Dear Vice President Pershing:

Enclosed is the Graduate Council's review of the Department of Communication. Included in this review packet are the report prepared by the Graduate Council, the Academic Profile, and the Memorandum of Understanding resulting from the review wrap-up meeting.

Please forward this review to the Academic Senate to be placed on the information calendar for the next meeting of the Senate.

Sincerely,

David S. Chapman
Associate Vice President for Graduate Studies
Dean, The Graduate School

Encl.

XC: Ann L. Darling, Chair, Department of Communication
    Robert D. Newman, Dean, College of Fine Arts
The Graduate School – University of Utah

GRADUATE COUNCIL REPORT TO THE SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND THE ACADEMIC SENATE

September 29, 2008

The Graduate Council has completed its review of the Department of Communication.

The External Review Committee consisted of:

   Janis Anderson  
   Dean, School of Communication  
   Emerson College

   Gerald Baldasty  
   Chair, Department of Communication  
   University of Washington

   Linda Putnam  
   Professor, Department of Communication  
   University of California-Santa Barbara

The Internal Review Committee of the University of Utah included:

   Kevin Hanson  
   Chair, Division of Film Studies

   Sandra Shotwell  
   Professor, Department of Theatre

   Dan Dustin  
   Chair, Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism

This report by the Graduate Council’s ad hoc committee is based on the Department of Communication Self Study, the report of the Internal Review Committee, the External Review Committee, and the joint response of the Chair of the Department of Communication and the Dean of the College of Humanities.
DEPARTMENT PROFILE

Program Overview

The Department of Communication addresses a broad scope of topics in its teaching and research that fall under the umbrella of communication. The department offers 13 sequences in two undergraduate degree programs: Mass Communication and Speech Communication. At the graduate level, the department offers a Masters and a Ph.D. degree. The department has addressed the recommendations it received when the Graduate School last reviewed it in 2001: 1) faculty salaries are more competitive; 2) an additional technology position has been added to support the demands of the department; 3) undergraduate advising has been addressed through the use of peer advisors; 4) graduate student funding has improved; 5) more facility space has been utilized through reorganization of existing space. The department has consistently achieved national and international recognition for the achievements of its faculty.

Faculty

The department consisted of 34 regular faculty and two lecturers in the 2007-2008 academic year. Of the 34 regular faculty members, 22 are tenured, 10 are professors, 13 are associate professors, and 11 are assistant professors. Eight of the associate professors have been in rank for more than 10 years. There are 17 males and 17 females on the faculty and among them are one African-American, one Korean, one Hispanic, and one Arab-American.

Department faculty produced over 20 books, 144 journal articles, 86 book chapters, and 16 creative projects between 2002 and 2007. A number of faculty members have also received book and article awards and many have national or international reputations. Several faculty members have received large grants between $300,000 and $1,100,000. Faculty members have also received numerous teaching awards and have high averages on student evaluations.

The department has a mentoring program for assistant professors that includes assigned mentors, monthly meetings with the department chair during the first semester, and feedback from a peer teaching committee.

Department faculty members are heavily engaged in service in the department, college, university, community, and professional service. However, several faculty members express concern about excessive service loads, disproportionate service assignments across ranks, and the need to promote service values for untenured faculty. Faculty members report a high level of collegiality within the department.

Students

The department numbers 312 undergraduate pre-majors, 597 undergraduate majors, 32 masters students, and 59 doctoral students. Mass Communication, particularly Public Relations, attracts a disproportionate number of students. At the same time, a majority of graduate students are in Speech Communication, so there are potential misalignments between instructional needs, graduate student interests, and faculty hiring.
Students at all levels report high satisfaction with the department’s programs and praise the programs for their rigor, breadth and combination of areas, and faculty accessibility. Financial support, however, is a concern. Among the graduate students, 45 receive financial support in the form of assistantships. Stipend amounts are significantly below those of peer communication departments. Graduate students would like to receive more supervision of their teaching, particularly in the first semester. Undergraduate students express concern about getting into classes that they report are always full and also the need for more classes in late afternoons or evenings.

**Curriculum**

The two undergraduate degree programs, Mass Communication and Speech Communication, include several sequences. Mass Communication includes four sequences: electronic journalism, news-editorial, public relations, and communication technology. The Speech Communication curriculum is a liberal arts degree that has a strong emphasis on preparing students for graduate education. This area currently has nine sequences, which leads to a number of problems. Substitution of courses is often required when specified courses are not offered due to faculty leaves or scheduling conflicts. These frequent substitutions make the sequences less defined as coherent areas of study. The department is engaged in a curriculum revision that is aimed at developing a more condensed sequence alignment.

The doctoral program reflects the breadth of the department and is responsive to students’ individual interests. The national reputations of faculty members attract strong students in areas such as organizational communication, cultural studies, mass communication, and instructional communication. The doctoral program lacks a strong niche focus, which the external reviewers suggest is becoming more common for outstanding doctoral programs.

**Program Effectiveness and Outcome Assessment**

The department emphasizes clear course objectives across the curriculum and has identified student competencies in its accredited journalism program. It is also working to identify such competencies in Speech Communication. Alumni surveys are used to assess the competencies of graduates from the department’s programs. These surveys consistently praise the department’s graduates for their critical thinking skills, oral and written communication, teamwork and problem solving, constructing and defending arguments, and analyzing and synthesizing information.

**Facilities and Resources**

The department shares the Languages and Communication (LNCO) building with several other departments and with the dean’s office. It controls one telecommunications lab and has scheduling priority over four computer labs. It also has an electronic imaging lab. Technological (i.e. technology convergence) and instructional (i.e. production, editing, etc.) trends suggest that substantial upgrades and additional space will be needed.

Although substantial progress has been made in the area of faculty salaries, some salaries remain below the level of their peers. The department relies heavily on soft funding for many of its operational and instructional needs. Pay rates for adjuncts and technology support staff are low.
compared to departments at peer universities. The department has recently hired faculty members that work in the area of digital media. These faculty members require substantial hardware, software, and programming support.

The department has achieved noteworthy success in its development activities. Examples of its successes in this area include named rooms, equipment gifts, and scholarships. Only a few faculty members are engaged in this effort, which raises concerns about its sustainability.

COMMENDATIONS

1. The department has done an excellent job of responding to areas of need identified in the 2001 Graduate Council Review which include more competitive faculty salaries, improved graduate student funding, the addition of a technology support position, enhanced undergraduate advising, a commitment to diversity through hiring, and better space utilization. The Department has also made significant progress in increasing the diversity of its faculty and in infusing new media expertise in its programs and faculty.

2. The department has been a pioneer in integrating Mass Communication and Speech Communication. It has also engaged in interdisciplinary outreach in areas such as environmental studies, applied ethics, conflict resolution, and visual, scientific, and technical literacy.

3. The department has established a culture of excellence and collegiality that is characterized by a climate of respect and support.

4. The department faculty continues to enjoy a national reputation as evidenced by their visibility in professional organizations, recognition for research contributions, and the securing of significant grants.

5. The department exhibits an impressive commitment to teaching and service. For both undergraduates and graduates, it serves a large number of students and, judged by available measures, provides a rigorous and relevant experience to its students. Faculty members also demonstrate a high commitment to serving a variety of constituencies both on and off campus.

6. The department has achieved impressive success in fundraising.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The department should invest time in determining the future direction of the department with the aim of finding the right balance between its focus and scope. Particular attention should be given to considering opportunities for integration, consolidation, and collaboration. Particularly, the potential for integration and synthesis across the two undergraduate degrees should be explored. As part of this discussion, the department should also address whether it should develop a more focused niche approach in its strategy.
2. Practices and guidelines should be developed that facilitate the promotion of associate professors within 5 to 7 years after tenure. The department should review the RPT document to clarify expectations for promotion to professor. The increased specificity of expectations should be achieved while preserving flexibility and multiple paths to advancement to professor. The department should also consider other steps it can take to enhance the likelihood of associate professors advancing to professors such as appropriate professional development activities.

3. A more strategic approach to service should be considered by the department. Redistribution of service assignments may be necessary, but this discussion should consider how the department might distribute workloads to maximize its collective success.

4. Graduate students report difficulties in their first year with teaching and matching up with faculty of similar interests. The department should identify steps that will assist graduate students in their first year. These steps should include more supervision, and perhaps a course reduction, in their first semester. The department should also develop mechanisms to mentor graduate students in their first year.

5. The department should work to improve stipends for graduate students.

6. The department should institutionalize its development efforts. More faculty members should get involved in the on-going outreach and relationship building involved in development.

7. An increasing emphasis on communication technology in research and teaching require strengthening the infrastructure that supports the department’s media expertise. This focus should include consideration of labs, teaching classrooms, hardware, software, programming support, and investment in technology staff.

**ACTIONS TAKEN SINCE INITIATION OF THE REVIEW**

Based on the reports of the Internal and External review committees, the department scheduled a two-day retreat to “engage in a wide ranging discussion of who we are as a department and how we can better take advantage of our individual and collective strengths.”

Submitted by the Ad Hoc Review Committee of the Graduate Council

William Hesterly (Chair), Business
Patrick Tresco, Engineering
Jingyi Zhu, Mathematics

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Memorandum of Understanding  
Department of Communication  

This memorandum of understanding is a summary of decisions reached at a wrap-up meeting on 7 April 2009, concluding the Graduate Council Review of the Department of Communication. David W. Pershing, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs; Robert D. Newman, Dean of the College of Humanities; Ann L. Darling, Chair of the Department of Communication; David S. Chapman, Dean of the Graduate School; and Frederick Rhodewalt, Associate Dean of the Graduate School were present.

The discussion centered on but was not limited to the recommendations contained in the Graduate Council review completed on 29 September 2008. At the wrap-up meeting, the working group agreed to endorse the following actions:

**Recommendation 1:** The department should invest time in determining the future direction of the department with the aim of finding the right balance between its focus and scope. Particular attention should be given to considering opportunities for integration, consolidation, and collaboration. Particularly, the potential for integration and synthesis across the two undergraduate degrees should be explored. As part of this discussion, the department should also address whether it should develop a more focused niche approach in its strategy.

The department is conducting long-range strategic planning in order to address the issues raised in Recommendation 1. They hired a facilitator to lead their Fall 2008 departmental retreat. The retreat resulted in an ongoing conversation which should culminate in a strategic plan that includes future directions for the department as well as redesigning the graduate and undergraduate curriculum. The department has undertaken a faculty workload study with the goal of developing a framework for equitable workload assignments. The department intends to have the strategic plan fully developed by the end of the 2009/2010 academic year.

**Recommendation 2:** Practices and guidelines should be developed that facilitate the promotion of associate professors within 5 to 7 years after tenure. The department should review the RPT document to clarify expectations for promotion to professor. The increased specificity of expectations should be achieved while preserving flexibility and multiple paths to advancement to professor. The department should also consider other steps it can take to enhance the likelihood of associate professors advancing to professors such as appropriate professional development activities.

The department has begun rigorously evaluating tenured faculty including tenured associate professors for the purpose of advancing faculty toward promotion. Workloads will be adjusted accordingly. The department will review and incorporate College of Humanities’ guidelines for promotion to associate and full professor.
Recommendation 3: A more strategic approach to service should be considered by the department. Redistribution of service assignments may be necessary, but this discussion should consider how the department might distribute workloads to maximize its collective success.

This recommendation is addressed as part of the planning activities described in response to Recommendation 1. The workload assessment study will produce workload distribution guidelines that will be implemented in the 2009/2010 academic year.

Recommendation 4: Graduate students report difficulties in their first year with teaching and matching up with faculty of similar interests. The department should identify steps that will assist graduate students in their first year. These steps should include more supervision, and perhaps a course reduction, in their first semester. The department should also develop mechanisms to mentor graduate students in their first year.

The department has implemented the following procedures for advising first year graduate students in order to address difficulties reported by students during the review:

1. Students are assigned a temporary advisor at the moment of entry into the program and are encouraged to get in touch with that person to discuss classes, areas of interests, and teaching assignments.
2. Students take a seminar on teaching offered by the department chair during their first semester.
3. Students are assigned to teach in courses with very direct supervision (i.e., a standardized syllabus, monthly meetings, classroom observations).
4. The Director of Graduate Studies runs two workshops each semester (four in the first year) specifically focused on topics such as finding and approaching your advisor, composing a committee, finding research support, and the like.

Recommendation 5: The department should work to improve stipends for graduate students.

Although stipends in the Department of Communication are the highest in the College of Humanities, the department will work with the Dean of Humanities to provide additional funding for student stipends.

Recommendation 6: The department should institutionalize its development efforts. More faculty members should get involved in the ongoing outreach and relationship building involved in development.

The department has assigned a faculty member to coordinate development efforts between the department and college.
Recommendation 7: An increasing emphasis on communication technology in research and teaching require strengthening the infrastructure that supports the department’s media expertise. This focus should include consideration of labs, teaching classrooms, hardware, software, programming support, and investment in technology staff.

The department is attempting to raise funds to update the digit laboratory. The Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs encourages the department to generate research overhead for return to the department to invest in infrastructure. The department is also encouraged to pursue funding from the Research Instrumentation Fund to support technology improvements.

This memorandum of understanding is to be followed by annual letters of progress from the Chair of the Department to the Dean of the Graduate School. Letters will be submitted each year until all of the actions in the preceding paragraphs have been completed.

David W. Pershing
Robert D. Newman
Ann L. Darling
David S. Chapman
Frederick Rhodewalt

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David S. Chapman
Associate VP for Graduate Studies
David W. Pershing
Robert D. Newman
Ann L. Darling
David S. Chapman
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June 4, 2009