



## **HCOM PPR 2021-22**

### **Chair's response to the report of the team of internal and external reviewers**

It was a pleasure to meet with the review committee. They are undoubtedly a highly qualified group who brought a very useful and informed perspective to the process, and the Chair welcomes their input as well-reasoned, detailed, and thorough.

### **The primacy of AB 928 for strategic planning**

What the Review Committee Memo ("Memo") emphasizes, more so than the self-study, is the potentially transformative and highly negative impact of AB 928. As noted in the conclusion, "Going forward, the department will need to address issues of online instruction and the impact of AB 928." The loss of oral communication as a central component of a core curriculum<sup>1</sup> would do damage to students who badly need such skills as part of a stand-alone course experience. As many sources have noted, folding the course content into other areas degrades the pedagogical experience of the students. It will further damage those institutions who study, research, and teach the knowledge about human message exchange in the first place. As the Reviewer Memo concisely states, "If the University does not make oral communication a graduation requirement, the department will suffer greatly...[and] eliminate employment opportunities for MA students."

At present,<sup>2</sup> ICAS is working on recommendations they will present by May, 2022. If ICAS does not produce consensus a 3-member ADTIIC group must establish a common GE pathway by May 31, 2023 and forward recommendations to the legislature by Dec 23, 2023. CSU membership on ICAS appears to be advocating for oral communication curricula, however, at the end of the day 2 courses must be removed from the extant CSU GE requirements to comply with AB 928. One eminent possibility is the elimination of oral communication in the joint transfer degree and/or its removal from the CSU GE package in the education code.

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<sup>1</sup> Previously referred to as the "Golden Four"

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/student-success/AB-928/Documents/ab-928-timeline.pdf>



A change of this magnitude could render all other considerations and plans moot since half of all our sections are oral communication GE courses. An appropriate response will require the coordinated action of the department, college and university leadership, and the shared governance institutions that guide curricula. We look forward to a culminating memo that helps prioritize a sound departmental and campus response to this foundational change.

## **Review of accomplishments and strengths**

We note with gratitude that the external review team has validated, from an outside perspective, many of our strengths. Some points are worth highlighting:

- “Department faculty are active and influential researchers”
- “The Department should be commended for reaching the Chancellor’s 2025 transfer graduation targets two years early”
- “The Forensics program has been at the forefront of some of the most important anti-racism conversations”
- “The department serves a crucial role in the university’s mission to enrich the lives of students and inspire them to thrive in a global environment. The basic communication course (e.g., HCOM 100), is a well-established fixture in the first-year college curriculum”
- “The department prides itself on providing students with meaningful learning opportunities through excellent teaching”
- “The importance of the Andersen Research Library to non-teaching graduate students was apparent when speaking to students who regularly use the space”
- “Overall the Department and the student’s we interviewed demonstrated a strong sense of collegiality and belonging”

It is also gratifying to note that the review committee has recognized “we commend the department for their dedicated efforts to respond to the feedback received in the last program performance review” and that in terms of the minor “we applaud the department for creating this degree option.” The department is proactively working on improvements in process and substance and has a well-functioning self-governance structure and culture.



I believe the report indicates that we are a highly successful department with faculty (and students) producing important research, excelling in the classroom, and proactively adapting in ways that keep us at the forefront of the field. This is evident in many programs, in the use of space, and in the development of the curricula.

## **Review of challenges and threats**

The Memo identifies resource limitations as a significant challenge and I concur with this assessment. As the Memo notes, our successes have come amidst “numerous changes in leadership at the university and within the College of Communications, experiencing curriculum and staffing disruptions, and through continued budgetary issues.” Some specific concerns are worth emphasizing.

Faculty workload. As the Memo states, “As noted in previous reviews, faculty are significantly overworked and under-resourced.” Additional cuts since the previous review have heightened this challenge. Because “increases the workload and potentially decreases the quality of the education provided to students” we view this as urgent, and greatly appreciate that the Memo acknowledging that faculty and student interests align. Strategies that seek to enhance the student experience at the expense of faculty resources and workload are counter-productive.

Student-faculty-ratio. The Memo acknowledges and validates the concerns expressed in the self-study when they note: “The review committee acknowledges the inordinate burden being placed upon faculty within the department (and across departments at the university). The self-study speaks to the expanding Student/Faculty Ratio (SFR) and Student/Tenure-Track Faculty Ratio (STTFR) beyond what is identified as optimal in the Collective Bargaining Agreement.” To expand on the implications of this point, the concern in the self-study was that campus-designed SFR levels are used for budgeting purposes and correcting the inordinate burdens will require addressing those budget formulae at the university level. The Memo correctly notes that this may be part of a national trend. I will simply append that many national trends are negative and counterproductive forces are to be resisted rather than embraced. The thorough review in the self-study demonstrates with peer-reviewed research that increased class sizes inhibit educational quality and this relationship is codified in Article 20.34 of the CBA.



Resource and SFR-STTFR problems should be addressed as a long-term priority.

Part-time faculty support. The Memo notes: "Another challenge faced by HCOM is retaining part-time faculty. The issue is partly caused by enrollment swings that are outside of the department's control (i.e., the size of the freshman class and their advising) and the typical fall-to-spring dropoff." I concur and note with gratitude that the most important factors threatening lecturers will require support the department cannot provide. As noted in the self-study, this is a core diversity issue.

## **Recommendations**

I concur that the changes recommended in the Memo would improve the department. The ease (and even ability) to implement the changes varies with the recommendation and depends on available resources. A succinct summary follows with comments about implementation issues.

- *"The department might want to continue to review course rotations and make course offering decisions based on patterns of enrollment."* This recommendation is well received as is part of the ongoing work of the curriculum committee. In light of recent curricular improvements and changes this will be carefully monitored. The ability to access enrollment and need data more efficiently would assist in this effort. For instance, we can find past enrollments, but have no ability to determine, for example, how many major students have not completed a specific requirement. The process of simply gathering data to monitor enrollment patterns is beyond the capacity of many individual faculty members and more accessible data systems would improve planning.
- *"One recommendation from the review team would be to update the internship website to elaborate on why internships are important to undergraduates."* This is a reasonable recommendation and easily implemented.
- *"The communication [studies] department might leverage the expertise of its communication instructors by working with the Faculty Development Center to help facilitate workshops or certificates in support of faculty teaching and learning practices."* We would welcome the opportunity to share expertise and have made initial inquiries into this area. However, development of a certificate program that does not generate resources exacerbates



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P.O. Box 6868, Fullerton, CA 92834/92831 / T 657-278-3617 / F 657-278-3355

- faculty workload issues. We are pursuing options via the EIP office that will support faculty in such endeavors.
- *"The committee...notes that the seven year [assessment] rotation is too long."* I acknowledge this observation and the recommendation will be forwarded to the curriculum committee.
  - *"Online instruction, whether synchronous or asynchronous, must play an important role in increasing enrollment."* I agree, and the department has a working group dedicated to addressing the opportunities and challenges of online instruction. We hope to implement their recommendations in AY22-23.
  - *"The department might assign a senior faculty member as a mentor to every probationary faculty member."* Overall faculty are progressing through ranks successfully, and while I welcome the suggestion it must be balanced against increases to exiting workloads. I will forward this recommendation to the Personnel committee.
  - *Curriculum:* Our curriculum is in a constant state of development with an active curriculum committee. Our top priority is to implement and evaluate our recent changes, slated to take effect in the Fall of 2022, and the Memo recommendations about the areas of health communication, instructional communication, and rhetoric will be forwarded to the curriculum committee.
  - *Data disaggregation.* This is an excellent idea and the IPEDS categories are too broad. Disaggregation would require independent data collection and be a stand-alone research project and cannot be completed without substantial support. We cannot get more fine-grained student demographic data from existing systems and would need to conduct an independent survey.
  - *"Reinstate [the] Student-Retention Initiative."* I am grateful the committee acknowledged this goal and past program success. This is identified in the self-study as an area we will pursue.
  - *"Graduate Communication Association."* I welcome this as a productive possibility with the caveat that adding a faculty advisor adds additional uncompensated faculty workload. The recommendation will be forwarded to the graduate committee.
  - *"The department should be given the option to change the name of their department and drop the 'human' from the title."* I concur and welcome any collaborative efforts to pursue this long-overdue goal.
  - *"The college should consider expanding its computing spaces in consideration of the needs of the four departments."* I concur with

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this recommendation, and note this will require a college-level resource investment.

The Chair welcomes these recommendations and finds them all to be of value. However, as noted in the Memo our limitations are excessive faculty workload and lack of budget. Our ability to implement any changes is equal to any additional support we receive. The conclusions of the Memo reinforce the position in the self-study that “the department has hit a point where ‘doing more with less’ is no longer tenable.”

## **Conclusion**

We are grateful for the committee visit and find their comments thoughtful and well-informed. We look forward to working with campus partners in developing a sustainable plan of action that addresses the department needs while allowing for growth.