

2021-22
Revisit Team Report
for Accreditation in Journalism
and Mass Communications

Name of Accredited Unit: Journalism Department

Name of Institution: California Polytechnic State University

Name of Unit Administrator: Brady Teufel

Date of Original Site Visit: January 26-29, 2020

Revisit Date: November 18-19, 2021

Revisit Team's Recommendation: Accreditation

Revisit Team Chair: Ann M. Brill, Dean, William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications, University of Kansas



Revisit Team Member: Greg Luft, Chair, Department of Journalism and Media Communications, Colorado State University



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

Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

Reasons cited:

1. The unit needs to be compliance with the 76/104 rule
2. Public relations students constitute 75 percent of the declared majors in the unit but are not being given a comprehensive view of the profession. Instead, instruction is closely tied to traditional media.

Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Reasons Cited:

1. The unit's assessment plan has not been fully deployed. Data are meager and not being used to close the gap and make appropriate changes in the curriculum.
2. The unit needs to demonstrate an assessment plan that gathers and analyzes data AND closes the gap between what it says it is doing and what it can demonstrate by using data to make curriculum decisions.

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

Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

Summary of findings:

Regarding Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction, the original site team found two issues – 1) the unit balance with outside credit hours and 2) while public relations students constitute 75 percent of the declared majors in the unit, they were not being given a comprehensive view of the profession. Instead, instruction is closely tied to traditional media.

1.) 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.

Cal Poly is on the quarter system and 180 credits are required for graduation. The unit offers a Bachelor of Science in Journalism with news and public relations tracks. The core for both tracks requires 40 credits in journalism. Track requirements include 20 credits from a select list of courses and 16 elective credits. The University has a general education requirement, with a total of 64 credits required in five broad categories.

At the time of the site team revisit, the unit has been in compliance with the 76/104 rule, which is the standard for those units on the quarter system, for the last two years. The unit went from 83.3 percent and 91.8 percent in compliance to 100 percent for the 2020-2021 academic year.

2.) Public Relations curriculum

In 2020, the unit's core requirements were journalism focused, with no core courses devoted to public relations teaching and learning. The majority of students in the unit are public relations (75%), but public relations courses comprise only 14% of the courses listed in the catalog (6 of 43). Students who selected the public relations track could graduate with only three (12 units) or four (16 units) public relations courses. At the time of the original visit, several faculty mentioned the need to redress this imbalance as an urgent priority.

By the time of the revisit, the unit made significant changes in its public relations requirement and offerings, including:

- Focusing Journalism electives to include only those courses taught within the unit to afford students more opportunities to take Public Relations electives.
- Building a five-course public relations concentration modeled after the undergraduate curriculum recommended by the Commission on Public Relations Education.
- Enhancing experiential learning with more opportunities for Public Relations students.
- Expanding connections within the Integrated Marketing Communication minor to clarify its value for students interested in public relations.
- Adding a tenure-track faculty member with expertise in this area. This additional faculty member is a second tenure track faculty member with a focus in public relations. Although her first quarter classes were delivered remotely as she prepared to move to California from Florida, she already has demonstrated positive impact and energy as indicated by students and existing PR faculty.
- Further integrating a philosophy of preparing storytellers in public relations with multimedia and social media skill sets.
- The department is beginning to focus on creating formal concentrations (instead of informal tracks) that will help to identify public relations-focused coursework and requirements.

In the quarter following the initial site team visit, the unit had a short window left in the winter quarter 2020 to submit curriculum changes for the next catalog cycle. The unit is to be commended for their quick actions to:

- Add new courses to the Public Relations Track that had been Journalism/Media/Mass Comm electives outside of the track. Students now choose among these to fulfill a requirement:
 - JOUR 345, Social Media for Strategic Communication
 - JOUR 403, Multimedia Production for Public Relations and Advertising
 - JOUR 412, Public Relations and Crisis Management
- Require all public relations students to take JOUR 342, Public Relations Writing and Editing
- Allow public relations students to take the agency class (JOUR 415) as their student media participation requirement.
- Broaden content in several core courses to encompass both news and public relations topics.
- Eliminate the Media/Mass Communication units from the list of elective courses “inside the unit,” which has the effect of freeing public relations students to max out their units in public relations courses.

The initial site team encouraged the unit to offer Public Relations students options in fulfilling their campus media requirement. As part of the recent changes, public relations students can now fulfill their student media course requirement by taking either Advanced Public Relations Practicum: CCPR or Advanced Broadcast Journalism Practicum or Advanced Newspaper Reporting Practicum.

Then: *Journalism/Public Relations Track (20 units)*

Select 12 units from the following:

- 1) JOUR 304 Public Affairs Reporting (4 units) or JOUR 333 Broadcast News (4 units) or JOUR 334 Editing (4 units)
- 2) JOUR 312 Public Relations (4 units)

3) JOUR 352 Advanced Newspaper Reporting Practicum (4 units) or JOUR 353 Advanced Broadcast Journalism Practicum (4 units)

Select 8 units from the following:

- 1) JOUR 342 Public Relations Writing and Editing (4 units)
- 2) JOUR 412 Public Relations and Crisis Management (4 units) or JOUR 413 Public Relations Campaigns (4 units)
- 3) JOUR 415 Advanced Public Relations Practice: CCPR (4 units)

Now: *Journalism/Public Relations Track (20 units)*

- 1) JOUR 312 Public Relations (4 units)
- 2) JOUR 342 Public Relations Writing and Editing (4 units)
- 3) JOUR 345 Social Media Strategies for Strategic Communication (4 units) or JOUR 403 Multimedia Production for Public Relations (4 units) and Advertising or JOUR 412 Public Relations and Crisis Management (4 units)

Select 8 units from the following:

- 1) JOUR 304 Public Affairs Reporting (4 units) and JOUR 352 Advanced Newspaper Reporting Practicum (4 units)
- 2) JOUR 334 Editing (4 units) and JOUR 352 Advanced Newspaper Reporting Practicum (4 units)
- 3) JOUR 333 Broadcast News (4 units) and JOUR 353 Advanced Broadcast Journalism Practicum (4 units)
- 4) JOUR 346 Broadcast Announcing and Production and JOUR 353 Advanced Broadcast Journalism Practicum (4 units)
- 5) JOUR 413 Public Relations Campaigns (4 units) and JOUR 415 Advanced Public Relations Practice: CCPR (4 units)

In addition, since the initial visit, indications are that faculty were enthusiastic about improving public relations exposure across the curriculum, including making changes to incorporate more public relations principles, cases and assignments into the core curriculum, including courses in Media Law, Journalism Ethics, and the Senior Media Practicum.

Also of note: Cal Poly is the only remaining university in the California system on the quarter system. The university is preparing for a transition to semesters, likely in 2025-2026. Faculty already are planning how to utilize this change for additional curricular improvements.

Overall Evaluation: COMPLIANCE

Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Summary of findings:

The original site team report found that: "The unit's assessment plan has not been fully deployed. Data are meager and not being used to close the gap and make appropriate changes in the curriculum. about attracting, retaining and celebrating a diverse student body and faculty hires."

In response to that finding on non-compliance, the unit undertook the following:

1. Conducted focus groups and an alumni survey to guide curriculum development.
2. Brought in an outside consultant to help the unit create a streamlined process for collecting artifacts and assessing them using the course management system, Canvas, and importing artifacts into Portfolium Educator.
3. Identified "signature assignments" to assess three Professional Values and Competencies in core courses and created rubrics for scoring them.
4. Adopted new Program Learning Objectives that align with ACEJMC's Professional Values and Competencies and address gaps identified in the accreditation process.
5. Drafted new Course Learning Objectives to more clearly represent material being taught, and provide consistency across sections, then mapped Course Learning Objectives in core courses with the new Program Learning Objectives.
6. Revisited earlier writing assessments in JOUR 203 to see if remedies were implemented to address previous problems.
7. "Closed the loop" on weaknesses in math/statistics and history identified in earlier assessment activities.
8. Kept on track with their Assessment Plan with the Knowledge Assessment Exam, Graduating Senior Survey, Employment Survey and Internship Surveys in 2020-21.
9. Conducted "signature assignment" assessments of three Professional Values and Competencies: History, Diversity and the use of Tools and Technologies.
10. Identified two new Program Learning Objectives to assess in 2021-22 along with a revisit of earlier writing assessments in JOUR 462.
11. Created a comprehensive "one-stop shop" website for all assessment activities and reports, and updated the unit's assessment plan.

The focus groups and alumni survey, in Summer and Fall 2020, provided information that led not only to curriculum changes but also to some organizational changes. Alumni encouraged the unit to ensure experiential learning and provide for specialization within the curriculum.

Initial results already can be seen in the revised Public Relations curriculum.

The original site team suggested using more direct measures regarding assessment of the 12 ACEJMC competencies and values and the courses where they are taught. The unit used the university's Office of Academic Proof to evaluate and analyze the unit's Program Learning Objectives (PLOs). The framework went into effect in Winter and Spring 2021 for courses in Diversity, History, Technology and Writing.

The unit also revised their degree's PLOs, which also had to be assessed for the university's internal assessment requirements. The revisions went into effect for the current academic year.

One of the concerns of the initial site team was inconsistency across multiple sections of a course. The revisit team found those inconsistencies addressed following faculty members' work to revise and update Course Learning Objectives so that all faculty teaching sections of the same course were using the same CLOs and devising appropriate assignments to fulfill each of them.

In response to the original site team's concern over the lack of following up on weaknesses found in freshman writing assessment, the unit further discovered two areas that scored the lowest on their rubric: support and synthesis. These items reflect the degree of accuracy, scope, organization, flow, and thoroughness of writing assignments. After changes in assignment requirements, recent assessment in 2020-2021 showed that scores in the Support and Synthesis categories improved and are now among the highest of measured indicators.

TRAIT	AVERAGE SCORES		
	News Reporting & Writing 2015-16	Senior Media Practicum 2016-17	JOUR 203 2020-21
Purpose	2.3	2.4	2.5
Synthesis	2.1	3.2	2.6
Support	2.0	2.9	2.7
Style	2.2	2.5	2.6
Mechanics	2.5	2.7	1.9

As noted in the original site team report, the unit also did not “close the loop” with its data showing scores in journalism history and numeracy/statistical knowledge were worse among seniors. At that time, the faculty had discussed the data but no steps were taken to remedy the situation. That information also showed up in the unit’s internship reports.

Since then, the unit has revised the Course Learning Objectives for its News Reporting and Writing course to include two new learning objectives – identify and evaluate numerical data for relevancy and accuracy, and apply mathematical and statistical concepts to facilitate audience understanding of numerical information. Regarding the history course data, the unit had not taught Journalism History for several years. The unit is now revising the Media, Self and Society course and added the Course Learning Objective of “identify milestones in journalism and mass communication history that have altered the power relationship between individuals and the mass media that serve them.”

The PLOs the unit assessed in the most recent term are Freedom of Speech, Ethics and Writing. The unit’s new website contains previous assessment reports, the unit’s Strategic Action Plan, and reports with analysis of the 2020-2021 measures.

In summary, the revisit team found the unit had moved forward in the consistency, quality and quantity of its assessment. The unit closed the loop in its revised Public Relations curriculum, adding specific assignments to its courses to meet course learning objectives and worked effectively within its faculty, on campus and with others in the state system to implement effective assessment tools.

Overall Evaluation: COMPLIANCE

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

1. The unit's physical space is not conducive to learning in the contemporary media and communications environments.
2. The unit faces challenges diversifying its student population and faculty given the costs of attending the University and living in the area, as well as the demographics of the local community. It will need to be creative and vigilant about attracting, retaining and celebrating a diverse student body and faculty hires.

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

REGARDING THE UNIT'S PHYSICAL SPACE:

The original site team report found the unit making the best of its space and shared space. As noted, the university has a new building for the program as part of its strategic plan. In the meantime, the unit continues to make improvements in its equipment and fundraising endeavors.

At the time of the revisit report, the site team found that the unit

- Secured support through California State Lottery funds to purchase 20 Fujionon X-T3 Mirrorless 4K cameras. These cameras are in place and represent a significant upgrade from cameras purchases in 2014.
- Purchased an additional 9 video cameras to brings its total to 19 cameras
- Added 10 "mobile kits" to enable students to use their smartphones as video-gathering tools.
- Added 4 HD studio cameras to replace standard definition cameras.
- Replaced analog audio plant with a new Web-based digital engine and mixer to allow for remote, browser-based audio mixing.
- Purchased mobile Web-based interface to allow the unit's radio station to continue remote broadcasting without in-studio presence.
- And other upgrades that will provide students experience with more current technology.

Given the high profile of the unit and Mustang News, the unit hopes that fundraising will result in a new building within ten years.

DIVERSIFYING STUDENT POPULATION AND FACULTY

Since the original site team visit, the unit has been working even more closely with campus diversity officers to ensure a diverse pool of faculty applicants even though the university does not report the racial and ethnic makeup of the candidate pool for faculty positions. The most recent hire is a white female with significant experience interacting with multicultural groups. Her professional experience includes working in international marketing with Disney Studios, running an entertainment company that specialized in hosting cultural exhibits and events based on Asian subcultures and teaching English as a second language.

The unit worked with university admissions to increase the yield of underrepresented minorities among applicants. One marketing tool was a video emailed in spring 2020 to conditionally admitted students. In fall 2020, the university saw the percentage of minority first-time freshmen grow from 20.4 percent in fall 2019 to 27.6 percent in fall 2020. Transfer student numbers, however, were down. As the revisit site team notes, it is difficult to predict enrollment trends following the pandemic disruption.

4. Summary conclusion and recommendation:

The revisit team found the unit now in compliance on the two standards earlier out of compliance. The revisit team also noted progress in access to equipment and some minor facility changes that were within the unit's control. The exit interview with campus leaders included a discussion of possible building upgrades. The curriculum changes as well as the additional faculty member in Public Relations significantly addressed the concerns in Standard 2. Finally, the unit is to be commended for the use of its assessment data to implement curriculum changes and, in particular, working with campus and a sister university in the California State University system to devise, implement and make changes using technology that makes the process easier on faculty as well as ensuring clarity and consistency in the data. Campus leaders were unanimous in praising the unit as modeling best assessment practices.

Recommendation: ACCREDITATION

Accrediting Council

On Education in Journalism and Mass Communications

Patricia Thompson
Executive Director

May 12, 2022

Jeffrey D. Armstrong, President
California Polytechnic State University

Dear President Armstrong:

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications met April 29 in Chicago and voted 15-1, with one recusal, that the Journalism Department at California Polytechnic State University receive initial accreditation. Mary Glick, associate professor and former chair, attended the meeting.

The Council concurred with the recommendations for initial accreditation made by the Accrediting Committee and the revisit site team.

We will be in touch with the chair about the next visit for the school, scheduled for the 2026-27 academic year.

Please accept my congratulations and best wishes for continued success for the Journalism Department, its students, faculty and the professional media constituencies it serves.

Sincerely,



Peter Bhatia
ACEJMC President

cc: Brady Teufel, chair
Mary Glick, former chair
Ann Brill, site team chair
Marie Hardin, chair, Accrediting Committee
Patricia Thompson, executive director, ACEJMC