

Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo Communication Studies, BA & MA

The 2021-2022 Program Performance Review (PPR) process for the Communication Studies BA and MA programs in the College of Communications (CCOM) concluded with a culmination meeting on February 10, 2023.

The following people attended the meeting: Carolyn Thomas (Provost), Edward Fink (AVP for Undergraduate Academic Programs, AVPUAP), Elaine Frey (AVP for Graduate Studies, AVPGS), Bey-Ling Sha (Dean, CCOM), Deanna Leone (Associate Dean, CCOM), Jon Bruschke (Chair, Department of Human Communication Studies), and Su Swarat (Senior AVP for Institutional Effectiveness and Planning, SAVPIEP).

The Provost commended the department for successfully completing the PPR process, for making it a meaningful opportunity for reflection within the department, and for engaging in dialogues with colleagues outside the department (e.g., college leadership, external reviewers). The following specific accomplishments were highlighted during the PPR process:

- In addition to the degree programs, the department supports the university through its crucial role in the general education (GE) curriculum, specifically providing courses to fulfill GE requirements in oral communication and critical thinking. The Provost commended the department for balancing GE and major offerings, managing part-time faculty hiring needs, and supporting the GE demand of the university.
- The department has a robust curriculum committee that monitors and considers needed changes and is dedicated to incorporating diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) values in the curriculum. The Provost commended the department for setting an example for others.
- The department faculty are active researchers and widely cited, increasing the department's attraction of undergraduate and graduate student scholars. The Provost commended the faculty for modeling scholarship, which positively influences student engagement and career trajectory.
- The department faculty were amongst the first on campus to examine the Department Personnel Standards through a DEIJ lens. The Chair's leadership is a significant factor for this accomplishment.
- Many recommendations from the prior review were met with department-level initiatives.
- The intercollegiate forensics program remains a powerful space for student engagement and leads important anti-racism conversations on campus and across the intercollegiate debate community.
- The department leadership has guided the department through many obstacles, including realigning operations with available resources, which required making difficult decisions to ease the college's fiscal standing. The Provost commended the Chair for being a source of strength and stability for the department.

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

1. Program, department, and college naming conventions:
 - The department (Human Communication Studies), the external reviewers, and the college leadership all pointed out the need to work with relevant parties to clarify naming conventions of the programs.

Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo Communication Studies, BA & MA

- The Chair acknowledged that this is a longstanding issue, and stated that the college climate is now better, making it possible to restart the conversation with the Department of Communications. He prefers the department name to be consistent with the degree program name (i.e. “Communication Studies”).
 - The Dean expressed support for the proposed change and stated that the confusing names negatively affect students’ accurate selection of majors, with potential future impacts to college-based or major-based admissions.
 - The Provost recommended the naming convention issues to be discussed and resolved at the college level.
2. Course modality:
- The external reviewers and the college leadership recommended the department to consider increasing the modalities of course offerings to include face-to-face, online, hybrid formats, and extension programs.
 - The AVPUAP commented that the department has been active in adding modalities to existing courses.
 - The Chair stated the department identified courses that “made sense to be online”, and examined student trajectory to determine which courses could be offered online. It is observed that online classes fill faster and more than in-person classes in the initial return to in-person classes post-pandemic. The department curriculum committee is currently looking to determine how many courses should be online.
 - The Provost asked whether the department is working with the college instructional designer to ensure the quality of online instruction.
 - o The Chair responded that the department has faculty with specialty in the area, so there is no need for instructional designers. He also referenced challenges when working with the instructional designer.
 - o The Provost and the Dean both recommended the Chair to explore how to use the instructional designer as a resource to help reduce faculty workload. The Chair noted that curricular design is not an urgent need and online course quality was maintained by faculty.
 - The Chair also reported that a degree completion program is in the works with EIP.
3. MA program curriculum:
- The AVPGS inquired whether the MA program curriculum structure – two required courses, one culminating experience, and the rest being electives – is sufficient to offer students the structure they desire. She recommended the program to focus on areas of strength based on faculty capacity and expertise, and offer students clearer pathways (with less flexibility than what the program currently has). She also asked whether the current program structure where every student has a committee of three faculty is too labor intensive for the small number of faculty.
 - o The Chair stated that the MA program currently requires 30 units and a thesis/comps/project culminating experience. The curriculum does offer a lot of possible combinations/pathways, but the committee structure helps ensure each student’s study plan is customized and achieved.

Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo Communication Studies, BA & MA

- While the Chair acknowledged that the committee structure is labor intensive, he reported that it seems to be working. Since the program is focused on preparing students for research, the committee structure is important.
 - The Provost commented that the department approach seems to be working, but she asked the Chair to have the conversation with faculty to ensure a balanced workload.
 - The AVPGS recommended the program to keep a watchful eye on enrollment since the number of applications has slightly declined. The program is encouraged to pursue the 4+1 BA/MA option to help grow enrollment.
4. Program assessment:
- The external reviewers recommended the programs to update the curriculum maps, and ensure assessment is meaningfully investigating the learning outcomes and the potential equity gaps. They recommended the programs to disaggregate data in assessment efforts.
 - The AVPGS echoed the recommendation and encouraged the department to work with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning to improve program assessment.
5. Enrollment impact:
- The Chair stated that the anticipated increase in the freshmen class has significant impact on the department, and thus would like to know whether such numbers of entering freshmen will continue.
 - The Provost responded that the campus is moving towards increasing freshmen as a way to align campus enrollment growth with the direction of the CSU system growth. The exact amount of increase is difficult to guarantee, but larger freshmen classes are expected for the near future.
 - There is a shared recommendation among the program self-studies, the external reviewers, and the Dean's Office that the department budget (i.e., funded SFR) should be increased to support faculty workload reduction and part-time faculty retention. It is agreed that leadership should ensure the department is considered for campus resources, funds, and resource management opportunities.
6. Faculty hiring:
- The Chair stated that the department has a small faculty, so faculty loss due to retirement needs to be replaced. This is particularly critical given the anticipated increasing department enrollment. This request echoes the external reviewers' recommendation that the university should ensure funding for tenure-track faculty, particularly to support any potential future changes to the MA program curriculum.
 - The Dean commented that the Dean's office moved a line from another department to this department in recognition of the enrollment growth in majors, and has done everything feasible at the college level. The Dean is working with the campus and division budget units to examine the SFR-funding rate.
 - The Dean also pointed out that an increase in enrollment requires more full-time faculty, but not necessarily tenure-track faculty, as many tenured/tenure-track faculty do not teach freshmen. The Chair noted that lower-division enrollment frequently funds tenure-track or other full-time faculty hiring as a normal campus practice. The Dean and the Chair will have more conversations on this matter.

**Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo
Communication Studies, BA & MA**

- The Provost shared that conversations are taking place between the colleges and the Division of Administration and Finance, which hopefully will lead to a stronger campuswide understanding of how to fund and support faculty work.

7. Resource needs:

- The department self-study, the external reviewers, and the Dean's summary all pointed out that resources are needed in order to address the aforementioned recommendations. There is consensus that the departmental instructional budget needs to be increased. Although time did not permit a verbal discussion of resource needs during the culminating meeting, conversations should continue to take place between the department, the college, the division, and the university to seek and secure the resources needed to implement the recommendations in this memo. It is recognized that the availability of adequate instructional resources has significant impact on the ability of the department to successfully accomplish the priorities identified in this document.

The Provost commended the “dual strength of leadership” of the Chair and the Dean. She praised both for having the interest of the college first, seeing the department as part of the college, being willing to work together, and being open to exchange different perspectives. The Chair also expressed appreciation for the support of the Associate Dean.