

2019-20
Revisit Team Report
for Accreditation in Journalism
and Mass Communications

Name of Accredited Unit: **School of Communication and Journalism**

Name of Institution: **Auburn University**

Name of Administrator: **Jennifer Wood Adams**

Date of Original Site Visit: **Jan. 28-31, 2018**

Revisit Date: **Jan. 28-29, 2020**

Revisit Team Chair: **Peter Bhatia, Editor and Vice President, Detroit Free Press**

Revisit Team Member: **Diana Martinelli, Dean, Reed College of Media, West Virginia University**

Revisit Team's Recommendation: **Reaccreditation**

1. List each standard found in noncompliance and the reasons as cited in the original team report.

Standard 3: Diversity and Inclusiveness

Reasons cited: Lack of diversity of full-time faculty, especially of domestic minorities. Lack of diversity of the student body, nowhere near that of the region from which the school draws. An absence of focused instruction and discussion on diversity in the syllabi of many courses, reflected in some of what we heard in meetings with students.

The school should develop new strategies for recruitment of faculty and students of color, particularly domestic minorities, that are more likely to have a successful result. On the faculty side, those could include consideration of a “professor of practice” designation, and far better use of adjunct positions to diversify faculty. On the student side, those could include new targeted scholarships, reinstatement of the high-school journalism workshop and other targeted outreach efforts by the school, the college and the university.

Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Reasons cited: Lack of programmatic assessment data for the Public Relations sequence. The 12 ACEJMC competencies are not clearly addressed by the PR sequence assessment. For both sequences, alumni and professionals are not included in a meaningful manner in the assessment process, beyond internship evaluations.

The school should revise their assessment instrument for the Public Relations sequence so it includes measures easily tied to the 12 ACEJMC values and competencies. Once the advisory boards are back in place, these individuals should be included in the program assessment to get a broader sense of student preparedness prior to them having internships and only relying on assessment supervisor reports.

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.

Standard 3: Diversity

Summary of findings:

LACK OF DIVERSITY OF FULL-TIME FACULTY, ESPECIALLY OF DOMESTIC MINORITIES: Since the original site team visited, the school has made four faculty hires. Two were replacements and two were new lines for lecturers. Of those four, three are of color. One, an African American female, serves as a lecturer and as diversity coordinator. She joined the unit in fall of 2018. The three who began work in fall 2019 are an assistant professor in journalism (African American female), a full professor in journalism (a Dutch citizen, black, but given that the Netherlands is 80 percent white, the school is counting him as a minority. The revisit team found this a reasonable interpretation.) and a lecturer in journalism -- sports production (white male).

As of a result of these hires the faculty went from 72 percent white and 27 percent international to 60 percent white, 20 percent of color, 20 percent international. This represents substantial progress in a short period of time. It’s important to acknowledge the school director’s fanatical devotion to improving the diversity of the faculty. She worked every angle, every publication, and scoured lists of freshly minted Ph.D.s. In the end, new faculty came to the school in different ways, but the director’s efforts were significant.

The school’s relatively new diversity coordinator (in her second academic year in the position) is making great impact. In addition to teaching courses with a strong diversity and inclusion focus, her initiatives are detailed below. She credits the faculty with being open to her suggestions to get more diversity matters into their classes (and syllabi). She calls her work a “kitchen sink” of working on curriculum, with students and with recruitment and retention.

She told a powerful story – when she was a visiting professor at Auburn before taking her current role -- of a white, female student telling her she had never had a black teacher before and she was raised to believe that blacks

had nothing to teach her. As the semester progressed, she said, the student eventually apologized and thanked her, and they remain in touch today.

Faculty Populations – 2019-2020 Full-time CMJN Faculty (n = 15)

Group	Female	% of total	Male	% of total	Race/Ethnicity % Total
White	5	33%	4	27%	60%
Asian	0	0	0	0	0
International	1	7%	2	13%	20%
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	0	0	0	0	0
Black/ African-American	2	13%	1	7%	20%
Hispanic/ Latino (any race)	0	0	0	0	0
Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0	0
Two or more races	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	8	53%	7	47%	100%

Faculty Populations – 2016-2017 Full-time CMJN Faculty (n = 11)

Group	Female	% of total	Male	% of total	Race/Ethnicity % Total
White	5	45%	3	27%	72%
Asian	0	0	0	0	0
International	1	9%	2	18%	27%
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	0	0	0	0	0
Black/ African-American	0	0	0	0	0%
Hispanic/ Latino (any race)	0	0	0	0	0
Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0	0
Two or more races	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	6	54%	5	45%	100%

LACK OF DIVERSITY OF THE STUDENT BODY, NOWHERE NEAR THAT OF THE REGION FROM WHICH THE SCHOOL DRAWS: Despite ambitious plans and a surge in activities at the university, college and school level, the school’s percentage of students of color has fallen slightly in the past two years. A new university vice president for enrollment and a new university strategic plan signify the university’s commitment to making progress and 2020 admissions, while still underway, shows growth in African American applicants and a 28 percent increase in early admits for 2020-21 at the university level. A stronger focus university-wide on in-state students is expected to increase minority enrollment in the school as well.

The school points out the difficulty SEC universities accredited with ACEJMC have in recruiting students of color. None come close to parity for African Americans in their service areas. The poor public school systems

and the inability to prepare students for higher education is a reality in Alabama. One report ranked its schools as the nation’s worst. For example, the school reports the composite ACT score average for 2019 Alabama high school students (regardless of race) was 18.9, compared to a national average of 20.7. The average ACT score of a student admitted to Auburn is 27. The provost noted the 2020 cohort may top 28 on the ACT.

Quoting from the school’s revisit report: “While a difference of 1.8 in the scores of Alabama vs. national average may not seem like much, ACT research estimates that an increase of 0.1 in the Alabama state average ACT composite scores for the 2019 graduating class would result in 148 more students enrolling in college. If Alabama reached the average national composite score of 20.7, 2,664 more students would enroll in college, based on ACT research.”

Despite the lack of success in raising enrollment numbers for students of color, a good-faith effort is underway to attract and retain more students of color. The vice president for enrollment says the university goal is to get to 60 percent in-state, 40 percent out-of-state. This hasn’t been achieved before. She says the university is being more strategic about who it admits – reading files to look beyond test scores and GPAs – to allow a wider reach for students without lowering quality. She embraces a no-excuses point of view.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT POPULATION – FALL 2019

Group	Males	Females	2019 % total in unit	2019 % total in institution
White	73	317	87.4%	78.9%
Black/ African-American	10	15	5.6%	5%
Hispanic/ Latino (any race)	3	10	2.9%	3.4%
Asian	1	3	.9%	2.4%
Two or more races	0	8	1.8%	2.6%
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	0	1	0.2%	0.3%
Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0%	.1%
International students (any race)	2	3	1.1%	7.1%
Unknown	0	0	0%	.3%
Total Population	93	356	446	22,364

Source: Auburn University Office of Institutional Research Fall 2019

The school lists these new initiatives on diversity with specific focus on growing minority enrollment:

- 2019 Auburn University Extraordinary Women’s Lecture – sponsored and organized the event featuring Tarana Burke, founder of the Me Too Movement on Sept. 26, 2019. The event was sold out.
- The university’s Critical Conversations lecture series – sponsored by Auburn’s Office of Inclusion and Diversity and specifically mentioned by students.
- Summer Journalism and Media 2.0 Camp – In summer 2019, the diversity coordinator and journalism adviser created a camp for rising 10th, 11th and 12th graders. Thirteen students attended the inaugural camp. Scholarships, which covered camp tuition and all fees, were awarded to five African American students and one female student with disabilities. Seven full scholarships will be offered to underrepresented and minority students for the 2020 camp. (Restoring the camp was a specific recommendation of the site team.)

Here are some of the school diversity coordinator’s recruitment and retention efforts:

- Established an open-door policy with the following identity groups and frequently meets with them individually – Auburn University Black Student Union, Latino Student Association, LGBT Community and Korean Korner to listen to their concerns.
- Routinely meets with current underrepresented and first-generation undergraduate and graduate students.
- Spoke at the Summer 2019 National Society of High School Scholars about diversity and inclusion, in Washington D.C.
- Organizes relevant diversity and recruitment experts to speak to the school’s faculty. Some of the presentations have included the associate provost and vice president of the university’s Office of Inclusion and Diversity, who spoke on cultural competency. The diversity coordinator also met with the school faculty to discuss recruitment and retention efforts for minority and underrepresented students.

- Met with Auburn High School and Booker T. Washington High School, a predominately African American school, in spring 2019 to discuss the school's majors and career opportunities in journalism.
- Collaborated with the Auburn University Outreach and hosted a Journalism and Multimedia Seminar for 12 Black Belt Alabama high schools in the summer of 2019. African American, Latino and students of European descent from these counties participated in a two-hour class about how to report and write for multimedia journalism. The Black Belt is the poorest, most rural part of Alabama. It covers west-central Alabama and gets its name from the color of the rich soil.
- Met with and addressed middle and high school student members of Youth Hope Builders in Tuskegee and Notasulga, Alabama, about the opportunities in the school. She also offered a two-hour class about how to report and write for multimedia journalism in the summer of 2019.

The school's diversity coordinator and diversity committee also have worked on initiatives and projects since the coordinator's hire, including:

- Becoming the Beloved Community – A community-wide dialogue, “Intentional Listening: How to Love your Neighbor in the Midst of Terror,” held at First Presbyterian Church on Sept. 12, 2019. Auburn University Latino, African American and Asian students voiced their feelings about what it means to be a person of color during current times. More than 300 people attended.
- Organizing a Study Abroad program focusing on *Researching, Retracing and Reporting Slavery and Racism from Brazil*. The program will take place in July 2020 in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, which was the first and last location of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in South America with connections to the United States.

ABSENCE OF FOCUSED INSTRUCTION AND DISCUSSION ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN COURSE SYLLABI: Examination of syllabi shows ample inclusion of diversity matters. Writing and reporting fundamentals classes include diversity units. So does sports journalism. The literary journalism course is built around the books *Hillbilly Elegy* and *Hidden Figures*.

Issues of diversity are part of instruction. One combined multimedia and features writing class is working to tell stories of a historically black part of Auburn with support from the Solutions Journalism program. One class requires students to establish beats on under-covered communities. One professor was going into class during the revisit preparing a timely conversation on the controversy over the cropping out of a black woman from an AP photo. PR students unanimously mentioned the large number of diverse guest speakers, both in person and videoconference/Skype.

Students give the school credit for forcing them out of their comfort zones -- “getting to know people as people,” as one put it. They call it an open place to discuss controversial issues, welcome and encouraging. It was suggested by students that there has been dramatic improvement in consideration of diversity and inclusion at the school.

CONSIDER A PROFESSOR OF PRACTICE DESIGNATION: The university created a professor of practice protocol in 2019. While limited in scope – no teaching outside of specific field expertise, no opportunity for advancement – it does now exist. The school plans to take advantage of this option when opportunities become available.

MORE TARGETED SCHOLARSHIPS: Scholarship opportunities appear plentiful at the university, college and school level. The director confirmed that the school would find a way to fund a qualified student of color who wouldn’t otherwise have the means to attend the university. The vice president for enrollment noted the university is increasing focus on need-based scholarships.

SUMMARY: While there remains work to do, progress has been made, especially in hiring faculty of color. It is unrealistic to expect significant enrollment change in the two-year provisional period, but a large number of new efforts are in place, especially at the university and school level. Time will tell, but early signs are positive. Progress in minority enrollment is a fair expectation when the next accrediting team arrives in four years.

Overall evaluation: COMPLIANCE

Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Summary of findings:

According to the 2018 site team summary, noted weaknesses related to assessment included the following:

ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT FOR THE PR SEQUENCE IS NOT TIED TO ACEJMC'S 12 VALUES AND COMPETENCIES: Findings of the 2020 revisit team found substantial progress in the PR sequence's assessment. For example, the Public Relations sequence has added student-learning outcomes to align directly with ACEJMC's 12 professional values and competencies. A curriculum map indicates the specific courses within the curriculum that support them and specifies which learning level -- introductory, reinforcement, or mastery -- applies in both required and elective courses. According to the curriculum map and a review of current syllabi, the required courses within the PR curriculum include each value and competency through the mastery level. The PR sequence also uses direct and indirect measures of assessment that mirror more closely those used by the Journalism sequence, as suggested by the previous site team. Specifically, the PR sequence's graduation survey wording now precisely reflects the 12 values and competencies.

LACK OF ASSESSMENT DATA FOR THE PR SEQUENCE FOR THE PERIOD UNDER REVIEW: The PR sequence provided data stemming from several direct and indirect measures. The PR sequence's new graduation survey found high student satisfaction on every ACEJMC value and competency, averaging at least a 4.23 on a five-point scale.

Another assessment measure used by both Journalism and PR includes scores from student internship supervisors. The 2018 PR major assessment report showed very high scores (4.56 to 4.94 on a five-point scale) from student supervisors (N=99) in the required internship course across all ACEJMC values and competencies, with the exception of history and law, which were omitted from the instrument, likely owing to the difficulty supervisors might have in ascertaining performance/knowledge in these areas.

Ironically, the PR sequence changed its internship supervisor survey in October 2018 to also align directly with Journalism's. As a result, competencies related only to writing (e.g. style, grammar, clarity, press releases, fact sheets), and technological/digital skills (e.g. multimedia, web, video, social media, Photoshop) are aligned specifically to ACEJMC values and competencies. However, the internship survey assesses other professional qualities (e.g. accepts criticism, is reliable, meets deadlines) as well as other student strengths and weaknesses. The college has a full-time internship coordinator who ensures the survey is distributed via Qualtrics at the end of each semester and summer and who makes the results available to the Public Relations and Journalism sequence heads accordingly. He also specifically alerts the sequence heads if he sees any results that seem concerning.

LACK OF INPUT FROM PROFESSIONALS AND ALUMNI IN THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS: The school has created formal advisory councils for Journalism and for Public Relations, respectively, which were not in place during the last site team visit. Both councils are comprised of numerous and diverse professionals, representing a wide range of media and public relations employers (e.g. nonprofit, agency, corporate, education, health care, political). As recommended by the last site team, both Journalism and Public Relations sequences now engage these alumni and professionals in directly assessing student work. On the public relations side, the professionals examined and used a rubric to score several assignments from the students' capstone and writing courses; in journalism, they reviewed early and late semester work in a magazine feature-writing course. Advisory council members also serve as guest speakers, giving students access to professional contacts and exposure to current professional issues.

PR faculty report meeting at least once a year to discuss assessment results and to share information about their classes. As a direct result of the last site team visit, the faculty have ensured ACEJMC student learning outcomes and diversity and inclusion activities and assignments are documented on syllabi. As a result of the assessment and reflection process (which included a focus group of graduating PR students in February 2018 that was coordinated through the university's Assessment Office), the Style and Design course has been revised to focus more on digital/technological tools and software, and PR students with whom the revisit team met unanimously indicated great satisfaction with this course.

Other curriculum changes implemented as a result of faculty meetings related to assessment and reflection include the PR campaigns class, which has shifted to allow students to choose their own clients as a way to afford diverse client options and to help ensure better student engagement and enthusiasm throughout the project. As a result, student teams have recently taken on work for organizations related to immigration, literacy and Auburn's Black Student Union. The case studies class also has been updated to more intentionally emphasize ethics, diversity and inclusion.

STRUCTURAL AND INSTRUCTIONAL PROBLEMS IN THE PUBLIC RELATIONS CURRICULUM, LEADING SOME STUDENTS TO BE ILL-PREPARED FOR INTERNSHIPS AND EMPLOYMENT:

PR seniors reported feeling positive about their educational experience in the school overall and believe they are prepared and are confident to enter the workforce when they graduate in May. Students indicated they were able to obtain the classes they needed to progress toward graduation in a timely matter, and they were enthusiastic about their internship experiences. Positive internship supervisor reports and the revision of the Style and Design course, which is now often available to juniors and not delayed until students' senior years, also reflect positive progress in professional preparation.

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.

Those figuring in Standards 3 and 9 are discussed above.

- A striking lack of diversity, especially domestic minorities, among full-time faculty, mitigated only modestly by adjuncts.
- An overwhelmingly white student body that does not begin to reflect the population of Alabama or the region.
- Absence of focused instruction and discussion on diversity and inclusion in course syllabi.
- Structural and instructional problems in the Public Relations curriculum, leading some students to be ill-prepared for internships and employment.
- Assessment instrument for the PR sequence is not tied to ACEJMC's 12 values and competencies.
- Lack of assessment data for the PR sequence for the period under review.
- Lack of input from professionals and alumni in the assessment process.

In addition:

- Uneven student advising services in the College of Liberal Arts.
- Limited community involvement by faculty beyond the University, at least in what is reflected in the self-study.

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

- **A striking lack of diversity, especially domestic minorities, among full-time faculty, mitigated only modestly by adjuncts.**

This area of weakness was addressed in #2, Standard 3

- **An overwhelmingly white student body that does not begin to reflect the population of Alabama or the region.**

This area of weakness was addressed in #2, Standard 3.

- **Absence of focused instruction and discussion on diversity and inclusion in course syllabi.**

This area of weakness was addressed in #2, Standard 3

- **Structural and instructional problems in the Public Relations curriculum, leading some students to be ill-prepared for internships and employment.**

This area of weakness was addressed in #2, Standard 9

- **Assessment instrument for the PR sequence is not tied to ACEJMC's 12 values and competencies.**

This area of weakness was addressed in #2, Standard 9

- **Lack of assessment data for the PR sequence for the period under review.**

This area of weakness was addressed in #2, Standard 9

- **Lack of input from professionals and alumni in the assessment process.**

This area of weakness was addressed in #2, Standard 9

- **Uneven student advising services in the College of Liberal Arts.**

In summer 2018, the college revised its advising procedures. Now, a student who declares Journalism or Public Relations as a major is assigned an adviser from the school during freshman orientation. Majors keep that same adviser from freshman year through graduation. Students enthusiastically report this change as a positive and praise the school advisers as problem-solvers and for keeping them on track to graduation on time.

- **Limited community involvement by faculty beyond the university, at least in what is reflected in the self-study.**

Based on CVs, the faculty are extensively involved in service to the university, their respective fields, the local community and in the state.

5. Summary conclusion and recommendation:

The effort on diversity is palpable, has had great impact and is making a difference in the day-to-day operations of the school. Students feel it and appreciate it. Curriculum has become more inclusive. And it begins and ends with four faculty hires since the original site-team visit, three of whom are of color. As both the dean of the college and the provost noted, having a diverse faculty is essential to student recruitment. It is important here to note the dean's commitment to diversity and his commitment to salary equity for the faculty in helping this process forward. With the dedicated efforts of the university and led by the vice president for enrollment, expectations for improvement in the overall enrollment of color at the university are real.

It is clear the Public Relations sequence is teaching students the 12 professional values and competencies set forth by ACEJMC, as evidenced by its curriculum map, syllabi, internship evaluations, and senior exit surveys. The advisory boards' ratings contribute additional information about some values and competencies, such as critical thinking, AP style, writing, grammar, etc. Prior to future assessment and accreditation self-studies, it is recommended the sequences map exactly how/in what ways each one of the 12 values and competencies are to be assessed, and that any resultant curricular changes are well-documented.

Auburn's School of Communication and Journalism has made important strides on both diversity and assessment. While that is to be commended, the leadership of the school, college and university realize this is a long-term journey.

The school is worthy of reaccreditation.