

PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT

1. **Reporting Institution:** Eastern Illinois University
2. **Program Reviewed:** B.A. in Communication Studies
3. **Date:** February 7, 2018
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5. **Overview**

During the Department of Communication Studies' most recent strategic planning effort (2014-15), the department approved a new mission statement: "The Department of Communication Studies prepares our students to be effective and ethical communicators in their professional, relational, and cultural roles. Our students learn to critique and create messages in multiple contexts. We emphasize the intersections of theory and practice as the foundation for problem solving, creativity, critical thinking, and understanding the diversity of communication practices." The department's mission statement reflects and aligns with the university's mission with its emphasis on clear and effective communication skills, diversity and inclusion, reasoning and critical thinking skills, leadership skills and responsible citizenship. As student and alumni surveys make clear, the Department of Communication Studies is a student-centered academic unit.

The department's student learning objectives are: (1) students will acquire disciplinary knowledge for their content area; (2) students will develop critical thinking skills; (3) students will cultivate a sense of social and ethical responsibility; and (4) students will create and implement message strategies in diverse contexts with emphases on multimedia, writing and speaking. Implementation of these learning objectives occur in coursework that comprises the degree's four option areas: Interpersonal Communication, Corporate Communication, Mass Communication (concentrations: Broadcast News and Electronic Media Production), and an online degree completion program called Communication in Organizations (launched FA17).

The B.A. in Communication Studies degree prepares students to pursue a wide range of career opportunities within multiple sectors (e.g., government, profit, non-profit). Examples include: Broadcasting, Videography, Human Rights Officer, Counseling, Salesperson, Public Information Officer, Educator. In Illinois, the Mass Communication program is most similar to Illinois State University. The others programs (Interpersonal and Corporate) are comparable to Western Illinois University and Illinois State University (in terms of having options areas in interpersonal and/or organizational/corporate communication). The online degree program in relational and organizational communication is the only one of its type at a public university in Illinois. Comparing the department's total offerings (three degree programs) to public institutions

in the state, the department is unique in the range of sub-specializations it offers (e.g., health communication). The same can be said for the state's private institutions. In terms of the breadth of offerings, Communication Studies is most similar to DePaul University (DePaul possesses a College of Communication that does not include health communication among its seven degree programs).

Student and faculty success continues to be a hallmark of the department. Examples include students selected for state/national scholarships; students/alumni placing first at state/regional broadcasting conferences; forensics students winning top honors at regional and national tournaments; students securing admission to communication Ph.D. programs. Faculty have and published their research in a variety of peer-reviewed publications. Faculty have also engaged in a variety of creative activities, from documentary films to musical compositions. In addition, faculty secured university grants (e.g., Redden), and won major university (e.g., Academic and Contribution Awards, Faculty Laureate), state (e.g., Illinois Broadcasters Association Silver Dome Award) and national awards (e.g., Fulbright Award). Faculty have also demonstrated sustained commitment to departmental, university, professional and community service.

Section 6.1 summarizes significant programmatic changes since the last IBHE review (e.g., the development of two new degrees programs, online instruction) and 6.4 describes departmental plans for the future (e.g., the completion of the department's strategic plan).

6.1 Description and assessment of any major changes in the program (e.g., (a) changes in the overall discipline or field; (b) student demand, (c) societal need, (d) institutional context for offering the degree; and (e) and other elements appropriate to the discipline in question.

Since the last review, communication studies as a discipline continues to demonstrate its strengths—high student interest and demand, its inclusiveness and flexibility as a degree, and career opportunities for graduates. Numerous national surveys confirm that employers still value graduates who possess excellent communication skills. Based on a 2015 national survey, the National Association Colleges and Employers (NACE) reported that employers seek out specific skills and attributes on college graduates' resumes. The top five are communication skills/attributes: leadership, ability to work in a team, communication skills (written), problem-solving skills and communication skills (verbal).

Graduate job placement remains strong. According to the EIU Career Service *2016 Annual Report*, based on alumni surveys, the career outcome rates (secured employment six months after graduation) for communication studies is extremely high: Corporate Communication (100%), Public Relations (100%), Interpersonal Communication (100%) and Mass Communication (86%). Positive job placement trends at EIU mirrors success at the national level. As cited in the 2016 issue of *Spectra* (National Communication Association), a 2015 National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) report found that approximately 61 percent of college graduates (bachelor's degree) in communication studies secured full-time employment within six months of graduation. The average for all graduates (regardless of major) is 55.4%. To assist with helping

students gain post-graduate employment, the department (as part of its strategic plan) has transformed the internship course into an internship *program* and made internship opportunities more visible for students.

While job placement, student satisfaction, and costs have not changed significantly, the B.A. in Communication Studies degree program has witnessed a decline in enrollment. Enrollment decline can be attributed to several factors including overall decline in university enrollment from 11,178 (Fall 2011) to 7,030 (Fall 2017) and corresponding decline in enrollment in the College of Arts and Humanities. The department has implemented (and continues to press forward with) a number of measures to reverse the enrollment decline, including the creation of an online option in the B.A. in Communication degree (enrollment has doubled from FA17 to SP18), a new Health Communication major (the department can now offer the major as a completely online degree), the development of a proposed new degree program (in process) called Television and Video Production (projected launch date: FA18) as well as the creation of additional recruiting/marketing materials.

Despite this reduction, the department continues to be the college and a university leader in undergraduate student enrollment/majors (FA17: 262), student credit hour production (AY 2016-17: 9,535), and degrees conferred (FY17: 139). In addition, the department's freshman retention rate (FA15 to FA16, 71%) matched the university's average for this time period. The department's retention rate over a three-year period is 80%, higher than the university average (76%).

Significant programmatic and curricular changes have occurred since the program's last review. At the time of the last review (March 2010), Communication Studies offered *one* undergraduate degree program with five option areas: Interpersonal Communication, Corporate Communication, Public Relations, Mass Communication (two concentrations areas: Broadcast News and Electronic Media Production) and Rhetoric and Public Advocacy. The department also offered a communication studies minor and five interdisciplinary minors (Advertising, Broadcast Meteorology, Film Studies, Health Communication, and Public Relations). Today, the department offers *three* undergraduate degree programs and *seven* minors.

The Public Relations option area was eliminated and replaced with a new Public Relations major. This programmatic change was part of a larger university effort to reduce curricula overlap between the Departments of Communication Studies and Journalism who both offered PR as an option/concentration. Communication Studies launched the new PR major in Fall 2016. The new major is the premier PR program in the state, offering more public relations courses than its competitors. Enrollment doubled during the program's first year (FA17: 65 students). In addition, the new online undergraduate degree completion will help students enhance their marketability in today's professional environment through the integration of theory and practice and the development of relational and organizational communication skills.

Another programmatic change was the elimination of the Communication, Popular Culture, Society option area (previously titled Rhetoric and Public Advocacy) due to low

student enrollment in the option area. The option area was revised into a new minor, Communication and Cultural Diversity (launched Fall 2016). In addition, the department recently (FA/SP17) revised its Communication Studies, Health Communication and Public Relations minors.

Some of the curriculum changes described above are an integral part of the department's strategic plan. The final report (including a self-study and 15 recommendations/goals) was completed and approved in Fall 2015. The self-study examined four areas: Who are our students?, program quality, program delivery, and departmental governance/climate.

As part of the department's strategic planning efforts, Communication Studies and Health Promotion developed EIU's first undergraduate interdisciplinary major: Health Communication. Approved by IBHE in March 2017, the new major will tap into the growing national need to equip health professionals with effective communication skills.

In other developments, the department has significantly increased its online presence. In 2011, Communication Studies offered only a handful of online classes; the department currently has 42 approved online courses (undergraduate/graduate). And starting in 2012, Communication Studies started to shift more and more of its summer offerings to online delivery. In Summer 2011, three of the nine courses were designated online. Six years later, ten of the 12 courses were offered online.

Communication Studies also piloted the university's first dual credit course—CMN 1310: Introduction to Speech Communication—in Spring 2017. Dr. Richard Jones coordinated and supervised the dual credit course which included 26 students from two area high schools. There is significant demand for future enrollment. For AY 2017-18, for example, 10 high schools will offer EIU's dual credit speech course to approximately 198 students. Communication Studies is the university leader in dual credit.

6.2 Description of major findings and recommendations, including evidence of learning outcomes and identification of opportunities for program involvement;

The Department of Communication Studies performs a comprehensive annual assessment program that involves collecting quantitative data on disciplinary knowledge of all option areas, and measuring student learning through use of rubrics. Data is also collected through an annual survey of student perceptions of social responsibility, professional ethics, multicultural sensitivity, and communication flexibility. Regarding disciplinary knowledge, the department continues to work on developing reliable pre-test/post-test instruments. In our last report to the Committee for Assessment of Student Learning, we were able to report that in the Public Relations option (which has since become a major), the students scored an average of 79% on the posttest. The students in the Interpersonal Communication option scored 61% on average, Corporate Communication students scored 36%, and no data was reported for the Broadcast News and Electronic Media Production option. These data have motivated faculty in each option area to adjust the tests to accurately reflect current intellectual trends in their respective fields, and to reassess which courses administer the post-test. Adjustments have also been made to ensure cooperation with assessment by placing full-time faculty in introductory and capstone courses.

Evaluation rubrics suggest that Communication Studies students are strong in all areas. The critical thinking rubric showed that 97% of students were at least minimally competent, for speaking and writing 100% rated at least minimally competent, for video production, audio production, and web design 100% rated at least minimally competent. The annual survey (AY 2016-17) revealed a mean score (out of five) of 3.48 on social responsibility, 2.58 on multicultural sensitivity, 4.05 on ethics, and 3.55 on communication flexibility. There were no significant differences across gender, class level, time spent at EIU, or GPA.

During the data collection phase of the department's strategic planning effort, the Strategic Planning Task Force surveyed 330 current majors and 369 alumni. Students reported that their experiences with the department typically met or exceeded their expectations: education quality (92%), accessibility of our faculty (88%), quality of faculty (87%), technology (74%), curriculum helps students prepare for their chosen careers (74%). In the same survey, students responded positively to questions about coursework and career preparation: speak effectively (96%), think critically (95%), influence others (94%), write effectively (92%), management relationships with a diverse group of people (90%), engage in leadership (89%) are some examples of the link between coursework and preparing students for life after graduation. Students were also asked about satisfaction with elements of the department. As noted in the self-study, "the students report they value of the quality of the teaching and the positive relationships faculty members have with their students."

Alumni were also very positive about their relationships with the department including quality of education (95%), quality of faculty (93%) and access to faculty (93%). In regards to relevance of degree to current profession, 95% of alumni found that their current jobs "are highly relatable to their communication degrees or that they utilized various skills obtained during their time in our department in their jobs." Interestingly, a high percentage (88%) of alumni agreed that their communication coursework prepared them for the workforce, an even higher percentage (94%) believed the CMN coursework proved to be applicable outside of work.

6.3 Description of action taken since the last review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular changes; and

See curriculum changes in section 6.2.

6.4 Description of action taken as a result of this review, including instructional resources and practices, and curriculum changes.

As a result of this review, the department will continue to implement the goals and recommendations established by the 2015 self-study report. To date, the department has completed 8 out of 15 strategic goals. Of the seven remaining goals, two goals have been delayed and one goal has been discarded. For the latter, the department's Executive Committee believed a formal and structured mentoring process is unnecessary and advocated for a more organic approach. The four remaining goals yet to be completed are: creating more recruiting materials including a departmental brochure, re-evaluating assessment practices, seeking a long-term solution to raise funds to replace instructional technology, and enhancing efforts to increase alumni involvement in the department.

6. 8Decision:

Program in Good Standing

Program flagged for Priority Review

Program Enrollment Suspended

Explanation

The Communication department and its faculty are to be applauded for their ongoing strategic planning and their commitment to aligning their curriculum with the plan's goals, as well as mission of the College and University. Additionally, the department's outreach—notably dual credit—underscore the faculty efforts to advance the institution. With respect to the program, the BA meets all enrollment and graduation expectations and is in "good standing" relative to IBHE rules. In sum, the program exceeds expectations.

Jay D. Gatrell, Ph.D.

Provost & VPAA

2/7/18