



Date: January 20, 2016

To: Su Swarat, Ph.D.
Director of Assessment and Educational Effectiveness

From: Gary Ruud, Ph.D. 
Chair, Department of Human Communication Studies

Subj: Chair Response to External Reviewer's Report

The external reviewers (Dr. Tom Hollihan and Dr. Patricia Riley (both from the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at USC) visited our department on November 12-13, 2015 as the basis of their academic review. The reviewers were able to meet with Interim Dean Irene Matz, Interim Associate Dean Ed Fink, members of our faculty, office-staff members, and undergraduate and graduate members. In their words "Without exception, everyone with who we spoke was upbeat, friendly, and deeply committed to the academic mission of the college and the program." Their comments are appreciated and I believe an accurate description of our department's culture and philosophy.

The reviewers initiated their report by noting several strengths of the department: senior faculty who are "world class" in their respective areas with exceptional research productivity, recently hired faculty who show great promise in teaching and research, outstanding TAs who receive high praise from students, and faculty with "impressive teaching evaluations." The reviewers also noted that our debate and forensics program is one of the best in the nation and one that is superior to other programs at the best U.S. universities. An additional strength noted was having extremely supportive, smart and knowledgeable administrators represented by our Interim Dean, Interim Associate Dean, and Department Chair.

The reviewers identified a number of areas of concern and also had several suggestions that would make for a stronger department. Some of the concerns have already been addressed or are in the process of being resolved whereas others will be discussed this semester at our faculty meetings. Following is my response to specific items of concern by the reviewers.

1. The reviewers note that the department was "significantly overworked and under resourced" and that faculty teaching loads are "punishingly heavy. . ." They further comment that "faculty salaries are woefully inadequate. . ." Unfortunately, the department has little control over faculty teaching loads or salaries. Typically, the course load for each faculty member is 4/4. At this point, there are few opportunities for course assigned time. Our graduate advisor and area coordinator receive assigned time for one course each semester and our recently hired faculty members receive a reduced teaching load for their first two years. The department will work with the incoming Dean and Provost to explore opportunities to get our teaching load in line with other universities and departments within CSUF. It should be noted that departments (e.g., English) at CSUF have gone to a 3/3 load so it is possible and I would argue beneficial to our faculty and to our students. Salaries will also be discussed with the incoming Dean and Provost especially given the cost of living in Orange County as indicated by the reviewers.
2. The reviewers indicate that the department should attempt to increase the number of undergraduate majors. Although the number of our majors has increased significantly (127 majors in fall 2012 to

230 majors in fall 2015) there are opportunities to make our major more attractive to incoming and current students. The reviewers note that one reason for the low majors is the “confusion generated by the naming of the college and its departments” (i.e., a College of Communications with a department of the same name, a Department of Human Communication Studies with a degree program in Communication Studies and Communicative Disorders). This has been an ongoing issue for years and is unlikely to change at least in the near future. What the College can do is identify prospective HCOM students in their advisement capacity. Additionally, the department plans to offer one faculty member assigned time to attract students from feeder high schools and from local community colleges. This would increase the visibility of our department (another concern by the reviewers) and help to generate more majors and minors.

3. The reviewers suggest that the HCOM Department and the College of Communications needs a “complete makeover” of our websites. The websites are currently being revised in a manner that should be more accessible and visually attractive to viewers. In short, this issue is being addressed under the guidance of the Interim Associate Dean and his committee.
4. The reviewers recommend that our forensics and debate team needs “secure” and “predictable funding.” Given the accomplishments of our forensics and debate teams at the national level for the last several decades (against the likes of Harvard, Northwestern, USC, Dartmouth, etc.), it is imperative that there is sufficient and consistent funding to ensure continued success. It has been designated a high impact practice—a co-curricular and interdisciplinary activity. Historically, the program has been funded in large part by the IRA but this past year the traveling budget was cut by half. The department is very appreciative of the contributions by the Provost and Dean’s Office (\$10,000.00 each) to offset the cuts but this can be seen only as a temporary fix. According to the Chancellor’s Office, forensics fits squarely within Instructionally Related Activities according to the Education Codes (89230, 89700, 89721h) and Executive Order 1000 – Section IIIA. For the forensics program to remain competitive at the national level there needs to be adequate funding through IRA and/or other means. The department will work with the incoming Dean and Provost to develop a strategy for sustained funding for the forensics program.
5. The reviewers comment on curriculum improvements including adding faculty members and courses in digital social media and health communication. Currently, we have one faculty member and one course in social media and one faculty member and one course in health communication. Both areas of study have been positively responded to by our students. Several new courses have been proposed in social media and should be in the curriculum within the next year. The department will be reviewing curriculum and corresponding faculty this semester. With the success of both the social media and health communication courses, it is anticipated that the department will request faculty lines in both areas beginning fall 2017.
6. The reviewers recommend additional access to needed technology and suitable classrooms. Currently, the policy from the College of Communications regarding lab space states that “HCOM is entitled to priority choice of up to three time slots each semester” (typically in CP-019, the only lab with 25 stations). Needless to say, this is inadequate given the number of courses offered that require labs. To address this issue, at least in part, the College has purchased a mobile computer cart. The cart, however, is designed to be used on an “as needed” basis and not as a permanent solution to limited lab space.
7. The reviewers recommend that the department systematically collect data to benchmark the progress of our M.A. program (e.g., student placement or careers following completion of M.A. degrees). In spring 2016, there will be assigned time for a faculty member to initiate a plan to gather and analyze data related to the M.A. program.

8. The reviewers suggest that additional support for our large classes (K2) is needed. They noted that “two universities in the CSU system have been creative and found ways to give faculty more support.” The department will work with the incoming Dean to explore options (e.g., teaching assistant) designed to make the large classes more manageable for faculty and a better learning experience for students.
9. The reviewers recommended that the department provide more internship opportunities for our students. Currently, the department does not require an internship (the other two departments within the College do have an internship requirement) but does encourage students to take advantage of this curricular option. Consequently, the number of internships is up from an average of four or five per semester to fourteen scheduled for spring 2016. Nevertheless, this is a small number and should be increased significantly. The department will work with Pamela Caldwell (Director of the Internship Program) to develop a strategy that might entice more of our students to enroll in internships. Additionally, an agenda item for our faculty meetings this semester will address the requirement of an internship for our undergraduate students.
10. Other issues that the reviewers included (e.g., mentoring for junior faculty, the department becoming a “salon for important conversations, the creation of a graduate student association) will be items to be discussed at our faculty meetings.

In summary, the reviewers were very positive in their assessment of the department but they also had significant concerns and recommendations. Their report will be shared with the faculty and items included in their review will be the basis of faculty meeting deliberations. The department is committed to providing the best possible learning experience for our students and offering our faculty an opportunity to enhance their teaching and research at the highest level.