




December 6, 2022

To: Carolyn Thomas, Provost

From: Bey-Ling Sha, Dean 

Re: Dean's Summary Report and Recommendations  
Program Performance Review: Communication Studies B.A. and M.A.  
Department of Human Communication Studies

I have read the self-study of the B.A. and M.A. programs in Communication Studies completed by the Department of Human Communication Studies (HCOM) in Fall 2021. Four reviewers external to the Department visited the program on February 15, 2022, and that site team submitted its report on March 4. The Department chair's response was submitted later that month. This dean's report summarizes my reading of the documents and offers my recommendations regarding this program.

**History and Contexts.** Since the last PPR, the Department of Human Communication Studies has experienced not only the COVID-19 pandemic that has impacted the world in ongoing ways, but also multiple changes in administrative leadership at the campus, division, and college levels. In addition, HCOM faculty colleagues in the communicative disorders program separated into their own Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, effective AY 2017-2018. Also, academic advising has been centralized into a College-wide Student Success Center, whose team includes an internship coordinator and a Career Center adviser.

**Department/Program Mission.** As noted in the self-study, the HCOM Department "serves the crucial role of providing general education curriculum to students across the university, particularly in the areas of oral communication (GE area A1) and critical thinking (GE area A3)" (cf. Self-Study, page 4). That mission remains unchanged, and its continued execution is well aligned with the University's 2018-2023 Strategic Plan.

As the campus moves toward major-specific admissions, I support the desire of the HCOM Department to "work with all relevant parties" (cf. Self-Study, page 11) toward a resolution of perceived confusion resulting from longstanding naming conventions of programs and units that comprise the College of Communications.

**Curriculum.** Effective Fall 2022, the Department's undergraduate curricular changes since the last review integrated new core requirements for majors, streamlined offerings that serve as breadth experiences, and added interesting new electives. The Department intends to maintain its curricular excellence in traditional areas of strength, while expanding curricula into new areas.

**Curricular Developments.** The Department has a robust curriculum committee that monitors course offerings, considers new curricular options (e.g., certificate programs through the Office of Extension and International Programs), and examines the impact of online instruction. Although the pandemic's longer-term impacts on students' preferred course modalities remain unclear, I encourage the Department to make the adjustments necessary to support its ability to flexibly offer courses in any given semester in face-to-face, online, or hybrid formats. I also encourage HCOM faculty to continue conversations about the potential benefits and challenges of Extension programs, whether by offering professional certificates or by exploring self-support degree-completion programs in collaboration with the dean's office.

**Graduate Program.** The M.A. curriculum remains unchanged since the last review, and it reflects the classic 30-unit graduate program that culminates in a comprehensive examination, a project, or a thesis. As the competition for students will only intensify in the coming years, I encourage HCOM to re-examine its M.A. curriculum so as to more-clearly position the program advantageously vis-à-vis similar communication studies M.A.s across the state and the country.

Such a re-positioning of the competitive advantage of the HCOM M.A. program might include: (a) the explicit articulation of non-teaching career opportunities for these graduates, given the uncertain landscape of future faculty hiring in higher education; (b) the exploration of a possible 4+1 B.A./M.A. program, as recently newly permitted by the CSU Chancellor's Office; and (c) a consideration of Department priorities for any future hiring of tenure-line faculty, given the external review team's recommendation (cf. page 6 of its report) that ". . . any new hires the department is granted be focused on areas that would support a transformed graduate program. This could mean more professionally oriented faculty and faculty with expertise in organizational communication, campaigns, and consulting."

As another alternative, given current trends in online education at the community college level, perhaps a re-positioned M.A. in HCOM would be one that incorporates M.Ed. program elements in instructional design or instructional technology. In any case, continuing the status quo for the M.A. program is unlikely to help the program be optimally viable in the coming years, so I strongly encourage greater attention to this component of HCOM curricular offerings.

**Assessment.** The Department's annual assessment efforts examine – on a rotational basis – one of seven Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs); embed the assessment measures in questions/assignments of specific undergraduate courses under the purview of the individual course instructor; and focus on PLOs grounded in the disciplinary literature on theory and research on communication competence (see Self-Study, Appendix I [Eye], Assessment). The HCOM self-study appears to make no mention of whether, where, and how PLOs for the M.A. program are assessed.

**Connecting the Department to the Discipline.** While the self-study cites prior literature regarding the value of (presumably undergraduate) participation in intercollegiate forensics and the merits of smaller class sizes in contrast to larger class sizes, future performance reviews for the Department's programs would benefit from (a) demonstrating the Department's own participation in those "super-assessments" cited in the literature; (b) collecting, analyzing, and publishing data specific to the Department in ways that contribute to that broader literature; and (c) acknowledging that the literature cited with regard to class sizes show publication dates that precede the advent of social media and the widespread adoption of digital platforms for classroom management, which may impact student attainment of learning outcomes in the contemporary collegiate environment.

**Scaffolding PLOs Attainment.** In addition, the assessment plan would be strengthened by noting the courses in which specific PLOs are introduced, developed, and mastered, so that formative, intermediate, and summative assessments might be performed. The thoughtful and intentional scaffolding of student learning is helpful to students' academic success.

**Enrollments.** Since the last review, the Department has seen an increase in its undergraduate major headcount, from 190 in the B.A. in AY 2014-2015 to 331 in AY 2021-2022. The M.A. program has seen ups and downs in enrollment, with 36 enrolled in AY 2014-2015, 43 in AY 2018-2019, and 29 in AY 2021-2022.

**Graduate Student Recruitment.** I support the Department's intention to proactively recruit graduate students, and I encourage the faculty to nominate strong candidates for non-resident-tuition waivers (NRTWs) and other merit-based awards offered by the CSUF Office of Graduate Studies.

**Potential Impact of AB 928.** As of this writing, the potential “loss of oral communication as a central component of a core curriculum” (cf. Chair’s Response, page 1) of general education remains a threat that will only be removed once the final decisions are made at the state level with respect to the establishment of a common GE pathway across the three sectors of higher education in California. If oral communication is in fact eliminated as a GE requirement, then a University-wide conversation will be necessary to make oral communication a campus-graduation requirement. Without discipline-specific, theory-grounded, and skills-based instruction in oral communication, Cal State Fullerton students will not be optimally prepared for their futures, given the documented necessity of effective communication skills for work and for life.

**Faculty.** The Department’s faculty are active researchers whose work is widely cited by their peers, especially in the area of intercultural communication. Other disciplinary areas of scholarly strength include instructional communication, sexual communication, and health communication, with considerations of diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice (DEIJ) permeating nearly all research areas. These scholarly endeavors keep the faculty at the forefront of the field, not only in terms of research agendas, but also in terms of life-relevant scholarship that is attractive to both undergraduate and graduate students, as well as aligned with campus priorities toward anti-racism and social justice.

**DEIJ.** With regard to the latter, I note with appreciation that HCOM faculty were among the first at Cal State Fullerton to willingly and eagerly re-examine the Department Personnel Standards (DPS) with an eye toward DEIJ, grounding their efforts in both scholarly literature from relevant fields and authentic conversations with each other. The DPS revision efforts included a re-consideration of expectations for research and scholarly activities, as well as for teaching and pedagogy. Relatedly, the HCOM forensics program continues to lead important anti-racism conversations, with both national impact on speech and debate programs and personalized impact on our own students. I encourage the HCOM faculty to leverage its expertise in traditional rhetorical studies to incorporate visual rhetoric and to examine questions of procedural rhetoric, by which systems use representations and interactions to establish their “rules of engagement” that ultimately advantage some groups to the disadvantage of others.

**Workload.** I note that faculty workload remains a challenge, not only in HCOM, but across the higher education landscape. I concur with the external reviewers and the Department chair that resource issues require addressing as a long-term priority. Toward that end, I encourage the Department to leverage (via the College) existing campus resources in the areas of data collection and disaggregation, student enrollment projections, and — moving forward — student outreach and recruitment, as the campus moves toward major-specific admissions. In addition, I encourage HCOM faculty to continue participating in College- and campus-led opportunities to learn some of the nuts and bolts of academic resource management, so that our collective conversations about resources may creatively seek solutions while remaining accurately grounded in realities.

**Resources/Space.** I concur wholeheartedly with the Department chair’s expressed concerns regarding “lack of budget.” While “budget” is a generic term that may have different meanings in different contexts, I use that term here to underscore the challenge of delivering on instructional targets using the College’s current funded SFR of 23.1, which since FY 2020-2021 has been allocated to HCOM as a distributed-funded SFR of 24.5 so that unfunded mandates (e.g., re-assigned time for department service, medical leaves) could be fiscally supported.

**Structural Deficit.** Historical analysis of the College’s budget allocations over the past 12+ years indicates an initial base budget that necessitated additional fiscal support each year, as departments incurred instructional costs in their efforts to meet FTES targets. Furthermore, the College’s fiscal position was negatively impacted by the use of excessive reassigned time in FY 2017-2018 and FY 2018-2019, during which

some areas including HCOM implemented 3-course teaching loads, which only exacerbated existing structural deficits and negative carry-forwards. (While the self-study indicates on page 14 that the “three-course scheme . . . successfully addressed faculty workload,” the definition of “successful addressed” was not clearly articulated.)

**Operational Realignment.** Since 2019, the College and each of its four departments have collectively worked very hard to realign operations with available resources (see “Menu of Options for Operational Realignment for Implementation Starting in FY 2020-2021” and “Background and Contexts to Menu,” drafts dated December 16, 2020). I commend the HCOM faculty for engaging in department-wide conversations about the menu items and the Department chair for undertaking difficult decisions as we all worked together to ameliorate the College’s fiscal standing. At this time, it is apparent that systemic change above the College level is necessary.

**Instructional Costs.** We look forward to the upcoming campus-wide review and analysis of instructional costs that will be performed in 2023 by the National Association of College and University Budget Officers (NACUBO), with hope that the funded SFR for the College will be appropriately adjusted. In addition to operational fiscal adjustments, we hope for adjustments to conceptual understandings of “instructional costs,” so that this term can more-appropriately encompass the full range of activities related to teaching and learning, such as reassigned time for research, scholarly and creative activities, as well as reassigned time for department, college, campus and community service.

**Instructional Spaces.** With respect to instructional spaces, we look forward to continued campus conversations regarding the assignment of classrooms to specific courses and the ways in which these historical assignments might require adjustments of processes, so that all departments desiring large-lecture spaces can have priority-access to these rooms on a rotational basis. Given current campus efforts toward enforcement of the CBA-defined 120-enrollment minimum for K2 (i.e., “double-section”) qualification, combined with the campus commitment to DEIJ, all departments across the University would be well served by transparent fairness in the assignment of large-lecture spaces.

**Student Needs.** Since the completion of the HCOM self-study, the University’s Division of Instructional Technology has implemented a “laptop for all” program that enables any student to receive a laptop that is pre-loaded with software needed for their academic endeavors. Thus, any HCOM majors desiring out-of-class access to data-analysis software such as the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) may request that this be installed on their laptop on loan from the campus. Also, I note that space on the second floor of the College Park building, adjacent to the Student Success Center, has been designated as a Student Community Center, where any majors in the College of Communications may socialize and/or study during regular business hours. The transition of this suite (CP 250) into a student-focused space has been slowly progressing since the 2021-2022 academic year, given the non-linear transition from online back to in-person interactions post-pandemic. Moving forward, these efforts to meet students’ needs for technology and community space will be monitored and adjusted as resources permit.

## **Closing Comments**

I congratulate the Department of Human Communication Studies on completing its 2021-2022 Program Performance Review. The hard work of the faculty — in particular the Department’s chair, Dr. Jon Brusckhe — is very much appreciated and respected. I am proud to note the many strengths of the communication studies programs, and I am optimistic about the future of this Department, our many challenges notwithstanding.