and are highly regarded, but others only teach in the short run. The inevitable turnover leads to inconsistency without careful monitoring and creates concern over the quality of instruction. One goal is to hire another full-time advertising faculty member to add stability to the program. Another is to monitor more closely the work of the part-time faculty to make sure that what they teach is consistent with the goals of the course and does not "drift" too far away. A final goal is to follow university guidelines for part-time hires and make certain that faculty know that applicants have been screened. Despite careful screening, some hires will inevitably be better than others,

but if faculty members know that hiring procedures and guidelines were followed, they may be less critical.

- Reinstating the advertising classes for credit in the COMS major. Counting a limited number of public relations courses as upper division professional/applied courses while not counting the advertising courses sends a message that the department doesn't value advertising. Furthermore, it sets up an adversarial relationship with the advertising faculty. This is out of step with other institutions since many programs combine advertising and public relations under the umbrella of strategic communication. Removing the barrier between ADVT and COMS would benefit both the students and the department
- Increase community building opportunities that develop better relationships between the advertising students and faculty. It appears that there is a strong camaraderie among the COMS students and faculty, which appears missing between the ADVT students and the faculty, alumni, and other stakeholder groups that support the mission of the major. Students interviewed expressed a hunger for guidance and advice. The vacuum in community perpetuates confusion and discontent. Since the students who have committed to the major are among its greatest diplomats, a keener effort to generate social capital and community is expected to be a great advantage to the well-being of the program in the long term.
- Take advantage of the interest that other disciplines have for courses in the Advertising Program. The School of Management recognizes that advertising courses present valuable opportunities for their own majors. The strong relationship between marketing and advertising as a component of the marketing promotions mix makes the courses across the disciplines highly attractive. The advertising minor can support the marketing major, and cooperative agreements between colleges facilitate access to business courses for students majoring in advertising.

#### 6. Other Opportunities to protect the program and grow its mission

- During the Transition...

Help the new program director as she takes on the challenge of making the Advertising Program innovative. She will move into a critically important administrative role at the same time that she adjusts to a new city and a new university, establishes a research agenda, and devotes time to the classes she teaches. She will not only need to be adept at time management but will also need mentors to help her navigate through the issues she

tackles. With Greg Pabst's retirement and Marilyn Delaure's sabbatical, the more that other administrators and faculty can help her through the process, the better her chances are of succeeding. It's important to move forward from the past issues, and she will need help.

- Be proactive and goal-oriented

In the Short Term, make the Advertising Program the very best it can be while remaining housed in the department of communication studies. Build the reputation of the program so that the communication studies faculty are proud to include the Advertising Program within the department.

In the Long Term, plan to create a new Department of Advertising and Public Relations—or Strategic Communication—that can house these two programs. By sharing some common courses, it may be possible to create a major in public relations as well. Advertising and Public Relations are enormous growth areas in universities across the country and could bring in considerable revenue, not only due to increased revenue from tuition but from the fundraising potential that alumni from these programs represent. Ignoring that possibility is a lost opportunity.

- Nurture relationship with Advertising Program alumni. The transition in key faculty who have spearheaded the program up to now requires a strategy that lends credibility to the talent that has already emerged from USF's Advertising Program. Alumni can serve as a valuable conduit for student mentoring, guest lecturers, mining local capstone course opportunities, and as mentioned in the previous point, contributing revenue to the program and institution.

### ***Conclusion***

The Review Team found that the dedication and enthusiasm for the advertising program was overwhelming positive among students and faculty alike. Despite a rocky start, we heard more reasons why the program is worth a stronger investment than reasons against it. Even in light of frustrations expressed about strained resources, faculty vetting, and course availability, no one said the program should be eliminated. This is good news because it lays a path defined more by opportunity than obstacle. The true investment into the mission, structure, and then resource allocation where needed will make the Advertising Program at USF truly great. We believe this is not only within USF's reach, but also that the competencies of those talented individuals invested in the Advertising Program will bring them to light.