

1. INTRODUCTION

Department history

Mass Communications has been in a prolonged state of transition since UNCP's Department of Communicative Arts was dissolved in 1998. Until that year, students interested in mass communication majored in "communicative arts," with tracks in broadcasting, journalism, and/or public relations. That department also housed English and theater. Upon dissolution, Mass Communications became a stand-alone department that administered the broadcasting, journalism, and public relations tracks through a bachelor of science in mass communications. The student newspaper (*The Pine Needle*), the yearbook (*The Indianhead*), and the university TV station (WNCP) went with it. The broadcasting track itself had originally coalesced around the TV station (formerly WPSU), which played a role in Institutional Advancement as well as Academic Affairs. By the summer of 1998, sole responsibility for WNCP was delegated to Mass Communications (and thus, Academic Affairs).

The University's academic bureaucracy was reorganized into a system of colleges with deans in 1999, and Mass Communications was assigned to the new "School of Business and Mass Communications" at that time. This relationship with Business lasted about one-and-a-half years; personnel turnover and a lack of traditional faculty credentials in Mass Communications made the department a bad fit with accreditation plans of Business. In the next shuffle, Mass Communications was moved to the College of Arts & Sciences (where the remainder of Communicative Arts had become the new Department of English, Theater, and Foreign Languages).

With the departures of chairpersons or instructors each year since 1998, the programs known collectively as Mass Communications had been continuously short at least one faculty member, but, more importantly, academic growth was retarded. As a result, there were some inconsistencies and gaps in the curricula in the three tracks at the same time that there were redundancies; there was a lack of theoretical justification for some courses, and a lack of master syllabi to establish what knowledge and experiences were considered essential, imperative, and intrinsically valuable for the baccalaureate.

In Fall of 2003, all funded positions were finally occupied: two faculty plus two staff in Broadcasting, one faculty in Journalism, and two faculty in Public Relations. Some of the faculty have the experience and credentials to teach in multiple areas. The Department now has three professors with earned doctorates and two non-tenure track instructors, and it relies on two to three adjuncts¹ each year.

Department description

Mass Communications at UNCP is an academic department that fosters the study of mass communication in theory and practice while preparing professionals in broadcasting, journalism, and public relations and improving the lives of people through high-quality, integrated programs in teaching, research, and outreach.

The Department emphasizes a strong liberal arts education plus rigorous professional preparation for those planning careers in the mass media and media-related fields. The Department also offers courses analyzing the role of the mass media in

¹ Two of the adjuncts are longtime university employees: instructor Sara Oswald, M.A., who teaches half of her fulltime course load in English, and television engineer George Johnson, M.Ed.

society. Students and faculty are encouraged toward creative expression in a variety of media.

The student newspaper, *The Pine Needle*, is a learning laboratory of the Department and advised by a Mass Communications faculty member. The publication plays an integral role in preparing mass communication students to meet the challenges of a career in newspaper journalism. Majors and non-majors alike can earn academic credit for writing, editing, designing, and publishing the newspaper, which is published at least 14 times a year with eight pages or more in each issue.

The student yearbook, *The Indianhead*, is a learning laboratory of the Department and advised by a Mass Communications adjunct. The publication provides writing, editing, and photography experience for students interested in book-length publication opportunities.

WNCP-TV is a learning laboratory for students and faculty in the Department of Mass Communications. Its operation provides hands-on experiences by which students can acquire and hone technical skills and put theory into practice. Local origination programming is produced by UNCP students or faculty in class or as part of departmentally approved extracurricular productions. WNCP-TV represents the university to external publics insofar as it provides a program service to regional audiences via our cable channel and other distribution. The public relationship also includes limited production services and/or program slots that may be offered to select governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, or individuals—at the discretion of the Department.

2. PROCESS

In 2002-03 and 2003-04, the department chair(s) wrote fundamental portions of this document, such as the mission/vision statement, history, and assumptions. Those were circulated to faculty and staff for fact-checking, revisions, and additions, in advance of department meetings in which specific content and language were further reworked, ideas discussed, points clarified, etc. In 2002, four of the faculty had attended a session on learning outcomes and outcome assessment. In 2003-04, the department chair further revised the language, formatted the content according to the template provided, and circulated it among faculty and staff for final revisions, in advance of a final meeting at which the fulltime faculty voted to accept the document in the present form.

3. ASSUMPTIONS

Academic and professional values

The Department is committed to cultivating both academic credentials and practical, hands-on experiences in the communication fields. Therefore the Department will offer students an appropriate balance of theory and practice in coursework and extracurricular activities and will seek departmental accreditation from relevant academic organizations as an expression of these values. Also in this light, the Department emphasizes for its faculty professional experiences, technical preparation, or terminal degrees in relevant fields.

Enrollment

Institutional data from recent years suggests that enrollment in the Department will continue to grow along with the university's overall enrollment growth and will, in fact, outpace that overall growth due to attractive economic and technological developments in mass media and due to the Department's own enhanced recruiting efforts, personnel stabilization, and curricular/extracurricular improvements. Undergraduate enrollments nationwide in mass communication increased in Autumn 2002—part of a pattern of steady annual growth—according to the James M. Cox, Jr., Center for International Mass Communication Training and Research.

Currency

The Department, in coursework and in laboratories, will continue to adapt/respond to trends/innovations in the production, distribution, and reception of promotional, journalistic, and artistic content—staying current with new media technologies, methods, and genres while creating new student media outlets/organizations as able.

The Department will continue to expose students to the latest thinking and trends in the profession through visits by professionals and scholars in the field.

Internal and external collaboration

The Department will continue to play a major role in the UNCP Digital Academy through the participation of its personnel and sharing of resources at the Department's discretion, and, related to those, the development of courses in Media Integration.

The Department will continue to provide, at its discretion, limited video production services and/or television program slots to select governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, or individuals.

The Department will continue to encourage, facilitate, or arrange the participation of its students and faculty in audiovisual production, journalism, public communication campaigns, and other projects in the field with external "clients" or campus partners, under the auspices of capstone courses, internships, work-study, etc.

4. UNIT VISION AND MISSION

The Department aims to:

- educate students for ethical citizenship in a society in which communication and the free flow of information are the bases of democracy;
- focus on contemporary trends within the discipline, recognizing the complex mosaic of changing employment possibilities available in the information environment and thus preparing students for an economy in which the ability to adapt is a fundamental requisite to success;
- facilitate the development of sophisticated abilities in the gathering, analysis, and dissemination of information;

- provide state-of-the-art facilities for mass communication laboratory experiences

The Department's academic programs and laboratories are informed by scholarship and creative activities that promote human and economic development by contributing to knowledge of mass communication and applying that in media-related professions, the social sciences, arts, and humanities.

Through collaborative activities with industrial and educational partners here and abroad, the Department joins the entire university in public service that supports the citizens of North Carolina and in ventures that cultivate an international perspective in UNCP students and faculty.

5. PROPOSED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals

5.1

The Department will educate students in contemporary modes of media production, using contemporary technology, with an eye on cultural, economic, ethical, and legal issues related to mass media.

5.2

The Department will expand its offerings of hands-on experiences and other professional preparations for students and faculty.

5.3

The Department will earn "seals of approval" from relevant academic organizations and take other steps to assure and demonstrate the quality of its programs.

5.4

The Department will cultivate diversity of perspectives, paradigms, genres, and styles in courses, student media, projects, and special events in order to reflect theoretical developments in the field, economic trends in the business, and phenomenological changes for American audiences and media workers.

Objectives

5(a)

Revise curriculum in all three tracks by changing requirements for the baccalaureate; revising or adding minors in each; deletions, additions, and other revisions in course offerings.

5(b)

Obtain, learn, and incorporate state-of-the-art technology in all three tracks and in student media outlets/organizations.

5(c)

Engage Public Relations students in relevant, advanced activities and provide encounters with professional communicators in their field.

5(d)

Exploit the availability and affordability of the Internet/Web for new opportunities in student publishing and broadcasting.

5(e)

Earn accreditation from the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC).

5(f)

Acquire departmental memberships in relevant academic and professional organizations as able.

6. PROPOSED ACTIONS

- Revise Broadcasting track by expanding the video production sequence (including creation of a capstone course) and deleting/adding/merging other coursework as appropriate (to reflect actual employment opportunities for baccalaureates in the field and to anticipate pursuit of graduate education); create a Broadcasting minor.**

Completed FA '03

Assessment measure: Approved by Faculty Senate; number of majors and degrees conferred increases or holds steady in this track annually through 2009.

- Revise Journalism track and minor by expanding the news writing/reporting sequence (including creation of a capstone course), adding contemporary electives, and streamlining minor requirements, keeping an eye on ACEJMC accreditation guidelines (as per Objective 5(e) above. **Near to vote; SP '04****

Assessment measure: Approved by Faculty Senate; number of majors and degrees conferred increases in this track annually through 2009.

- Revise Public Relations track and minor by adding/expanding the advertising sequence and other coursework, including creation of a capstone course in which students conceive and realize communication campaigns. **Underway; SP '04 – FA '04****

Assessment measure: Approved by Faculty Senate; number of majors and degrees conferred increases or holds steady in this track annually through 2009.

- Revise Mass Communications core requirements by eliminating the MCM Senior Thesis/Project requirement in favor of the capstone courses created for each track in the track revisions and develop master syllabi for the core. **FA '04 – FA '05****

Assessment measure: Curriculum revision approved by Faculty Senate and master syllabi for each course in the core are available in department office by Spring '06.

- Digitally integrate our coursework, facilities, and student media by
 - 1) purchasing equipment;
 - 2) re-purposing equipment as able;
 - 3) continuing education of personnel;
 - 4) improving/expanding physical spaces, including furniture
 - 5) updating relevant course content. **Ongoing; annual**

- Add faculty to teach and research social, economic, and technical aspects of “New Media” and computer-mediated communication in general (as per Goals 5.1 and 5.4 above) and to advise new student publications or program services on the Internet/Web (see 5.2). **FA '05 (and FA '07 or '08 as enrollment warrants)**

- Conduct self-assessment and external review of programs as required for accreditation by ACEJMC. **FA '05 - SP '06**
Assessment measure: Accreditation earned/announced.

- Resurrect the Department’s chapter of Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) by appointment of a faculty adviser and other departmental support.
Completed SP '04
Assessment: The club should be active each year through 2009, i.e., financially solvent, comprising members in excess of the club officers, and producing a minimum of one event per semester.

- Create a student Web magazine or similar publication by nurturing it through a course and/or practicum credit and/or work-study. **FA '05 – SP '06**
Assessment: After start-up, the publication will be periodical and generate original content through 2009 and will be sustainable regardless of course offerings or faculty turnover.

- Create a practicum course for Public Relations through which students can apply concepts/skills learned in the program and experience “laboratory” projects and service learning for credit, similar to the practicum opportunities already enjoyed by Broadcasting and Journalism students. **SP '09**
Assessment measure: After start-up, the new P.R. practicum will sustain an average enrollment of 10 or more students per semester.

- Join the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication (ASJMC). **FA '04**

- Join the Broadcast Education Association (BEA). **FA '04**

- Investigate forming student chapters of relevant professional organizations, such as the Society for Professional Journalists and the Association for Women in Communications, and honor societies, such as *Kappa Tau Alpha* (journalism) and *Alpha Epsilon Rho* (broadcasting), by measuring interest, eligibility and advising responsibilities. **SP '05** *Assessment measure: Feasibility report made to the chair.*

7. EVALUATION

The assessment plan will include four-year outcomes surveys of students, five-year outcomes surveys of alumni, and three-year outcomes surveys of faculty. Our outcomes assessment of students also will rely on our records of job and/or further graduate work placement, which we will gather systematically as able. The Department participates annually in surveys of nationwide enrollments and graduates conducted by the Cox Center for International Mass Communication Training and Research, and both individualized and national results are returned to the Department. The Department already gathers evaluations of its students from employers supervising the required internship. Additionally, we will try to keep in close contact with our graduates through the publication and mailing of a yearly departmental newsletter. Through these various devices, the department's core faculty committee will be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of our programs on an on-going basis.

Evaluation will be linked to the department's mission, vision, and priorities and reviewed on a regular basis. A standing committee composed of the tenure track faculty will be responsible for ensuring that assessment activities are done routinely. Assessment resources and assistance from outside the unit will be sought (for instance, through professional development opportunities and from printing services). Such resources will be earmarked during the annual budgeting process. Multi-year records of assessment data will be retained so that patterns or trends may be discerned. That will allow responsible faculty to access cumulative assessment data easily and compare later outcomes with previous results.

Feedback from the assessment process will be used to support departmental decision-making. Patterns and trends can be communicated to stakeholders, and programs and services can be changed based on assessment data. Changes made based on assessment data can be identified. There is a general belief in the department that assessment data could help the faculty make sound program decisions.