



University of Nevada, Reno

Office of
Executive Vice President & Provost

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 30, 2016

TO: Gwen Hullman, Chair, Communication Studies
Debra Modellmog, Dean, College of Liberal Arts

FROM: Kevin R. Carman, Executive Vice President & Provost
Joseph I. Cline, Vice Provost, Undergraduate Education

SUBJECT: Communication Studies Program Review



Joseph I. Cline

We write to set forth the conclusions and our recommendations regarding the Communication Studies external program review in 2016.

The reviewers made many favorable comments regarding the department and its program strengths, including excited and engaged students, passionate and committed faculty, and a rigorous and student-focused curriculum. They were particularly impressed with the chair's leadership in creating a focused mission for the department and uniting faculty behind that mission. We commend her for this work and for organizing and leading the program review effort in the last academic year. In addition to being a program with growing enrollments in both its major and minor, it is recognized that the department provides a critical service to the university in terms of the communications courses required by other departments. Likewise, the department faculty are engaged in scholarship and service in the discipline. We agree that the department is poised for continued growth and success in the years ahead.

After reviewing the external reviewers' report and the department chair's and dean's responses, a closing meeting was held on May 10, 2016, to discuss the outcomes of the review and come to an understanding on the directions that the department should take in the coming months. After identifying the strengths noted by the reviewers, there was a discussion of the various opportunities for improvement that the department, with the support and guidance of the college, can take in the future to begin to address them.

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We offer the following recommendations for action in the coming months:

- Service Teaching; Overreliance on LOAs. The large curricular service load on the department is a major challenge that impacts the department and its faculty in many ways. While using LOAs is not uncommon and can be beneficial to the department and students, it is recognized that the department's reliance is too great and presents problems in terms of student satisfaction. The department chair also acknowledged the difficulties in being able to locate qualified faculty in the community. Recent steps that will begin to address this are the filling of a new lecturer position, as well as the addition of two new GTAs beginning Fall 2016. The hiring of a professor/chair in AY 2016-17 will also help. However, it is likely these steps will not fully address the challenge, particularly if program and general university enrollments continue to grow. Several ideas have surfaced in this process that should be explored by the department in the coming year. Two ideas are putting the minor on hiatus and working with departments that require students to take communications courses to arrive at agreements for the sharing of GTAs to provide course coverage. The chair should also work with the dean to determine if another lecturer position for the department should be requested as a priority for the college. If this has not already been done, we would also encourage the department and its faculty to explore additional opportunities to become engaged and partner with the CCID program. As mentioned in the closing meeting, there might be an opportunity for some resources that could be aligned between the CCID program and the department.
- Freshmen Retention. Although it was not discussed at the closing meeting, freshman retention of incoming Communication Studies majors averaged 75.7% over the last four years, below the University-wide average of 81%. The department should make use of new EAB-SSC tools to identify and provide special support to at-risk undergraduates.
- Faculty Teaching Load. While we understand that the current teaching load is not consistent with an R1 institution, the department should work with the new dean to consider carefully how a change would impact the department's ability to meet its teaching demands before implementing any change.
- Hiatus for the Minor; Reboot of MA Program; Other. We agree that permanently eliminating the minor may have negative or unforeseen consequences for the department. The initial step of temporarily deactivating the minor would seem to be a good one, and this should be explored early in the fall semester, so that if the faculty decide to go ahead with this, it can work through the various approval levels before the end of the academic year. We understand that plans are going forward to re-launch the MA program. It is hoped that this temporary deactivation could create some breathing room for faculty to engage in this as well as explore the idea of a minor in debate.
- Other Curriculum/Program Development. It is apparent that the department is actively exploring entrepreneurial ideas to not only provide it with resources but to gain some efficiencies in its teaching obligations. For instance, the department currently offers classes on evenings and weekends to attract professionals from the area. Additionally, the chair stated that they are one course away from having a fully online minor. Finally, the department is interested in putting together a 40 hour class for mediators. We encourage the department to continue to explore these ideas as it can.

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- Facilities. We look forward to the many positive outcomes that will result from consolidating the department in Lincoln Hall.
- Promotion/Tenure; Mentoring. The department chair stated the intent to begin to formalize a mentoring program for junior faculty. This topic should be explored with candidates in the chair search commencing in Fall 2016. The department should keep in mind that it is the expectation at the university that tenured faculty in all departments continue to build a portfolio of scholarly work following achievement of tenure so as to move successfully through the promotional ranks to full professor.
- Participation in NevadaFIT. We ask the department to consider if its entering freshmen students could become involved in the NevadaFIT experience. While we realize a camp exclusively for the department is not feasible, a partnership with the Reynolds School of Journalism camp could be explored.

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