

**2016-17**  
**Revisit Team Report**  
**for Accreditation in Journalism**  
**and Mass Communications**

**Name of Accredited Unit:** Department of Media & Journalism

**Name of Institution:** University of South Dakota

**Name of Accredited Unit Administrator:** Michelle Van Maanen, Department Chair

**Date of Original Site Visit:** October 19-22, 2014

**Revisit Date:** October 13-14, 2016

**Revisit Team Chair:** Ford Risley, Associate Dean  
College of Communications, Penn State University

**Revisit Team Member:** Kathleen Richardson, Dean  
School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Drake University

**Revisit Team's Recommendation:** Re-Accreditation

**1. List each standard found in noncompliance and the reasons as cited in the original team report. (Add additional pages as necessary.)**

Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Reasons cited: The department lacks a written, systematic assessment plan and no assessment timetable. Assessment during the review period has been haphazard and generates little data. As a result, few improvements have been made to curriculum that can be traced to formal assessment. It is also unclear if all the professional competencies have been assessed.

Alumni and other professionals not used extensively or systematically in the assessment process.

**2. For each standard that had been in noncompliance, provide a summary of the team's findings regarding corrections. Provide an evaluation of compliance or noncompliance. (Present a separate narrative response for each of the standards in noncompliance. Add additional pages as necessary.)**

Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Summary of findings:

Since the 2014 site team visit, the Department has put considerable work into improving its assessment of learning outcomes. The faculty recognized that they lacked a systematic plan and that assessment had been haphazard. The Department now has a comprehensive plan in place. It uses four direct measures and two indirect measures. Since the 2014 visit, the Department has employed all the measures except for the internship and career fair employer evaluation survey. It is retooling several of the measures with the expectation of getting more information that can be used to improve the curriculum.

The four direct measures:

**Portfolio review.** The Department has long had a portfolio review process in which faculty have reviewed senior portfolios in their area of expertise and informally consulted on curriculum changes to address any perceived weaknesses. Beginning in fall 2016, faculty changed the process to bolster the portfolios to demonstrate capabilities across more areas and to incorporate outside review of the portfolios. All students will create online portfolios demonstrating competence in professional preparation (resume and references); writing and communication skills; editing and design, and a capstone project. Students will submit their portfolios the semester before their final semester, and faculty will score the portfolios and return to the students for revisions. Final portfolios will be submitted for review and scoring by members of the Department's professional advisory group. Results will be reported both to the faculty and to the advisory group for analysis and to identify areas for improvement.

**Grammar examination.** The Department has utilized a grammar examination for two decades. It recently enhanced the assessment of grammar and language skills, an area of concern also identified in the employer survey. Students must pass the Department's grammar exam or receive a passing grade in ENGL 203 (English Grammar) before enrolling in News Writing class, MCOM 210. Once enrolled in news writing, student knowledge is further evaluated, including pre- and post-tests in grammar and AP Style. Initial results of those tests indicated the need for continued emphasis on the basic elements of grammar, punctuation and style. Faculty members who teach the news writing class have collaborated on curricular changes to address those issues, including more quizzes designed to help students familiarize themselves with writing resources and more intentionally and systematically focusing on a key grammar and style issues through the course. The faculty member who teaches the majority of the Department's writing classes has taken a similar approach in other courses, and sees a cultural shift occurring in the Department because of the grammar tests.

**Senior exit exam.** The Department requires a senior exit exam that covers media history, law, theory and writing. The Department uses the exam as an assessment tool and last revised the exam in 2012. Faculty reviewed the results from the fall 2015 and spring 2016 exams, and concluded that the results, considered with other assessment tools, did not accurately reflect student learning. The Department is revising the exam to better assess the learning outcomes of the current core curriculum. Faculty members are also rethinking ways of administering the exam to encourage students to take it more seriously, since it currently is not graded.

**Internship report.** The Department requires that all students obtain hands-on work experience for credit, either through an internship or a practicum in student media. Internship supervisors provide feedback on student work through written evaluations that measure how students performed across a range of areas that reflect the Department's 11 learning objectives. Students themselves also provide feedback and submit a portfolio of their work. Faculty analysis of the spring and summer 2016 internship reports indicates that supervisors were highly satisfied with student performance, rating interns between 4 and 5 (on a 5-point scale) in most areas. Faculty recommend continuing the current internship practices, requirements and reporting measures because they provide meaningful feedback.

The two indirect measures:

**Employer Survey.** The Department decided to conduct a survey every three years of the perceptions of employers regarding the preparedness of graduates. The first survey was conducted in spring 2016. It found that employers were satisfied with graduates in the areas of basic competencies, technical skills, creative thinking, business ethics, and ability to work with others. They were also satisfied with the graduates in their professionalism, social media skills, and adapting to changes in technology. They were less satisfied with the graduates in their written communication skills, listening skills, leadership, and self-confidence. The response rate for the survey was 10 percent with the

largest number of responses coming from newspapers, radio and television stations. The Department hopes for a better response rate in the next survey.

**Internship & Career Fair Employer Evaluation.** The Department also decided to survey employer participants in the Department's annual Internship & Career fair. The fair has been held since 2013 and more than twenty-five employers attend. The first survey will be held at the October 2016 fair. Responses will be compiled annually to assess the preparedness of students for internships and jobs.

Although the Department has strengthened its measures for assessment, it is not clear from the plan that all the ACEJMC competencies are being assessed. The Department will also need to ensure that it has used the information gained from the measures to improve the curriculum.

**Overall evaluation:** Compliance

**3. Describe any other weaknesses cited by the site team in its report and any additional concerns cited by the Council in its letter to the unit regarding provisional status.**

- No strategic plan for the department
- Diversity plan has not been updated
- Lack of diverse faculty in terms of race and ethnicity

**4. For EACH of the other weaknesses cited by the site team or concerns cited by the Council, provide a summary of the team's findings regarding corrections.**

**No strategic plan for the department:** The Department has revised its mission statement and written a strategic plan.

The Department's new mission statement reads:

The mission of the Department of Media & Journalism is to serve students pursuing careers in journalism and strategic communication by providing a learning environment, promoting personal enrichment, developing students' professional potential, and encouraging the pursuit of excellence across cultures. The department also actively contributes to scholarly knowledge in mass communication, and enthusiastically serves the university, community and the general public.

The Department's strategic plan, which is designed to complement the University's plan, places a priority on revising strategies for learning assessment; creating partnerships within the university and with external stakeholders that achieve greater diversity in the student body; creating partnerships with regional high schools and

other institutions in order to increase enrollment; developing partnerships that increase and enhance external research funding; and sustaining activities that enhance the dedication to alumni and the industry.

The mission statement provides comprehensive objectives for the Department. The strategic plan establishes its current priorities, but does not provide strategies for reaching those goals nor a timeline for doing so.

**Diversity plan has not been updated:** The faculty updated the Department's diversity plan. The new plan reaffirms the Department's commitment to diversity and inclusiveness, in activities, practices and curriculum, and sets the Department's goals for diversifying the faculty and student body and specific strategies for accomplishing those goals.

**Lack of diverse faculty in terms of race and ethnicity:** The Department has been approved to hire one new faculty member and has a plan for attracting a diverse pool of applicants by means of national advertising; personal outreach by faculty using their professional networks; vetting of all top minority, international and female candidates; and enlisting the help of University resources.

## **5. Summary conclusion**

The Department has made good strides in improving its assessment mechanisms. A workable plan that should yield useful information to improve the curriculum is in place and underway. The Department needs to ensure that all competencies are being assessed regularly and there is clear evidence of loopback into programmatic improvements.

The Department has also addressed the other weaknesses identified during the site team visit. It has revised the mission statement, strategic plan and diversity plan. It is also actively seeking to diversify its faculty with a new hire. To be effective, the strategic plan needs strategies and a timetable for achieving the goals.

Students have great enthusiasm for the Department. They had special praise for the faculty, who they said work tirelessly to help them learn and find the best jobs possible. The students appreciated the Department's up-to-date facility, technology and equipment. They also valued the student media opportunities that the Department provides. The students said they would like for the Department to offer a wider variety of courses, especially skills courses, but they recognized that was difficult with a small faculty.