

Report of ACEJMC Evaluation

Undergraduate program
2021-2022

Name of Institution: University of North Alabama

Name and Title of Chief Executive Officer: Dr. Kenneth Kitts, President

Name of Unit: Department of Communication

Name and Title of Administrator: Dr. Patricia Sanders, Chair

Date of 2021-2022 Accrediting Visit: October 17-20, 2021

Date of the previous accrediting visit: October 26-29, 2014

Recommendation of the previous site visit team: (Initial) Accreditation

Previous decision of the Accrediting Council: (Initial) Accreditation

Recommendation by 2021-2022 Visiting Team: Provisional Accreditation

Prepared and submitted by:

Team Chair

Name and Title: Dr. Dale Cressman, Associate Director
Organization/School: Brigham Young University

Signature _____

Team Member

Name and Title: Dr. Helen Katz, Executive Vice President
Organization/School: Publicis Media

Signature _____

Team Member

Name and Title: Dr. David Davies, Professor
Organization/School: University of Southern Mississippi

Signature _____

Please indicate if team members participated on site or virtually only:

On site: _____ Drs. Cressman and Davies

Virtually: _____ Dr. Katz

PART I: General information

Name of Institution: University of North Alabama

Name of Unit: Department of Communication

Year of Visit: 2021

1. Check regional association by which the institution now is accredited.

- Higher Learning Commission
- Middle States Commission on Higher Education
- New England Commission on Higher Education
- Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
- Southern Association of Colleges and School Commission on Colleges
- Western Association of Schools and Colleges

If the unit seeking accreditation is located outside the United States, provide the name(s) of the appropriate recognition or accreditation entities:

2. Indicate the institution’s type of control; check more than one if necessary.

- Private
- Public
- Other (specify)

3. Provide assurance that the institution has legal authorization to provide education beyond the secondary level in your state. It is not necessary to include entire authorizing documents. Public institutions may cite legislative acts; private institutions may cite charters or other authorizing documents.

The University of North Alabama’s authorization to provide education beyond the secondary level in the state of Alabama is established in the Code of Alabama 1975, Title 16 Education, Chapter 51 University of North Alabama, Sections 16-51-1 through 16-51-15.

Code of Alabama 1975 link:

<http://alisondb.legislature.state.al.us/alison/CodeOfAlabama/1975/Coatoc.htm>

Link to Chapter 51 University of North Alabama:

<http://alisondb.legislature.state.al.us/alison/CodeOfAlabama/1975/130528.htm>

4. Has the journalism/mass communications unit been evaluated previously by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications?

- Yes
- No

If yes, give the date of the last accrediting visit: October 26-29, 2014

5. When was the unit or sequences within the unit first accredited by ACEJMC?

2015

6. Provide the unit's mission statement. Statement should give date of adoption and/or last revision.

The department shares the College of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering's commitments to its students, expecting them "to graduate with an enhanced ability to acquire knowledge, to think clearly and critically, to communicate effectively, to respect and understand diversity, to appreciate aesthetic values, and to possess the skills necessary for a career and for lifelong learning."

The department's emphasis is on giving students the opportunity to develop ethical communication competency through academic and artistic performance, study, internships, and co-curricular involvement in university, professional, and community activities. Faculty and department administration are expected to contribute to this student mission through academic leadership, quality teaching and advising, and participation in scholarship, creative presentation, and community projects of local and global significance. (Revised August 2019)

7. What are the type and length of terms?

Fall and Spring semesters of 8 or 16 weeks

Summer sessions of 4 or 8 weeks

May and Winter intersessions of 2 weeks

8. Check the programs offered in journalism/mass communications:

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Ph.D. degree

9. List the specific undergraduate degrees as well as the majors or sequences being reviewed by ACEJMC. *Indicate online degrees.

Bachelor of Science, Mass Communication

Bachelor of Arts, Mass Communication

**10. Credit hours required by the university for an undergraduate degree:
(Specify semester-hour or quarter-hour credit.)**

120 credit-hours (semester-hours)

**11. Give the number of credit hours students may earn for internship experience.
(Specify semester-hour or quarter-hour credit.)**

Students may choose internship sections of 1, 2, or 3 credit-hours (semester-hours) with a maximum total of 6 internship credit-hours allowed.

12. List each professional journalism or mass communications sequence or specialty offered and give the name of the person in charge.

<u>Name of Sequence or Specialty</u>	<u>Person in Charge</u>
Journalism & Digital Media Production	Patricia Sanders (as department chair)
Public Relations	Patricia Sanders (as department chair)

13. Number of full-time students enrolled in the institution:

More than 8,361 students were enrolled at UNA as of the Spring 2021 semester.

14. Number of undergraduate majors in the accredited unit, by sequence and total (if the unit has pre-major students, list them as a single total):

<u>Name of Sequence or Specialty</u>	<u>Undergraduate majors</u>
Mass Communication (Public Relations)	74
Mass Communication (Journalism & Digital Media Prod)	57
Total	131
(As of 4/26/21)	

15. Number of students in each section of all skills courses (newswriting, reporting, editing, photography, advertising copy, broadcast news, public relations writing, etc.). List enrollment by section for the term during which the visit will occur and the preceding term. Submit two semesters with the self-study, and update as needed when the site team arrives on site. Attach separate pages if necessary. Include a separate list for online skills courses, which also must meet the 20-1 ratio. (The Council has ruled that campaigns courses are exempt from the 20-1 ratio.)

Spring 2021

Prefix	Number	Section	Course Title	Students
COM	215	1	Media Writing	18
COM	215	2	Media Writing	12
COM	215	3	Media Writing	18
COM	215	I01	Media Writing	1
COM	243	I01	Aural-Visual Production	18
COM	243	I02	Aural-Visual Production	18
COM	317	1	Digital and Social Media	17
COM	342	1	TV Production & Performance	10
COM	356	1	Advanced Reporting	11
COM	374	1	Public Relations Cases	16
COM	390	1	Public Relations Writing	19
COM	410	1	Layout and Design I	15
COM	410	2	Layout and Design I	21
COM	410	3	Layout and Design I	13
COM	411	1	Layout and Design II	20
COM	441	1	Creative Audio Prod	9
COM	442	1	Public Relations Campaigns	13
COM	460	1	Advanced Radio-TV Production	5

COM	470	1	Media Management and Diversity	14
COM	475	I01	Crisis Mgt & Comm. Relations	1
COM	499	1	Internship	6
COM	499	2	Internship	8
COM	499	3	Internship	8
COM	499	4	Internship	1

Fall 2021

Prefix	Number	Section	Course Title	Students
COM	215	1	Media Writing	18
COM	215	2	Media Writing	7
COM	243	1	Aural-Visual Production	11
COM	243	2	Aural-Visual Production	16
COM	317	1	Digital and Social Media	17
COM	326	1	Broadcast News Writing & Prod.	18
COM	341	1	Radio Production & Performance	16
COM	342	1	TV Production & Performance	10
COM	374	1	Public Relations Cases	16
COM	390	1	Public Relations Writing	16
COM	410	1	Layout and Design I	17
COM	410	2	Layout and Design I	11
COM	411	1	Layout and Design II	14
COM	442	1	Public Relations Campaigns	14
COM	460	1	Advanced Radio-TV Production	2
COM	499	1	Internship	2
COM	499	2	Internship	1
COM	499	3	Internship	6

16. Total expenditures planned by the unit for the 2021–2022 academic year:

In 2019, 2020, and 2021, the Department of Communication received \$17,668 resulting in a 0% increase or decrease.

Give percentage increase or decrease in three years:

Total expenditures should be similar to the 2020-2021 academic year approximating \$16,000 spent.

Amount expected to be spent this year on full-time faculty salaries:

The Department of Communication is expected to spend \$787,708 on full-time faculty salaries.

17. List name and rank of all full-time faculty in the accredited unit in fall 2021. (Full-time faculty refers to those defined as such by the university.) Identify those not teaching because of leaves, sabbaticals, etc.

Dr. Patricia Sanders, Professor
 Dr. Butler Cain, Professor
 Dr. Beth Garfrerick, Associate Professor
 Ms. Lisa Darnell, Assistant Professor
 Dr. Justin Bergh, Assistant Professor
 Dr. Litzy Galarza, Assistant Professor
 Dr. Timothy Worley, Assistant Professor
 Ms. Stephanie Montgomery, Senior Lecturer
 Ms. Betsy Heckert, Lecturer
 Ms. Tosha-Paige Whitten, Lecturer
 Mr. Jay Hillis, Visiting Lecturer
 Dr. Travis Cronan, Visiting Lecturer

18. List names of part-time/adjunct faculty teaching at least one course in fall 2021. Also list names of part-time faculty teaching spring 2021. (If your school has its accreditation visit in spring 2022, also provide the spring 2022 adjunct list when the team arrives for the visit.)

Spring and Fall 2021 Adjunct Instructors

Ms. Andrea Becker (Spring 2021 only)
 Ms. Laura Dangerfield
 Mr. Matthew Drumheller
 Ms. Leah Elms
 Ms. Maddisun Fowler
 Ms. Christa Glasgow
 Ms. Karen Hodges (Spring 2021 only)
 Ms. Jacqueline Llewellyn
 Dr. Amelia Sanders
 Ms. Tosha-Paige Whitten
 Ms. Cathy Wood

19. Schools on the semester system:

For each of the last two academic years, please give the number and percentage of graduates who earned 72 or more semester hours outside of journalism and mass communications.

Year	72 or more semester hours outside of journalism and mass communications		
	Total Graduates	Number in Compliance	Percent
2020-2021 academic year	42	41	97.6%
2019-2020 academic year	40	38	95%

PART II — Standard 1: Mission, Governance and Administration

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

a). The unit has a written mission statement and a written strategic or long-range plan that provides vision and direction for its future, identifies needs and resources for its mission and goals and is supported by university administration outside the unit. The unit annually updates its data on the ACEJMC searchable database website (<https://lookup.acejmc.org>).

The University of North Alabama has a long history as a teaching institution, although in recent years it has increased its emphasis on scholarly productivity. The Department of Communication resides within the College of Arts, Sciences and Engineering. It is one of 19 departments. The department has been in existence for approximately 40 years and has undergone significant changes recently. At the time of its initial accreditation in 2014-2015, it was known as the Department of Communications and Theatre. In 2016, Theatre was removed from the department. Subsequently, programs were renamed, curricula were revised, and the independent student media operation was moved into the department. The Cinema program was removed in 2019 and the unit was renamed the Department of Communications. At the time of the site visit it is known by its newest name, the Department of Communication. The university claims it is the fastest growing university in the state of Alabama. However, similar to other universities, the number of undergraduate students has declined, although this decline has been offset by an increase in the number of graduate students.

The unit has a clear mission statement centered on student learning, “expecting them to graduate with an enhanced ability to acquire knowledge, to think clearly and critically, to communicate effectively, to respect and understand diversity, to appreciate aesthetic values, and to possess the skills necessary for a career and for lifelong learning.” The statement further emphasizes “giving students the opportunity to develop ethical communication competency through academic and artistic performance, study, internships and co-curricular involvement in university, professional, and community activities.” The mission further states that members of the faculty and administration “contribute to this student mission through academic leadership, quality teaching and advising, and participation in scholarship, creative presentation, and community projects of local and global significance.”

The strategic plan appears to be more of a report, in which the unit responds to university goals and aspirations, as well as college aspirations, for five university themes: Transformational Student Experience, Academic Excellence and Innovation, Diversity and Inclusion, Financial Stability and Institutional Identity. For each dimension the unit identifies courses, teaching and learning experiences, or facility improvements that will contribute to the successful attainment of the university goals and aspirations. This report is made to the college each summer. However, it is not tied to department budgeting or funding.

The unit had not entered data on the searchable database prior to the visit, but did so during the site visit.

b). The unit has policies and procedures for substantive faculty governance that ensure faculty oversight of educational policy and curriculum.

The unit has faculty and student handbooks to supplement policies elucidated in the catalog. The faculty handbook runs a little over 100 pages long and covers everything from personnel regulations, to criteria

for appointment, promotion and tenure, leaves, salary schedules, instructional procedures and more. The handbook describes standing committees that provide for faculty governance at the university level. The current version was updated in September 2021.

The department currently has four standing committees: Research and Scholarships, Recruitment, Activities, and DFWI (D grades, Fails, Withdrawals and Incompletes) and Retention. During the past several years it has also convened committees for professional development and studies abroad. Committee work was not carried out during 2020-2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Department meetings are typically held monthly and all full-time faculty are able to vote on matters of shared governance, such as curriculum.

Department faculty members serve in various positions at the university level. Two faculty members have served on the Faculty Senate; another serves as a liaison for general education assessment. The immediate past chair is Assistant Vice Provost for International Affairs and Director of Education Abroad.

c). The unit's administration provides effective leadership within the unit and effectively represents it in dealings with university administration outside the unit and constituencies external to the university.

The unit has undergone numerous leadership changes since the last site team visit. After UNA's initial ACEJMC accreditation in 2015, the chair left for another university and was replaced by interim chair Jason Flynn for the 2015-2016 academic year. Professor Flynn was replaced in Fall 2016 by Dr. Butler Cain, who was chosen through an external search. Dr. Cain served from 2016-2021. In Fall 2016, during Dr. Cain's first year as chair, Professor Flynn died suddenly. Department records retained by Professor Flynn, during his year as interim chair, were never recovered. The current chair, Dr. Pat Sanders, was appointed on August 1, 2021, less than three months before the site team's visit.

Though new to department leadership, Dr. Sanders is an experienced full professor who has the confidence of the dean. Not only did she participate in an administrative fellows program administered by the Provost's Office, but shortly before the site visit she was chosen for the university's National Alumni Faculty Service Award. Prior to her teaching career, Dr. Sanders had extensive experience as a broadcast news director. However, by Dr. Sanders' choice, she is the interim chair and there is no indication whether she will continue in this capacity beyond 2021-2022.

The chair has sole discretion over the department's budget, though she affords transparency to her faculty colleagues.

The chair carries a 2-2 teaching load.

d). The institution and/or the unit defines and uses a process for selecting and evaluating its administrators.

Dr. Cain, the immediate previous chair, was appointed in 2016, following an external search. When he was appointed as an assistant vice provost in late 2021, the dean asked department faculty members to provide a ranked list of their preferred internal candidates. She then selected Dr. Sanders, who agreed to serve one year, on an interim basis.

Each year the dean evaluates the chair's performance. Additionally, the dean's office annually solicits feedback from the faculty. The chair is eligible for an additional four-year term.

e). Faculty, staff and students have avenues to express concerns and have them addressed.

Faculty and students can address concerns or complaints to the department chair. If the dispute involves a grade, students can go to a website to initiate an appeal. If further mediation is required, concerns may be resolved by the associate deans of the college and, if needed, the dean. When a neutral party is required, faculty and students also have access to a university-level ombudsman.

The department says it keeps records of student complaints and appeals. However, the site team was not made aware of them until the conclusion of the visit, after the report was written, and, therefore, was not able to access them.

SUMMARY:

The department has its fourth chair since the last site visit. The current chair had been in her job just two months at the time of the site visit. Nevertheless, she appears to have the confidence of the faculty and the dean. Additionally, the chair is an experienced professional and academic who expresses confidence in her ability to lead. However, she is formally the interim chair and there is no indication as to whether she will continue beyond this year.

Department faculty serve prominently at the university level. The faculty meets monthly and votes on all curriculum matters. The chair has sole discretion over the department budget.

The strategic plan seems more like a report than a plan and is not linked to its budget. However, it does describe the goals and aspirations of the department and is linked to the department's mission.

There is substantial evidence of faculty governance.

Overall evaluation compliance/non-compliance: **COMPLIANCE**

PART II — Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

Discussions of indicators b, c and e must describe and evaluate the individual academic sequences in the unit.

a). The unit requires that students take a minimum of 72 semester credit hours (or 104 quarter credit hours) required for a baccalaureate degree outside of journalism and mass communications and meet the liberal arts and sciences-general education requirements of the institution. ACEJMC expects at least 95 percent of the graduating classes in the two academic years preceding an accreditation visit to meet this requirement.

The department has two accredited mass communication sequences – Journalism & Digital Media Production, and Public Relations. (A third sequence, Communication Studies, is not accredited.) In each degree students must complete from 44 to 46 credit hours in the major; 41 hours in the General Education Curriculum; 12 hours in additional liberal arts courses; and 21 to 23 hours of electives. In total, students must complete 120 credit hours to earn their degree. Students must earn 72 credit hours outside of the major. The department's self-study notes that the unit does not approve graduation requests for students with fewer than 72 hours outside of the major.

b). The unit provides a balance between theoretical and conceptual courses, professional skills courses, and courses that integrate theory and skills to achieve the range of student competencies listed by the Council.

All students complete the following core courses:

- COM 205, Communication In A Global Age (3 hours)
- COM 215, Media Writing (3 hours)
- COM 243, Aural/visual Production (3 hours)
- COM 303W, Communication Research Methods (3 hours)
- COM 314, Communication Theory (3 hours)
- COM 400W, Communication Law and Ethics (3 hours)
- COM 420, Portfolio Preparation (3 hours)
- COM 499, Internship (1-3 hours)

Public Relations – The Public Relations curriculum covers all the basics necessary for a career in this field. Once students have completed their core courses, they take six required PR classes (Basic Reporting, Foundations of Public Relations, Public Relations Cases, Public Relations Writing, Layout and Design, and Public Relations Campaigns). They then take two PR electives, choosing from a list of three.

Journalism & Digital Media Production – Similarly, the Journalism & Digital Media Production (JDMP) major covers all of the basics. Once students have completed their core courses, they take five required JDMP courses (Digital and Social Media, Broadcast Newswriting and Producing, Radio Production and Performance, TV Production and Performance, and Advanced Reporting). Then they pick three electives from among a list of six courses.

In both majors, there is a balance between theoretical and professional courses thanks to the core the sequences share.

As part of a university initiative, the unit revised its department learning outcomes to specify what it expects of its graduates. The learning outcomes cover seven areas – Professional writing; Professional practice; Research; Theory; Law and ethics; Communication and society; and Diversity. The department's self-study said that the new learning outcomes reflected ACEJMC's learning outcomes, but it was unclear from the self-study which departmental learning outcomes were reflective of which ACEJMC outcomes. In response to questions from the site team, the department provided a listing specifying how its learning outcomes were matched to ACEJMC outcomes.

c). Instruction, whether on-site or online, is demanding and current, and is responsive to professional expectations of digital, technological and multimedia competencies. Achievements in teaching and learning are recognized and valued.

Syllabuses in both sequences are demanding and reflect current trends in media practice.

Public Relations – The PR curriculum continues to evolve. A second Layout and Design course was added when faculty realized their students would benefit from greater knowledge of design software such as Adobe. More recently, a PR Agency course was approved (starting Spring 2022), which will involve students creating a campaign for a real-world client. While it will begin as an elective, all the PR faculty are excited at the many opportunities this will provide to students, including boosting their pre-graduation experience, giving more chances to participate in regional or national PR student competitions, and expanding connections with local or regional businesses and non-profits.

Journalism & Digital Media Production – The curriculum requires students to be capable content creators in a range of digital platforms. Students have access to two computer labs of 20 computers each, and both labs have access to the Adobe Creative Suite and the wide range of programs it provides. In addition, purchases of hardware since the last accreditation have given students access to a wide array of equipment, including a TriCaster Mini multimedia production unit, studio cameras, and mixing boards.

The university, which was founded as a teacher's college, places an emphasis on good teaching, as does the department. The unit's self-study includes an impressive list of teaching-related achievements by the faculty, including scholarly articles on teaching, design of new courses, workshops offered and attended, and leadership of study abroad programs. To cite just one example, the current department chair, Dr. Pat Sanders, won a teaching award two years ago from the local chapter of the National Leadership Society. In a faculty peer-reviewed competition, the Broadcast Education Association Festival of Media Arts awarded Best of Competition, for Audio/Long-form Production, to Dr. Sanders for her podcast, "This Prof Life: Women of Color in Higher Education."

d). Student-faculty classroom ratios facilitate effective teaching and learning in all courses; the ratio in skills and laboratory sections, whether on-site or online, should not exceed 20-1. (Campaigns classes are exempt from the 20-1 ratio.)

The department adheres closely to standards for student-faculty classroom ratios. For the 2020-2021 academic year, for example, only one course exceeded the 20-1 ratio, a Layout and Design course that

had 21 students. Beyond that, only a few classes had the maximum of 20 students, and a few sections had just seven, eight, and nine students. Most classes are small in the department, an observation confirmed by site team members' visits to individual classes.

e). The unit advocates and encourages opportunities for internship and other professional experiences outside the classroom and supervises and evaluates them when it awards academic credit.

Public Relations – The internship course has become one of the cornerstones of the PR program. There are 15-20 opportunities available each semester, and companies routinely come back seeking interns from the program. It is well organized, with a clear structure and purpose, and thorough evaluation system in place.

Students in the PR major can also get involved in Lion PR. For an annual fee of \$100, they gain membership to four professional or pre-professional organizations. These include the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA); Public Relations Society of America - Alabama Chapter; Public Relations Council of Alabama (PRCA); and Southern Public Relations Foundation (SPRF). Three faculty members support these activities, taking students to meetings and encouraging them to network. While students acknowledged the value of the PR opportunities, they also noted that Lion PR requires a significant amount of money (for the membership fee) and the time commitment to attend meetings in other cities, which can be obstacles for students who have full-time jobs and/or are paying their way through school. As one commented, "You cannot work and participate in the clubs."

Several of the PR faculty mentioned a desire to create a Master's degree program, separate and apart from the Health Communications Masters that is already under discussion. There is a belief that a PR Masters would bring many loyal graduates back to campus for this advanced degree, helping to cement the greater focus on research that the Department has embraced.

Journalism & Digital Media Production – All journalism students must complete an internship. As with the PR internship, the program is well organized, with a clear structure and purpose, and a thorough evaluation system. Moreover, journalism students have the opportunity to work in student media, including the student newspaper, *The Flor-Ala*, and the *Flow*, a new magazine published each semester that was inaugurated in 2020 to replace the yearbook. Students estimated that about 30 students are working in student media at any one time.

Students must submit a written application to get credit for their internship. During the meeting with students, some concerns were expressed that students felt "very much on your own" in securing an internship, and one commented that he/she "was able to find more internship opportunities from UAH [University of Alabama-Huntsville] than here at UNA." Some students expressed frustration that the COVID-19 epidemic had caused their internships to be scaled back.

COVID-19 pandemic addendum

Similar to other universities, UNA shifted to online instruction at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. It later shifted to a hybrid model. The university has a comprehensive Recovery Plan. At the time of the site visit, masks were mandatory in all buildings. The site team noted that all faculty and students complied with the mask mandate.

SUMMARY:

The department offers an impressive array of courses despite its small size. There is a balance between theoretical and conceptual courses. Based on information provided to the site team (but not in the self-study), the department is ensuring that its curriculum is covering the ACEJMC values and competencies. Students have ample opportunities to hone their skills outside of the classroom, either through internships, work in student media, or in participation in student organizations.

Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: **COMPLIANCE**

PART II — Standard 3: Diversity and Inclusiveness

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

a). The unit has a written diversity plan for achieving an inclusive curriculum, a diverse faculty and student population, and a supportive climate for working and learning and for assessing progress toward achievement of the plan. The diversity plan should focus on domestic minority groups and, where applicable, international groups. The written plan must include the unit's definition of diversity and identify the under-represented groups.

The document provided by the unit is characterized as a plan, but more closely resembles a statement. Revised in August 2019, the document takes an expansive view of diversity. Rather than focusing on domestic minority groups, it “Embraces the diversity of cultural backgrounds, personal characteristics and life situations represented in this community; values an environment for the free expression of ideas, opinions, thoughts, and differences in people; and respects the rights, dignity, and property of all.” The document’s definition of diversity includes “age, culture, ethnicity, gender, nationality, national origin, political affiliation, physical attributes, race, religion, sexual orientation, and/or socio-economic status.”

The department proposes reaching its goal of creating, promoting, and retaining a diverse culture through recruitment and retention of diverse faculty and students and developing courses that promote diversity. Though the plan does not propose how it would measure success, it provides brief strategies described below.

b). The unit’s curriculum fosters understanding of issues and perspectives that are inclusive in terms of domestic concerns about gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. The unit’s curriculum includes instruction in issues and perspectives relating to mass communications across diverse cultures in a global society.

In order to promote diversity in the curriculum, the department proposes to develop material in existing courses “to increase opportunities for gaining knowledge and understanding the unique history, contributions, and perspectives of underrepresented groups.”

The unit identifies nine courses which include learning related to diversity and inclusion:

- Communication in a Global Age (required for all majors)
- Communication Theory and Public Interest (required for all majors)
- Public Relations Cases (required for PR students)
- Communication Law and Ethics (required for all majors)
- Media Management and Diversity (required for Journalism and Digital Media Production students)
- Interpersonal Communication (elective)
- Gender Communication (elective)
- Media History (elective)
- Global Media Systems (elective)

The department is successfully addressing international diversity. It created a course in Intercultural Communication and Global Media Systems. The department is also innovating with a Collaborative

Online International Learning initiative. Dr. Litzzy Galarza is scheduled to co-teach a course in spring 2022 with a colleague from Universidad Marista de Guadalajara, in Mexico. Students from both schools will have a common course experience online. Additionally, the department is active in experiential learning abroad. Since being accredited it has led or co-led studies abroad in China, New Zealand, Spain, and the UK. Additional programs have been put on hold because of the pandemic.

An examination of syllabuses found that several cited diversity as a learning outcome, however only one fall syllabus was found to have specific learning activities explicitly linked to diversity. Another class in the spring had diversity activities that occupied much of the second half of the semester. Although students could cite instances in which racial and gender diversity was discussed in classes, they portray it as a fairly rare occurrence. Public relations students said they've had several discussions around diversity, while students in digital production referenced recent classes that focused on women, Latinas and radio.

When asked by the site team whether members of the LGBTQ+ community feel welcome, several students suggested that diversity is promoted in word only. Another student said she didn't feel discriminated against so much as she didn't feel included.

c). The unit demonstrates effective efforts to recruit women and domestic minority faculty and professional staff and, where feasible, recruits international faculty and professional staff.

In order to recruit and retain domestic minority faculty and staff the unit ensures minority representation on search committees. It also says it promotes "efforts to increase the number of qualified minority and female applicants in faculty and staff searches." However, it does not provide details as to how it does that.

The full-time faculty is diverse: one Black female, one Latina, and five white women. The balance of the faculty includes two non-white males. The part-time faculty is 91% female.

During the past accreditation cycle, four men and two women were hired. However, the university does not require that the race or ethnicity of candidates is captured. Likewise, information regarding the hiring of adjuncts was provided in aggregate form, only dating back to 2009, making it impossible to discern the makeup of the hiring pool during the current accreditation cycle. Thus, the site team found evidence on recent searches to be incomplete.

Although students appreciate the current faculty, there is a desire for more diversity. Said one Black male: "It would be good to have a professor that looks like me."

d). The unit demonstrates effective efforts to help recruit and retain a student population reflecting the diversity of the population eligible to enroll in institutions of higher education in the region or population it serves, with special attention to recruiting under-represented groups.

In order to recruit a more diverse student body the department has visited high schools with high concentrations of students of color and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These visits have been interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The department plans to return to this practice when possible, as well as leverage university resources to provide "financial and experiential incentives" to attend UNA.

The department has a \$500 scholarship award designated for retaining minority students. It was awarded

in 2017, 2018, and 2019. However, there were no applicants in 2020 or 2021.

When the site team met with a group of 26 students, there were two Black women, four Black men, and one Latino. When asked whether it feels as though they are in an inclusive department, a Black woman responded, “No, I’m usually the only Black girl in the class most of the time.”

e) The unit has a climate that is free of harassment and all forms of discrimination, in keeping with the acceptable cultural practices of the population it serves, accommodates the needs of those with disabilities, and values the contributions of all forms of diversity. Accreditation site visit teams will apply this standard in compliance with applicable federal and state laws and regulations, as well as the laws of the countries in which non-U.S. institutions are located.

Not dissimilar to other universities, the department has twice encountered situations in which students were engaged in offensive speech. However, department leadership and faculty were quick to address these incidents.

All faculty members have completed a university-mandated course, “Diversity: Inclusion in the Modern Workplace.” The department has also adopted a “Safe Place” statement to delineate its classrooms and offices as a safe environment for “all aspects of people, including race, ethnicity, gender identity, socio-economic background, expression, age, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, and ability.”

The department successfully advocated for ADA compliant building modifications, making way for planned access to a second-floor restroom, addition of rails on a sloped hallway, installation of an elevator, and room numbers in Braille.

SUMMARY:

The unit has an expansive definition of diversity and a vague diversity plan, lacking specific targets defining success. Though the university is predominately white, the faculty is comparatively diverse. Students in the major are more diverse than the university and either above or at par with diverse populations, depending on the county. Students of color and those in the LGBTQ+ community express a desire for a more diverse faculty and more authentic demonstrations of inclusion.

The department has classes that address diversity, though syllabuses mostly lack specificity as to how they address the topic. The department’s global initiatives are wide-ranging, innovative and ambitious for a program this size.

Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: **COMPLIANCE**

Table 6. Faculty Populations, Full-time and Part-time

Show numbers of female, male, minority, white and international faculty members and the percentages they represent of the unit's total faculty. (Report international faculty the same way the university reports them.)

Academic year: 2020 – 2021 Full-time faculty

Group	Female	% of total faculty	Male	% of total faculty
Black/African-American	1	8%	0	
White	5	42%	3	25%
American Indian/Alaskan native	0		1	8%
Asian	0		0	
Hispanic/Latino (any race)	1	8%	0	
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	0		0	
Two or more races	0		0	
Other race	0		1	8%
International (any race)	0		0	

Academic year: 2020 – 2021 Part-time/adjunct faculty

Group	Female	% of total faculty	Male	% of total faculty
Black/African-American	0		0	
White	9	82%	1	9%
American Indian/Alaskan native	0		0	
Asian	0		0	
Hispanic/Latino (any race)	0		0	
Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander	0		0	
Two or more races	1	9%	0	
Other race	0		0	
International (any race)	0		0	

PART II — Standard 4: Full-Time and Part-Time Faculty

The unit hires, supports and evaluates a capable faculty with a balance of academic and professional credentials appropriate for the unit's mission.

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

a) The unit has written criteria for selecting and evaluating the performance of all full-time and part-time faculty and instructional staff.

The selection process is clearly laid out. Once the department has approval from the dean of the college to hire a full-time faculty member, the department chair creates a search committee of a chair and at least four members of the department. The position announcement must be approved by Human Resources. A rubric is used to rank the initial applicants. After the search committee agrees on those who should move to the next round, the applicants are interviewed via Zoom, using pre-selected questions. From there, a short list of candidates is invited to campus, where they meet with faculty, students, and the department chair. They are also invited to teach. Input is solicited from those who meet the candidate, and an offer is extended.

For part-time faculty, the college allows department chairs full discretion to hire adjunct faculty. A pool of applicants is maintained by the university, from which the chair can select faculty as needed.

There are very clear guidelines on Teaching, Research, and Service, including the guidelines for tenure and promotion (updated in Fall 2020). The University assesses candidates for promotion based on effectiveness in teaching; effectiveness in research, scholarship, and other creative activities; and effectiveness in rendering services.

The department evaluates faculty on an annual (non-tenured/non-tenure-track) or bi-annual (tenured) basis, using the Faculty Performance Report. The process involves having each faculty member assess their own progress on goals for teaching, research, and service. Once the chair has reviewed these and ensured they are complete, the reports are submitted to the dean's office for approval.

In addition, each faculty member completes a Statement of Goals at the end of each academic year, which they then review individually with the department chair. This statement includes an assessment of their performance and their goals for the following academic year. It enables the faculty to lay out any professional development plans they have, including conference attendance or additional training. There are university-wide professional development opportunities, such as Quality Matters, Canvas, grant writing, and inclusive teaching. The college has a faculty mentoring program, in which several of the department's faculty have participated. When faculty members go up for tenure, they feel well supported both within the department and the college. Dean Baird, the dean of the college, does a mid-tenure review to help ensure candidates are on track.

b) Full-time faculty have primary responsibility for teaching, research/creative activity and service.

At least 86 percent of courses were taught by full-time faculty for the past three years (2018-21), going as high as 91 percent in 2020-21.

During this accreditation period, several faculty members have demonstrated excellence in teaching, whether through presentations and papers on instruction (Butler Cain, Patricia Sanders), developing new courses and programs (Litzy Galarza, Lisa Darnell, Beth Garfrerick), or supervising award-winning student projects (Justin Bergh).

Tenured and tenure-track faculty have a 3-3 teaching load (fall/spring), which was reduced from 4/4 in Fall 2020 in recognition of the desire to enable those faculty to have more time to devote to research and service. Some faculty, though none on tenure-track, have a 5-5 teaching load.

During the years since the last accreditation, the department has promoted five of its faculty. Professors Sanders and Cain were promoted to full professor (May 2019), Professor Garfrerick was granted tenure (May 2015) and promoted to Associate Professor (May 2019), and Stephanie Montgomery was promoted to Senior Lecturer (May 2019).

c) Credentials of the unit's faculty represent a balance of professional and scholarly experience and expertise kept current through faculty development opportunities, relationships with professional and scholarly associations, and appropriate supplementation of part-time and visiting faculty

The department has made a deliberate effort to recruit more research-oriented faculty in recent years. But nearly all faculty have a strong level of professional experience. Combined, they have accumulated more than 50 years in the industry, including work at commercial and public radio stations, print and broadcast journalism, and public relations. Half (50 percent) of the current 12 full-time faculty members hold a doctoral degree.

The faculty are actively engaged with professional and scholarly associations, such as PRSSA and BEA, to ensure they are providing real-world experiences to their students. This is despite the minimal financial support that has been made available in recent years to support these initiatives. New faculty members are offered \$3,000 to use for conference travel during their first three years. Funds to support research and/or travel are available at the department, college, and university levels though there does not seem to be a clear process in place on how faculty can apply to each one.

Students did express appreciation for the "real world experience" they receive from the faculty, with one noting "I love the field expertise that the professors bring to the table."

d) The unit regularly evaluates instruction, whether onsite or online, using multiple measures that include student input.

Currently, instruction within the Department is evaluated primarily through student satisfaction surveys conducted at the end of each course. The surveys, which are not mandatory, are online, which means that participation levels vary (and are generally low).

However, the university has instituted a much more rigorous evaluation of its General Education classes across the campus, with the creation of a General Education Assessment Committee two years ago. Every department is represented; for Communication, Professor Heckert is the representative. The committee establishes benchmarks, as well as specific student learning objectives, for each course. There are pre- and post-tests for each course, with the goal of continuously improving these broad-

based, foundational classes. There are two courses within the department that fall under this initiative (COM 201 and COM 205).

In addition, the department faculty meet on a regular basis to evaluate instruction.

e) The faculty has respect on campus for its university citizenship and the quality of education that the unit provides.

In meeting with colleagues from across the campus, it is evident that the Department of Communication is highly respected and well regarded, for both citizenship and educational quality. Many examples were cited, including the experiential learning opportunities (internships, student media, study abroad), and the leadership of Communication students in many university organizations.

It was noted that the department takes an “external view” of itself, frequently looking to other departments for collaborative work, such as a joint Study Abroad program with the Department of Foreign Languages. The faculty were also praised for the “exceptional” example they set during COVID-19, supporting students socially and emotionally. They made an effort to keep up with their students through social media, as well as reaching out via email and phone.

Summary

While this is a fairly small faculty, they are collaborative, collegial, and effective. There has been a deliberate effort to bring in more research-focused scholars in recent years, but at the same time, all are still actively involved in professional development, college and university service, and enabling their students to benefit from multiple real-world experiences. They could enhance their curriculum evaluation by learning from the university’s robust efforts on evaluating general education classes.

Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: **COMPLIANCE**

PART II — Standard 5: Scholarship: Research, Creative and Professional Activity

With unit support, faculty members contribute to the advancement of scholarly and professional knowledge and engage in scholarship (research, creative and professional activity) that contributes to their development.

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

a) The unit requires, supports and rewards faculty research, creative activity and/or professional activity.

Despite its heritage as a teaching institution, the university now recognizes and supports research, as well as creative or professional activity. As noted in the prior standard, tenured and tenure-track faculty have a 3-3 teaching load now to enable them to devote more time to these non-teaching activities.

In the college, research funds are available through Faculty Research and Development Grants, but the process for securing one was not clearly laid out in the self-study. One faculty member called it “highly competitive.” The department funds to support travel for research or creative/professional activity come out of the overall budget, and range from \$500 to \$1,000 per person. In interviews with faculty, the site team was given at least three different numbers on how much faculty were eligible to receive this year. While one person had negotiated a three-year, \$3,000/year research funding package, another noted that he/she has been paying for all his/her professional activities for years.

In terms of rewards, there is now a specified process in place at the university for full professors to apply for \$5,000 Merit Awards in five-year increments.

b) The unit specifies expectations for research, creative activity and/or professional activity in criteria for hiring, promotion and tenure.

Expectations for the different areas of scholarship are clearly laid out in the Faculty Handbook. “Effectiveness in Research, Scholarship, and Other Creative Activities” is one of the three categories that is evaluated in promotion and tenure decisions, alongside teaching and service. There is a broad array of activities included here, with the recognition that “one’s scholarly accomplishments are valued by others in the discipline.” Scholarship includes publication in a peer-reviewed publication, presentations at professional meetings, and competitively awarded grants, among others.

The faculty seems to be fully on board with the increased focus on Research and Scholarship. As one member noted, “we are shifting the paradigm to more research.” This cannot happen overnight, but the department is clearly moving in this direction.

c) Evaluation criteria for promotion, tenure and merit recognition account for and acknowledge activities appropriate to faculty members’ professional as well as scholarly specializations.

The criteria for promotion, tenure, and merit clearly recognize a range of activities, both scholarly and creative. As noted earlier, there are three broad areas of effectiveness taken into consideration: teaching, research, scholarship and other creative activities, and service. There are specific (non-numeric) guidelines at each level (e.g., Lecturer seeking promotion to Senior Lecturer), all the way up to tenured faculty applying for a merit award. In each case, the Faculty Handbook details the requirements and, in many cases, provides a non-exhaustive list of examples to provide guidance on the application. As the

department moves to an increased focus on research, it should ensure that tenure-track faculty are not overly burdened with their non-research responsibilities.

At the time of the site team visit, the full-time faculty included two full professors, one associate professor, four assistant professors, one senior lecturer, three lecturers, and one visiting lecturer.

d) Faculty members communicate the results of research, creative and/or professional activity to other scholars, educators and practitioners through presentations, productions, exhibitions, workshops and publications appropriate to the activity and to the mission of the unit and institution.

Despite the turnover in faculty since the department's initial accreditation in 2015, the current faculty have tried to remain active in scholarship. Seven of the faculty produced a total of 25 pieces across book chapters, refereed articles, and conference presentations. In addition, faculty have written monographs, a refereed article, and textbook feature. At least one has a book proposal submitted.

Nonetheless, the chart provided in the self-study suggests there has been a significant reduction in scholarship output since the prior accreditation report, perhaps in part due to the pandemic's impact and the departure of one heavily published faculty member. This area was called out in the prior accreditation report as a potential weakness: "as the college and university place greater emphasis on research and scholarship the department will need to increase its creative and scholarly productivity."

The lack of funding support here may be a significant hurdle.

At the conclusion of the visit, the department chair noted that the scholarly productivity chart did not appear to include her work, specifically four invited academic papers and one juried creative work. Likewise, the citations for these works were missing from the self-study. This disclosure led the site team to question the accuracy of the portrayal of faculty productivity in the self-study. The chart below reflects the addition of the chair's invited academic papers and juried creative work, highlighted in red.

e) The unit fosters a climate that supports intellectual curiosity, critical analysis and the expression of differing points of view.

The department not only seeks to foster an open-minded, curious, and critical approach among its students, it encourages the same among its faculty. Whether in official monthly meetings or informal hallway conversations, this is a department that encourages discussion and seeks to find consensus.

Summary

Expectations for hiring, promotion, and tenure are clearly defined. There has been a notable reduction in scholarly output since the last accreditation report, though the number of research-producing faculty has declined. Nevertheless, the university has put an increased emphasis on scholarly productivity. Though teaching loads have decreased, faculty are trying to remain actively engaged in research and creative/professional activity with minimal support. Additional clarity in funding support would be beneficial.

Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: **COMPLIANCE**

Scholarship, Research, Creative and Professional Activities	Total from Unit*	Individuals				Totals (7)
		Full Professors (2)	Associate Professors (1)	Assistant Professors (3)	Other Faculty** (1)	
Awards and Honors						
Grants Received Internal						
Grants Received External						
Scholarly Books, Sole- or Co-authored						
Textbooks, Sole- or Co-authored						
Books Edited						
Book Chapters	5	1	1	3		5
Monographs	2	1	1			2
Articles in Refereed Journals	7	5	1	1		7
Refereed Conference Papers	13	8	1	3	1	13
Invited Academic Papers	4	4				
Refereed Essays	1	1				1
Encyclopedia Entries						
Book Reviews						
Articles in Non-refereed Publications						
Juried Creative Works	1	1				
Non-juried Creative Works						
Other (Textbook Features)	2		2			2

*Co-authored work should be counted as a single publication in the unit totals. However, if, for example, two members of the faculty are co-authors on the same journal article, it would be reported as a publication for both authors. **Includes all full-time faculty who do not hold listed ranks, such as instructors and others on term appointments. Many faculty in this category may hold teaching appointments without significant scholarship, research or creative requirements.

PART II — Standard 6: Student Services

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

a). Faculty and/or professional advising staff ensure that students are aware of unit and institutional requirements for graduation and receive career and academic advising.

Prior to Summer 2021, the Department of Communication advised all of its students each semester. Beginning that summer, the department joined a university initiative in which all freshmen and sophomores are advised by professional advisers in the University Success Center. Juniors and seniors continue to be advised within the department, and faculty set aside one to two weeks each semester to meet one-on-one with students. (During the COVID-19 pandemic, advising was mostly conducted virtually or via email.) The university's online Degree Works platform allows advisers to track student progress, and the department maintains records of student advising. Students receive career counseling in their advising sessions, and job announcements are distributed to students through email and the department's Facebook page. Career counseling is integrated into the department's internship and capstone courses.

In anonymous student surveys conducted via Qualtrics in the curriculum's portfolio preparation class, students overwhelmingly said that faculty members were helpful in advising them. Among students taking the survey in the 2020-2021 school year, for example, 92 percent of 63 students surveyed reported that faculty were "very helpful" or "somewhat helpful." However, response rates were low.

b). Faculty are available and accessible to students.

The department's faculty are available to students through office hours or, during the pandemic, via virtual hours and email. In the team's meeting with students, however, some students complained that faculty responsiveness to students is uneven. Some students said that not all faculty respond to student emails or requests in a timely manner, and others complained that they felt they had insufficient department help to find internships. At the same time, other students singled out several faculty members as being particularly helpful— with the faculty member even providing a cell phone number to be reached after hours. Students said they also appreciated faculty for caring about them and for the level of real-world expertise that they bring to the classroom. "I like the connections with the professors," one student commented.

c). The unit keeps students informed about the activities, requirements and policies of the unit.

The department's Facebook page—<https://www.facebook.com/MyUNACom>— is regularly updated with information about the department's activities and initiatives, and the department keeps students informed of its activities through regular email messages.

d). The unit and the institution provide students with extra-curricular activities and opportunities that are relevant to the curriculum and develop their professional as well as intellectual abilities and interests.

The department has a robust student media operation that provides extensive opportunities for students to put the skills they learn in the classroom into practice. *The Flor-Ala*, the student newspaper, moved

from the university's student affairs division into the department in 2018. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the unit published a yearbook, but in 2020-2021, the department and its students put the yearbook on hiatus and redirected its \$45,000 annual budget for the benefit of other student media, including the founding of *Flow*, an impressive magazine published in the spring and slated to be published each semester. *Flow* and *The Flor-Ala* are published out of a roomy stand-alone student media building that includes a large newsroom, a common area, and an audio studio used to produce podcasts.

The department hired a faculty adviser for the *Flor-Ala* to begin Fall 2019, replacing the staff adviser who had been managing the paper during its time in student affairs. The outgoing staff adviser of the *Flor-Ala* alleged that he'd been dismissed in retribution for articles the newspaper had published, and the College Media Association censured the university as a result of the former adviser's complaint. However, departmental faculty and university officials all agreed that the quality of the *Flor-Ala* had improved dramatically under the new advising model and its faculty member.

The department has a number of registered student groups to contribute to students' professional development. Mass communication students have access to the National Broadcasting Society—Alpha Epsilon Rho, and Lion PR for public relations students. Prior to the pandemic, the Broadcasting Society was producing student newscasts and Lion PR was facilitating student participation in local professional development opportunities with local public relations professionals. Students also participate in student awards competitions through the Broadcasting Society, the Hearst Journalism Awards Program, and the Public Relations Student Society of America.

In the site team visit with students, there was some concern noted that students' ability to participate in student media may be reduced by their work or other commitments, particularly if there is travel involved or additional costs required (e.g., the \$100 per-student membership for Lion PR).

e). The accredited unit must gather, maintain and analyze enrollment, retention, graduation rates and other aggregate information for improving student services and reducing barriers to student success. The unit annually publishes retention and graduation information on its website.

The university's Office of Institutional Research regularly collects data regarding enrollment and retention, and this data is published on the department's website. Enrollment in the unit peaked in the 2016-2017 school year, when it had 206 students, and after fluctuations in enrollment in subsequent years it had 180 students in 2020-2021. The retention rates for freshmen students advancing to their sophomore years within the department was consistently higher than that the university as a whole, peaking at 95% in the 2018-2019 school year. The unit's four-year, five-year, and six-year graduation rates have been improving in recent years and are on par with—and often exceed—university percentages.

SUMMARY:

The Department of Communication advises its students regularly and tracks student progress through the university's degree progress system. Faculty are known for caring about their students and are generally seen as being helpful and available, though a few students complain about the responsiveness of some professors.

Ample opportunities exist for extracurricular experiences to hone their professional skills, either in student media or in student organizations. After a controversy involving *The Flor-Ala* in 2018-2019, the student newspaper has rebounded and is widely considered to publish a high-quality product respected across the campus.

Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: **COMPLIANCE**

PART II — Standard 7: Resources, Facilities and Equipment

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

a). The unit has a detailed annual budget for the allocation of its resources that is related to its long-range, strategic plan.

The department uses a historical budget model in which budget allocations are simply rolled over from one year to the next. Except for changes in course fees, the budget changes little if at all from year to year. The department's strategic plan is largely a listing of university goals along with the department's responses to those goals, and, despite the paucity of the budget, it generally reflects the department's long-term plans. Overall, the site visit team was impressed with what the unit is able to do with the resources it has, with some of the caveats listed below.

b). The resources that the institution provides are adequate to achieve the unit's mission. The resources are fair in relation to those provided other units.

The budget appears adequate for day-to-day operations but is severely lacking in faculty travel. In most years, faculty receive only \$500, and even that is not guaranteed. However, the department's budget seems in line with those of the 20 other units within the College of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering; its budget is in the middle of the pack relative to the other units according to units' numbers of students and faculty. The yearly budget of \$17,668 is supplemented by course fees and by a university foundation account of about \$11,000. In addition, the past department chair was particularly resourceful with securing resources for one-time needs. In these years the department was able to secure funds to purchase new classroom desks and chairs, upgrade painting and carpeting in several areas, refurbish the faculty break room and lobby and, significantly, refurbish the Student Media building.

c). The facilities of the unit enable and promote effective scholarship, teaching and learning.

The 1930s building that houses the Department of Communication offers students and faculty a generous mix of classroom space, common areas, office space, and computer labs. The space includes two computer labs—one Mac and one PC—as well as both large and small theater-style classrooms. A large television studio is off the main lobby and includes two audio studios. All of the studio labs contain updated equipment more than adequate to meeting the unit's goals. In addition, the department has three classrooms, two of them tiered-style, as well as a generous conference room suited for seminar classes and faculty meetings. A lobby just off the department's administrative office gives students an area in which to study or relax. In addition, the university has secured \$250,000 in funding to renovate a second-floor area previously occupied by the Art Department. Once renovated the upstairs space will become an advanced audio-production suite, though department officials say they will need additional funding to fully equip the space. Student media are in a separate Student Media building, which has recently been remodeled and which includes an audio studio and a common area for students.

d). The institution and the unit provide faculty and students with equipment or access to equipment to support its curriculum and the research, creative and professional activities of the faculty.

In addition to the television, radio and audio studios mentioned above, the department has a checkout room which allows students to check out needed audio, photo, and video equipment for two to three

days. Equipment is up to date. One student complained during the student meeting that it was sometimes difficult to secure needed lab time. Overall, however, the department's equipment and the students' access to that equipment that appears to support its curriculum and the needs of its faculty and students. The department has identified a need for a broadcast engineer/studio manager to manage and maintain all audio and video production rooms, digital equipment, and the television studio.

e). The institution and the unit provide sufficient library and information resources to support faculty and student research and professional development.

The university's library is nearby and easily accessible to students.

SUMMARY:

The department's budget is sparse but in line with those of similar departments of the University of North Alabama. Travel funding for faculty—particularly in light of the university's push for faculty to more actively engage in research—is a pressing need.

Facilities are impressive for a department of this size, particularly in the number and variety of its classroom spaces, the large and well-equipped television studio, and multiple audio production studios.

Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: **COMPLIANCE**

PART II — Standard 8: Professional and Public Service

The unit and its faculty advance journalism and mass communication professions and fulfill obligations to its community, alumni and the greater public.

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

(a) The unit consults and communicates regularly with its alumni and is actively engaged with its alumni, professionals and professional associations to keep curriculum and teaching, whether on site or online, current and to promote the exchange of ideas.

Until recently, the department's relationship with its alumni, while strong, was informal and ad-hoc, inviting previous students back to campus as classroom speakers or to serve as mock interviewers for the COM 420 Capstone course. There have been additional interactions with alumni through the professional organizations in which faculty are involved, such as the Public Relations Council of Alabama. Last, but not least, faculty have sponsored student trips to tour the workplace of several alumni, including radio and TV stations.

In 2019, the department began the creation of its first alumni advisory board, recruiting five graduates to participate. Before any meeting was held, everything was put on hold by the pandemic. In 2020, an additional five alumni agreed to join the board. The plan now is to hold the first board meeting during the current academic year, although it is unclear what the goals are for this board.

The department does maintain both Facebook and Instagram pages to maintain contact with its alumni. In fall 2018 it created a student worker position, the Social Media & Digital Content Producer, which has made a difference. The Facebook page appears to be kept active and has 876 followers, while the Instagram page has 292 posts and 445 followers.

There is a link on the department website specifically for alumni, where they are encouraged to keep their contact and career information updated. The faculty has a database of PR alumni and has discussed expanding this to include Journalism & Digital Media Production.

In terms of keeping current, however, the faculty's active involvement in professional associations such as the Public Relations Council or Broadcast Education Association does go some way to ensure curriculum and teaching remain up to date.

(b) The unit provides leadership in the development of high standards of professional practice through such activities as offering continuing education, promoting professional ethics, evaluating professional performance and addressing communication issues of public consequence and concern.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the department was actively engaged in this area, bringing people to campus as guest speakers or for panel discussions on noteworthy topics such as First Amendment rights, public health, and the experiences of women or African-Americans. Several of these were timed around annual events, such as Black History Month or Women's History Month. All were open to the public.

A major new education initiative was approved for Fall 2021. Three micro-credential programs were approved by the Alabama Commission of Higher Education, offering additional opportunities for further education in the following areas: Communication Studies for Nonprofits; Public Relations for Nonprofits; and Media Writing. Each is an 8-week program, designed to appeal to professionals who want to enhance their skills, with courses counting toward Communication degree programs. The first of the three launched at the start of the Fall semester, with the other two slated to begin in the second half.

Faculty members are actively involved in improving professional practice and enhancing public service. This includes their active involvement in national and regional professional organizations (Broadcast

Education Association, Rotary International, Public Relations Council of Alabama, Southern Public Relations Federation), as well as participating in speaking engagements and local organizations.

(c) The unit contributes to the improvement of journalism and mass communication as academic disciplines by supporting the faculty's involvement in academic associations and related activities.

While faculty members are encouraged to be involved in academic and other associations, there is limited financial support available to do so. The department offered \$650 per faculty member this year, while additional funds can be applied for from the college or the university. Nonetheless, the faculty is actively involved in numerous associations and activities.

(d) The unit contributes to its communities through unit-based service projects and events, service learning of its students, and civic engagement of its faculty.

The department plans and coordinates numerous events with other campus entities, whether celebrating Día de Los Muertos, or organizing special events related to Black History Month and Women's History Month, undertaken with other departments or campus units. In addition, pre-pandemic, the department organized and hosted panels to discuss critical topics related to free speech and civil rights.

Students are also engaged in civic activities, either through internship opportunities with non-profit organizations, or class projects on their behalf. A Public Relations class, for example, worked with the Lions Club of Northern Alabama on a video project.

(e) The unit supports scholastic journalism through such activities as faculty workshops, visiting lectures and critiques of student work.

Scholastic journalism has been strongly supported. In particular, the Alabama Scholastic Press Association has benefited significantly from the involvement of the department. The department was intending to host the ASPA's Fall Regional Workshop in 2020, until that was canceled due to COVID-19. In addition, the department was represented at UNA's Multicultural Journalism Program for high school students in 2019. Faculty members have traveled to other states for high school training programs. There are plans to further increase engagement with high schools, particularly to recruit more students of color to the programs offered by the department.

Summary

The Department of Communication is heavily involved in both professional and public service. It hosts campus events for the community tied to key issues or major annual events, working with other departments or units. The faculty remain actively involved in numerous professional associations, which not only ensures they keep themselves current with their field, but also provides opportunities for students to gain valuable experiential learning through internships. There are active, albeit mostly informal, connections with a loyal alumni base that invites students to the workplace and visits campus on a regular basis. Engagement with high schools has been strong and the department recognizes there are further opportunities to develop these connections further.

Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: **COMPLIANCE**

PART II — Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

The Accrediting Committee and Council seek site-team reports on assessment that are appropriately detailed for a judgment on compliance that is informed, fair and consistent from one team to another. Please respond to each of these questions in your report on indicators (a), (b) and (c):

a). The unit defines the goals for learning that students must achieve, including the “Professional Values and Competencies” of the Council.

- Who is in charge of the assessment program (e.g., administrator, sequence coordinator or faculty committee)?
- How has the unit verified that core and required courses cover all 12 of ACEJMC’s professional values and competencies?
- How has the unit ensured that the syllabuses for these courses state learning outcomes that address the values and competencies appropriate for each course?

The chair is ultimately responsible for conducting and reporting assessment activities. There is no standing faculty committee in the department tasked with assessment activities.

When the unit was initially accredited in 2014-2015, it used the ACEJMC’s 12 professional values and competencies as its program learning outcomes. However, in 2019-2020, the unit reported assessment results based on seven new program learning outcomes. The revised outcomes were the result of a university initiative to standardize assessment of student learning across campus, in advance of reaffirmation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS), scheduled for 2023. Though the self-study suggested the new outcomes addressed ACEJMC’s professional values and competencies, it did not provide a map to demonstrate how they were related. Instead, it provided a map showing which courses addressed the new learning outcomes. During the visit, the former chair responsible for writing the self-study addressed this deficiency by providing a document that showed how the values and competencies are inherently addressed through the new program learning outcomes. Based on this, it would appear the professional values and competencies are fairly evenly distributed throughout the curriculum.

The chair has ensured that all syllabuses use program learning outcomes. The syllabus for the internship is the only Fall 2021 syllabus that retains the 12 professional values and competencies.

b). The unit has a written assessment plan that uses multiple direct and indirect measures to assess student learning.

- What direct measures of assessment does the unit use, where in the curriculum and when?
- What indirect measures does it use, where and when?
- Are these measures effective for assessing ACEJMC’s professional values and competencies?

The unit does not have its own written assessment plan, referring instead to the university’s assessment guide. Multiple sources told the site team that the university has recently concentrated on improving assessment of its general education program and that it is anticipated additional support will be provided to colleges and departments soon.

After initial accreditation in 2014-2015, no formal assessment program was undertaken until a survey was initiated in spring 2018. Direct, quantitative measures were begun in 2019-2020.

The department uses seven class assignments as direct measures. Individual faculty members, who teach the classes in which these assignments reside, grade them, then report to the chair the percentages of students attaining various grades.

Indirect evidence is drawn from a Qualtrics survey administered in the Communication Capstone class. It asks students to rate 56 courses on a four-point scale of “very beneficial” to “not relevant to my career.” Some courses had as few as four respondents. The highest number of respondents for any course was 14. In addition, the survey captured qualitative comments. Though no specific conclusions that might have been drawn from the indirect data were provided, the self-study suggests the department has used the survey data to make changes to individual assignments within courses, consider adjusting course requirements and make decisions about keeping or removing classes from the curriculum.

There is very little specific, concrete evidence to suggest how effective these measures have been in advancing student learning related to the professional values and competencies. There is no explicit link made to the professional values and competencies in either the two reports of direct measures, or the results of the survey.

c). The unit collects and reports data from its assessment activities and applies the data to improve curriculum and instruction.

- How does the unit collect and analyze the findings and identify unsatisfactory learning of specific values and competencies?
- What specific values and competencies had graduating classes not mastered satisfactorily?
- How does the unit decide how to address these areas of concern and what actions did it take to do so?
- How does the unit evaluate whether its actions overcame the weaknesses in student learning and what were the results?
- Was the program of data analysis and action effective for identifying and overcoming unsatisfactory student learning?

The faculty appears to have misunderstood ACEJMC requirements for assessment, mistaking summative class evaluations (grading) for formative program assessment. Specific class assignments are chosen, the professor teaching the class grades them, then provides a breakdown of the grades to the chair. The chair then enters the information into the assessment platform Watermark and provides a brief analysis as to whether a goal was met of a certain percentage of students attaining an A or a B. (For example, a goal may be that 70% of students attained either an A or a B.) The Watermark reports for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 conclude in all but one case that either no action was taken or needed, or the assessment activity would continue. In one instance, in the 2020-2021 report, the result of one assessment was to change the assignment upon which the assessment was based. Only the chair has access to Watermark.

d). The unit maintains contact with the alumni to assess these experiences in the professions and to provide suggestions for improving curriculum and instruction.

As described in Standard 8, the university and the department have had a challenge maintaining contact with alumni, yet have made some progress with efforts to create an Alumni Advisory Board. There is, however, no explicit goal stated to have them assess the curriculum. The self-study reports that external reviewers were consulted in developing its assessment effort and that it “regularly seek(s) constructive critiques from professional guests and colleagues regarding student work.” Very little specific evidence was provided, however.

e). The unit includes members of journalism and mass communication professions in its assessment process.

When the unit was initially accredited in 2014-2015, the site team suggested the department needed to “integrate more professional feedback into the assessment process.” However, the department still does not involve professionals in assessment. While suggesting faculty seek “constructive critiques” from professionals, the self-study reports that there “are members of the faculty who disagree with the notion that professional colleagues should be empowered to have a greater voice in academic assessment and review.” Because assessment was understood to be the same as grading, faculty members apparently believed involving professionals was “an inappropriate intrusion into the academic process that raises questions about the role of faculty and the potential for intrusion into student privacy.”

SUMMARY:

Formal assessment activity has only recently begun, after a pause of several years. The unit uses instructors’ grades as direct assessment measures and a survey of senior students as indirect measures. Neither appear explicitly tied to ACEJMC’s professional values and competencies, nor is there evidence of assessment results being analyzed or used to improve student learning. Professionals are not involved in assessment activities.

Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: **NONCOMPLIANCE**

PART III: Summary by site visit team

1) Summarize the strengths and weakness of the unit.

Strengths: The faculty is committed, collegial and well-regarded; facilities have improved; the department has strong connections with professionals and have innovative online and experiential learning initiatives abroad.

Weaknesses: The department is on its fourth chair since its initial accreditation in 2015 and the current chair has only committed to a one-year, interim appointment; it has a tight budget, with unclear access to travel funding; the department needs a clear diversity plan with measurable outcomes; the department's assessment activities do not include professionals, are not explicitly tied to the Council's professional values and competencies, are based on course-level grading, rather than program-level assessment, and lack evidence that faculty use evidence to close the loop.

2) List the standards with which the unit is not in compliance.

Standard 9, Assessment of Learning Outcomes

3) Summarize the problems or deficiencies that should be addressed before the next evaluation (i.e., related to non-compliance with standards).

The unit needs its own assessment plan that explicitly shows how the values and competencies are assessed.

Direct measures should be analyzed formatively and programmatically. Rather than having a professor grade his or her own students, faculty should work together to assess student work as a cohort, with the goal of assessing whether the program learning outcomes are being met.

Whether using direct or indirect measures, faculty need to thoughtfully analyze the results, then make programmatic improvements based on the data (i.e., "close the loop.")

Professionals need to be involved in at least some assessment of program learning outcomes. Faculty concerns about student privacy can be allayed by anonymizing student work; concerns that faculty prerogatives are being encroached upon can be addressed by separating the act of grading student work from assessing program learning outcomes.

4) In the case of a recommendation for provisional accreditation, list the deficiencies that should be addressed before the provisional status can be removed.

Develop and execute a systematic and authentic assessment plan that includes the input of industry professionals, measures program-wide student learning of the council's professional values and competencies, then provides evidence of closing the loop for continuous improvement of the curriculum.

5) In the case of a recommendation for denial of accreditation, clearly and fully explain the reasons that led to the recommendation.

N/A

6) If the unit was previously accredited, summarize the significant deficiencies noted in the previous report and the actions taken to correct them. If the unit was in noncompliance in the same standard(s) on the previous two visits, identify the standard(s) and the problems noted. Explain actions taken to correct the problems.

N/A

7) The self-study is the heart of the accrediting process. Often the quality of that document determines the degree of success of the site visit. Summarize the team members' judgment of the self-study.

The self-study was produced in trying conditions: After an initial accreditation, the unit experienced high leadership turnover; it lost records as a result of the initial leadership transitions; the self-study was produced during a pandemic and it was written by a leader (the previous chair) who was new to ACEJMC accreditation, working on several administrative assignments, and teaching a 2-2 load. While faculty had input, the self-study was largely the product of one person. As a result, a substantial amount of information was missing. Additional information was not immediately made available to the site team during the visit. For example, syllabuses, curriculum vitae, and resumés were not provided until Tuesday afternoon, the second full day of the visit.



Department of COMMUNICATION
College of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering

To: ACEJMC Council Members
Ms. Pat Thompson, Executive Director
Dr. Dale Cressman, Site Team Leader
From: Pat Sanders, Department Chair, Professor
Date: April 8, 2022

Dear Council Members:

This letter is written in reference to the Department of Communication at the University of North Alabama and the experience encountered while attending the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications Committee meeting held in Chicago in March, 2022. This memorandum is written in response to what was observed as a less-than-pleasant discussion concerning the department. The committee's discussion was felt to be one of degradation and embarrassment in the presence of the other thirty universities represented. Details are described below. Allow it to be stated that, when the results of the visit were shared by the site team with the department and university, they were very professional, positive, engaging and communicative.

It was learned after the visit that the department was being placed on provisional status after not meeting all of the requirements to satisfy Standard 9, which is a common reason for provisional status. Dr. Dale Cressman, the site team leader, relayed to department members and administrators that the department was non-compliant in the area because during the original site visit, it was noted that the department needed to institute additional assessment measures. Subsequent to receiving that information, the department did begin to collect data the following 2018 via identified courses and used measurements and assessments it thought was sufficient. It was explained during the second visit that the data method may not have been fully in accordance with ACEJMC expectations.

After the 2014-2015 accreditation visit, and during the follow-up self-study visit, 2020-2021, a new chair was appointed in fall, 2016, Dr. Butler Cain. Prior to the follow-up self-study visit, Dr. Cain did institute some assessment measures for the program. There appeared to have been some miscommunication or misunderstanding regarding available ACEJMC examples and resources being provided (as were made available during the second visit), and the department apparently still missed successfully meeting the entirety of the standard.

The department did not dispute the finding at the time, and, Dr. Sanders, as the newly appointed Interim Chair (August 2021) immediately put additional direct and indirect measures into place to correct the oversights and to begin collecting data in the spring of 2022 that are believed to be satisfactory assessment measures for ACEJMC. During the Accrediting Committee meeting, one committee member noted that other universities were cited for non-compliance related to Standard 9 but were not given provisional status. He stated that the provisional status seemed "a bit harsh." Dr. Cressman responded that was because *no* assessments were being made, which was an inaccurate statement.

The most disappointing experience during the committee meeting centered around questions that developed during the discussion of the department. Dr. Cressman was unable to answer numerous questions and responded quite often with "I don't know." Dr. Sanders was in attendance at the meeting for the very purpose of being able to answer any questions that the site team leader could not answer. Some of the questions and discussions that resulted were:

- **Standard 9.** Dr. Cressman stated that due to faculty in the department questioning the way in which assessments would be conducted, he thought there was a lack of understanding by faculty that led to failure to collect data the way in which the accrediting agency required. The Committee Chair proceeded to make the comment “Well, if they don’t *even know* what assessment *is*, how can they correct the problem?” after which she laughed along with other committee members. Dr. Sanders found the remark and the response to be highly unprofessional, awkward and embarrassing. It was felt as if the department was portrayed as not being knowledgeable or aware of what the term meant or how to solve the issue. Conversely, the department faculty are well-known for their years of academic service and their knowledge, not only in their areas of expertise, and for what assessment is as well. In addition, there were assessment measures underway.

Under Dr. Cain’s chairmanship, it was noted that assessment was taking place. An excerpt from the Self-Study Report that was submitted.

Two years ago, the University of North Alabama established new expectations and practices for academic assessment across the university. These changes were made to standardize assessment protocols across campus in preparation for SACSCOC reaccreditation. The university abandoned its previous digital assessment program and adopted the Watermark platform. It is a fully digital platform, and the department’s assessment records are contained within it. The university has provided training on how to use the system, and it also has used external reviewers to provide feedback to departments on the types of information that should be input into the system, how it should be organized, and how it could be improved. Access to the Watermark system is restricted to certain faculty members depending upon their university roles. The department chair has access to the Watermark system and has the sole expectation of providing annual updates for the department. Faculty members provide the chair with assessment results from their courses.

This is a new method for the Department of Communication, and it is only our second year using this system in this way. However, the department has identified specific assignments, tied them to particular learning outcomes, established target goals, and have reported those results. Based on the results, the department has determined whether to continue collecting data by maintaining a current course of action or to make instructional changes. The assessments, results, and actions are included in the following reports ...

Describe the involvement of journalism and mass communication professionals, including alumni, in the assessment process.

Journalism and mass communication professionals, including alumni, have been involved in directly assessing students through the evaluation of student interns and by serving as mock interviewers for COM 420 Communication Capstone (formerly Portfolio Prep). Public relations seniors interact with alumni through meetings of the Public Relations Council of Alabama’s North Alabama Chapter.

Since the site team visit, Dr. Sanders has created an Assessment Committee composed of the lead instructors for the department’s capstone course and internship course, along with a quantitative research faculty member to develop a plan for additional assessment. The plan called for the following and was put into place for collection according to ACEJMC standards in the Spring 2022 Semester. It is now fully implemented.

COM 420 Communication Capstone provides three assessment opportunities for

the Department of Communication: a mock interview, a digital portfolio, and a program assessment.

Mock Interview (Direct)

All students participate in a mock interview as a graded assignment. They are interviewed by professionals who are either Communication alumni, university alumni, or program/university supporters. The interviewers do not assign a grade but may inform the faculty member if there were issues related to a student's performance. Interviewers follow a rubric in which they are asked to evaluate students on a scale of one (not demonstrated) to five (proficiently demonstrated) on three learning outcomes: Professional Practice, Communication and Society, and Diversity. Interviewers are then asked to rate how well a student demonstrated preparation and professionalism during the mock interview.

Digital Portfolio (Direct)

Students are required to create a digital portfolio in which they showcase professional work they produced during their experiences as students in the Department of Communication. This is a graded assignment, and the faculty member assigns the final grade for the assignment. Outside of the classroom, a panel of faculty/professionals are presented a randomly-selected group of digital portfolios for review. Reviewers follow a rubric in which they are asked to evaluate students on a scale of one (not demonstrated) to five (proficiently demonstrated) on six learning outcomes: Professional Writing, Professional Practice, Research, Law and Ethics, Communication and Society, and Diversity.

Program Assessment (Indirect)

Students are required to complete a program assessment survey as a graded assignment. The grade is based on a 100/0 scale. If the student submits the survey, the assigned grade is a 100. If the student does not submit the survey, the assigned grade is zero. Students are asked to assess several program components, including courses, faculty advising, access to faculty, and skills development. Students are promised confidentiality to encourage their honest assessments.

COM 499-Internship

For our internship course, we developed two direct and two indirect measures of assessment to determine students' mastery of ACEJMC's corresponding values and core competencies as well as the department's learning outcomes and associated skills. All measures will be completed at the conclusion of each internship, for/by each student. Each measure utilizes language that directly reflects ACEJMC's core value and competencies to ensure the evaluation includes those key objectives, in addition to the department's associated learning outcomes and course objectives.

For the first direct measure, all internship supervisors will use a rubric to evaluate the student's overall performance regarding their writing skills, technological acumen, personal expression, area expertise/general knowledge, theory application and creative and strategic thinking. The rubric also includes areas of more general reflection upon the student's overall professionalism, interpersonal communications, hire-ability, promptness, teamwork and initiative.

The second direct measure is a rubric to assess the intern's final portfolio—a professional amalgamation of all the work they completed during their internship. This measure includes the supervisor's analysis of how the portfolio reflects freedom of speech application, communication to diverse audiences, clear and accurate writing, media theory, digital and technical skills and an understanding of the broader impact of professionals and institutions shaping communications.

The first indirect measure is a qualitative survey—a self-analysis that reflect the student’s feelings on their overall experience, competency, professionalism, preparedness and writing abilities throughout their internship. They will also reflect on how their internship incorporated media theory, freedom of speech, critical and creative thinking, as well as their personal understanding of how of professionals’ shape communications. The second indirect measure is a quantitative Likert Scale survey focused on the student’s analysis of their own performance regarding communicating with diverse audiences, utilizing technology, strategic and creative thinking, professional ethical practice, understanding the impact of communication on society and clear/accurate writing. The survey will also include areas focused on the intern’s overall evaluation of their performance with group work, identifying personal strengths/weaknesses, understanding their ability to follow instruction and receive feedback, how they managed professional relationships and how they demonstrated research and leadership skills.

The plan is to collect the data during the fall and spring semesters, aggregate it, assess and analyze it to identify any gaps or needs for improvement. Afterwards, any new steps that need to be taken to make the program even stronger will be implemented.

It wasn’t until a committee member was reminded that a representative from North Alabama was present and could be called upon to answer the questions that Dr. Sanders was finally recognized and asked to step forward to address the committee. It was at this point the committee chair very pointedly told her, “You are to answer one question and one question only and that is regarding assessment.” She was allowed to address only one question, though several questions had arisen concerning the program (addressed below) and the visit that were not answered. She had observed other universities being given the opportunity to answer questions that could not be addressed by their site team leader and felt very disappointed she was not afforded the same.

The following are discussions and questions that were presented during the meeting.

- **Leadership.** A committee member asked about the changes in leadership that had taken place in the department since the last site team visit in 2015, indicating that leadership changes may have played a role in assessment processes and that, perhaps, should have been cited as non-compliant. Had Dr. Sanders been allowed to address the questions, she could have cleared up any concerns that the changes were disruptive to any accreditation issue.

An explanation is offered now. The department had enjoyed the service of a long-term chair for more than sixteen years before deciding to step down from the position and to retire. The department commenced with conducting a search for a new chair and faculty member to serve. A new chair was identified through a normal search process and was hired. He served five-and-a-half years of two, four-year term increments, before making the decision to take another position as a director at a larger university. The dean then identified an interim chair while a search was conducted for a new chair and faculty member. The interim chair served a very brief term until a new chair was identified and hired in the fall of 2016. Later in the semester, the former interim chair, then, unfortunately, died unexpectedly.

Dr. Butler Cain was hired in 2016 and served five-and-a-half years before being promoted to an Assistant Vice Provost position in the Office for International Affairs. Afterwards, Dr. Sanders was named Interim Chair, following a poll of the current faculty by the Dean of the College. She accepted the role on an interim basis by choice and in order to determine if she wanted to assume the responsibilities at this status in her senior-level career. She has since decided to stay in the position until spring 2023 when a new search will take place through a normal process.

It should be made emphatically clear Dr. Sanders is not new to the department nor the academy. She is, in fact, a 40-plus year alumna of the department, having worked professionally for twenty years before returning as a faculty member. She is a Ph.D. credentialed, 23-year, tenured, full professor and senior faculty member in the Department of Communication and has served in prior leadership roles.

To imply that leadership changes seemed to be a bit chaotic was an egregious misrepresentation of the department by the committee. The department has enjoyed steady, solid and progressive leadership.

- **Scholarly Activity.** A question arose for Dr. Cressman concerning research and scholarly activity additions to the site team report after the visit. Dr. Cressman stated the additions made the team “question their scholarship as a whole following the additions.” First, after Dr. Cressman submitted his draft report to the department, he then asked the department to review it and make any corrections or additions before the final report was to be submitted for review. Dr. Sanders simply complied by asking the former chair who led the study to make the additions. He asked her to do so, and she did so directly to Dr. Cressman. There could be an assumption that the former chair was transitioning out of the chair role and was simply moving on to his new duties. There was nothing nefarious about the additions.

During that same discussion, the same committee member noted that scholarly activity had dropped notably since the initial (2014-2015) visit, which is not totally accurate. Two senior-level faculty members retired prior to the self-study and their scholarship was not included in the report. Also, the department had only recently made two new faculty hires. Again, had Dr. Sanders been called upon to answer the questions surrounding the issues, all of this could have been elucidated.

- **Budget.** The scholarship question was connected to the department budget as one committee member stated that she had “seen budgets ranging from sixteen thousand to a million dollars” and questioned how our faculty could operate a department and conduct research on such a low budget. The answer to that question is, the department budget is not the only source of funding. Senior level faculty members are allotted a small travel/research budget, and some newer faculty were offered a \$3000 annual start-up package for travel and to conduct research in their early career. In addition, funding resources are available upon application at the Dean’s Office and University levels for the same endeavors. The department was also the recent recipient of close to 100k in scholarships for students from outside sources.

During this entire discussion, Dr. Sanders was in the room patiently waiting for the opportunity to offer clarification and to answer any other questions that arose. She had been informed that that was why she should/was required to attend the meeting. She actually changed her spouse’s surgery date to be in attendance at the meeting.

To try to communicate how, again, embarrassed and demeaned Dr. Sanders felt for her department and university during the entire process would be an underestimation. Others in the room approached her afterwards and also commented on how she seemed to have been left out of the conversation and apologized for the way in which the department was represented, characterized, and the way she was made to feel. She was strongly encouraged to respond via written communication to both the Committee and the Council.

The University of North Alabama is the oldest four-year public institution in the state of Alabama, having been established in 1830. It is very highly regarded and has been noted as one of the best colleges by US News in 2020 and one of the best places to work in 2020 as well.

The Department of Communication also has a storied reputation of having seen graduates excel in the workforce across the country and around the world and is known for its relationships built, established and long-held with students and alumni. Facilities, studio and classroom spaces are well-

regarded and noted by students and professionals who visit. Alumni proudly come back to speak and to serve in sundry of ways. This was also communicated during the site team visit, which, again was very positive and was opposite of the report provided in Chicago.

The department did not officially contest the Standard 9 provisional status. However, it was noticed that some universities were cited for much more severe noncompliance issues and were still found to be in compliance and were either accredited or re-accredited. At any rate, the department is doing the work it will take to bring it back into compliance on the one standard. It has already been noted that a system was put into place in the Spring 2022 Semester to begin data collection in order to attend to Standard 9. More noteworthy, though, is the fact that the department was found to be in compliance on all eight of the other standards.

Dr. Sanders and her department members are proud of the Department of Communication, the College of Arts, Sciences and Engineering and the University of North Alabama. They would like for the ACEJMC Committee records to reflect that the way in which the department was portrayed at the committee meeting is not an accurate representation. The department is so much more and would like for the Committee and the Council to be provided with a more authentic demonstration of it. During the original site team visit, UNA was one of only three universities accredited in the state of Alabama. The other two are the flagship universities: the University of Alabama and Auburn University.

Subsequent to the Council meeting, Dr. Sanders received an email sent from the site team leader, Dr. Dale Cressman, who apologized for the way in which she was made to feel during the meeting. The apology was accepted, and the plan is to move forward with ACEJMC assessment corrections and to continue taking the department on a path for an even more positive future. The department is appreciative of the opportunity to share thoughts on the recent committee review and visit with the ACEJMC Council.

Sincere regards,



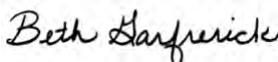
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Dr. Justin Bergh, Assistant Professor



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