

Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo Communications, MA

The 2018-2019 Program Performance Review (PPR) process for Communications, MA program concluded with a culmination meeting on February 7, 2020.

The following people attended the meeting: Pamela Oliver (Provost), Mark Filowitz (AVP of Academic Programs, AVPAP), Bey-Ling Sha (Dean, CCOM), Jason Shepard (Chair), Andi Stein (Program Coordinator), and Su Swarat (Assistant VP for Institutional Effectiveness).

The Provost thanked the program faculty for their hard work, and emphasized the importance of the PPR process for the university. She specifically highlighted the following accomplishments:

- Leadership's longevity and strong institutional knowledge is a tremendous asset to the program.
- Faculty and staff report feeling valued as team members.
- Program has talented faculty, and students participating in research with faculty reported great benefit to their studies.
- Students and alumni report engagement and favorable attitudes in flexibility to pursue specific areas of interest through research and 400-level elective courses.
- International student enrollment has remained steady.
- Graduate Coordinator's efforts in recruiting students via graduate school fairs and presentations to prospective students is commendable. The Graduate Coordinator echoed the importance of meeting students face to face and following up with them to encourage enrollment. She emphasized that perspective students enjoy talking with faculty more than professional recruiters.
- High quality faculty represent a broad range of practical and academic backgrounds.
- Students reported receiving high quality advising.
- Increased diversification of students and faculty.
- Strong reputation as among the best Communications MA programs offered in the region and throughout the CSU system.
- Students working full time in the field of Communications are an asset to the program.
- Student input on course scheduling is valued and collected via annual survey.

Major recommendations and issues raised through the PPR process were discussed as follows:

1. Graduate student admission support:
 - The Program Coordinator reported difficulty with the Cal State Apply process. The Provost confirmed that unfortunately this is a common experience.
 - The AVPAP reported that the Office of Graduate Studies has hired a staff member to focus on graduate student TDA, and he is working with the Provost to explore the possibility of hiring another graduate evaluator in order to process graduate applications quickly.
2. Graduate student recruitment and enrollment:

Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo Communications, MA

- The external reviewers recommended the program to consider emphasizing the program's "competitive advantage", e.g. faculty talent, geographic location, industry relationships, etc., to bolster student recruitment and enrollment.
 - o The Program Coordinator stated that the "hands-on" experiences offered by the program is unique, even better than programs at private institutions.
 - The AVPAP asked about the possibility of expanding spring admits, and the Program Coordinator concurred that it would be desirable. The typical size of spring cohort currently is 4 to 5.
 - o The Dean asked whether the small size of the spring cohort would be problematic for the program's cohort model. The Program Coordinator stated that the spring admits would be integrated with the fall cohorts fairly quickly, and the course enrollment would even out due to flexibility in course taking patterns.
 - The Program Coordinator stated that the three concentrations help balance out enrollment. For example, there is strong interest from students in the Tourism and Entertainment Communications concentration that drives the offering of at least one course focused on entertainment every semester. The research-focused concentration (preparing students for doctoral programs), while small in size, does not require additional course offerings since there are sufficient courses offered for the other two concentrations.
 - The external reviewers recommended a review of workload of the Program Coordinator in relation to her recruitment work, and suggested the department to discuss how recruitment can evolve into a shared responsibility.
 - o The Chair concurred with the recommendation. The Program Coordinator expressed desires to expand the geographic reach of her recruitment effort by attending recruitment fairs beyond local areas. She would like to continue and expand attendance to professional association meetings as well to recruit students.
 - o The Dean recommended the department to think about the "institutional longevity" re graduate recruitment. The Provost concurred, and recommended the department to cultivate appropriate faculty candidates. The Program Coordinator acknowledged the need, and expressed the wish that more faculty and faculty from other departments would join the recruitment effort.
 - o The Chair stated that there are more junior faculty now who are interested in graduate programs, which is hopeful.
 - The external reviewers recommended dedicated budget allocation for advertising and marketing materials (online and in print).
 - o The Chair reported that the department currently can accommodate this need.
3. Online course offerings:
- The Provost asked about the status of and plan for online courses offered in the program.
 - The Program Coordinator stated that the program has offered three courses online that generated a lot of complaints from students. She is not opposed to expanding online offerings if there is sufficient student preference. She stated that while some students (being working professionals) prefer online courses, others prefer the small group discussions possible only in face-to-face classes.

Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo Communications, MA

- The Chair reported that there are multiple 400-level online courses that graduate students can take. The unsuccessful online offerings were limited to 500-level classes. He stated that the key to successful online courses is the right faculty. The Chair also indicated that online enrollment for 500-level courses, at least initially, may be small and thus not budget friendly. The program will need to carefully balance student interest and budgetary sustainability.
 - The Provost acknowledged that it is challenging to teach online, and the university currently only offers, but does not require, training before faculty teach online. The university should work towards making such training a requirement.
4. Incentives for faculty who serve as thesis advisors:
- The external reviewers recommended the program to review compensation or reassigned time for faculty working on thesis committees and student research.
 - The Program Coordinator stated that there is no compensation currently, but the positive change recently is that there are more enthusiastic faculty interested in being involved in the graduate program, making it easier to find committee members.
 - The Dean and the Chair both acknowledged the need, but also expressed the difficulty given the college budget deficit. The Provost encouraged the college and the department to explore solutions.
5. Possibility of cross-departmental graduate programs:
- The Dean asked about the possibility of developing cross-departmental graduate programs within the college to make the college more competitive.
 - The Program Coordinator reported that the program encourages students to take two courses from other departments, and she has often had students from other departments taking her classes.
 - The Provost commented that this is a great way to start conversations about interdisciplinary work, a focus of our university strategic plan.
 - The AVPAP stated that few such programs exist on campus. The major challenges include resource distribution between the involved departments, and the different RTP requirements among departments.
6. Grants and other new revenue sources:
- The AVPAP recommended the program to work with the university's Office of Research and Sponsored Projects to increase grant applications and awards.
 - The Dean acknowledged the need, and added that more work needs to be done through the college development office to raise funds.

The Chair expressed appreciation for the Program Coordinator for serving as a long-time leader of the program. Her dedication is what makes the program successful. The Chair is committed to provide any supported needed to continue the program success.

The Provost concluded the meeting by thanking the program for its excellent performance, and thanking the faculty for their hard work.