

**2023-24
Revisit Team Report
for Accreditation in Journalism
and Mass Communications**

Name of Accredited Unit: Department of Journalism

Name of Institution: Central Michigan University

Name of Unit Administrator: Dr. Sean Baker, Coordinator

Date of Original Site Visit: November 28-December 1, 2021

Revisit Date: January 15-17, 2024

Revisit Team Chair: David Boardman, Temple University



Revisit Team Member: Dr. Michel Haigh, Texas State University



Revisit Team's Recommendation: Re-accreditation

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

Standard 1: Mission, Governance and Administration

- The climate within the unit is one of trauma, victimization and deep distrust of upper administration. Although the interim chair, brought in from outside the unit, has done an admirable job of calming troubled waters, the unit needs and deserves stable leadership with expertise in and connection with the discipline.
- The strategic plan is outdated and has been largely ignored for nearly a decade.
- The norms of shared governance have been largely lost and must be restored.

Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

- The unit's curriculum is outdated, particularly as it pertains to the use of modern delivery platforms for media.
- Curriculum and instruction is far too siloed, both within the majors of the unit itself and particularly in the stark separation that exists between the Department of Journalism and the School of Broadcast and Cinematic Arts. This deprives students of opportunities for learning many of the skills they are seeking in video, audio and emerging technologies.
- The curriculum shows little if any evidence that it is tied to assessment of student outcomes.

Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

- The unit has an assessment plan that was once promising but has neither been updated nor executed for many years.
- Data has been gathered on a basis enough to comply with university requirements but has not been effectively utilized to inform curricular changes.
- Some direct measures, such as the exit exam, have not been implemented consistently. Others, such as professional evaluations of the capstone classes, have not used the feedback to make substantive and effective curricular changes.

- There is a need for a new champion who understands assessment and can work with faculty to close the loop between assessment findings and curricular improvement.

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.

Standard 1: Mission, Governance and Administration

The 2021 site team found a unit in crisis, with a turnstile of leadership, uncertain direction and abysmal morale. The very existence of journalism education at Central Michigan University appeared at risk. The Department of Journalism was being led by a temporary chair from outside the department; in fact, he had been brought out of retirement to try to stabilize things. He was the fifth chair in seven years – two of whom had been elected but forced out by administration. The department was plagued by various controversies, one that even rose to national publicity.

What has occurred in the two years since that visit is a testament to the power of ACEJMC’s accreditation process, and to the determination of the unit’s faculty and university leadership to better serve their students. This unit has made remarkable progress, clearly embracing the findings of the 2021 site team and acting upon them directly. While the situation is not perfect – some of the issues cited were too deep to be remedied in two years – the tenor, morale and momentum have been transformed dramatically.

The weaknesses that led to the unit being found out of compliance on Standard 1 have all been addressed. Some of the work began the day the previous site team left campus in November of 2021, and it accelerated greatly with the appointment of a new dean in fall 2022, Dr. Jefferson Campbell. As Dean Campbell states in a letter to ACEJMC that was part of the Revisit Self-Study:

“Upon my arrival as Dean of the College of the Arts and Media, my first task was to read the report from the ACEJMC site visit and deliberation. This report, and the phrase “*The climate within the unit is one of trauma, victimization and deep distrust of upper administration...*” stood out to me as particularly concerning and I set out to meet the faculty and learn about the history of the department and its relationship to administration at the college and university level. It quickly became clear that an escalating pattern of mistrust and decision-making based on that mistrust and fear had been established over the course of several years. Under the leadership of Dr. Sean Baker last year, the Department of Journalism made progress in its perception and dealings with my office, and I have worked diligently to demonstrate that my office and the Office of the Provost sincerely

wants to help faculty in Journalism rebuild their enrollment and morale as a unit. I have not been afraid to discuss some of the situations of recent years that have fueled the mistrust, and while we are not completely finished with building our relationship, the faculty and I are in agreement in approaching each issue with good faith and trust and have acted on that premise for the past academic year. Further, I have been mindful to approach changes and concerns in the true spirit of shared governance with faculty in this discipline, and together we have already made significant changes to build strong, working relationships that over time will allow us to strategize our future plans.”

The most significant change instituted under Dean Campbell was the reorganization of the Department of Journalism and other departments in the realm of media and communication into a new School of Communication, Journalism, and Media, within the College of Arts and Media. The creation of this School followed a process that was highly inclusive of faculty, including a series of votes on the establishment, structure, name and governance of the new School.

The result is a refreshingly different attitude toward administration than what the 2021 site team heard from faculty. “The whole place just feels different, and better,” said one veteran faculty member. “We took very seriously the feedback from the site team, and the climate is markedly better.”

In the new structure, the Department of Journalism no longer exists. Rather, Journalism and Photojournalism is a program unit within the School of Communication, Journalism and Media, along with Strategic Communication (including Public Relations and Advertising), Communication, and Media Arts (including Broadcasting and Cinematic Arts). Each of those areas has a unit coordinator, who reports up to School Director Heather Polinsky. She reports directly to Dean Campbell.

Along with this consolidated leadership structure, the dean made significant changes in the Responsibility Centered Management (RCM) budgetary model. No longer is there a direct correlation between student credit hours and unit budgets; rather, the credit-hour revenue goes to the College, which then distributes to the units. This is intended to allow for more flexibility, more innovation and more cooperation, and to reduce defensiveness and silos.

The faculty have embraced the new structure and consider it an opportunity. It has already facilitated more cross-disciplinary conversation and collaboration, and new, interdisciplinary curricular offerings are in the works.

The unit’s strategic plan was revised and ratified in February 2022, following a series of faculty meetings. The faculty agreed to revisit the plan each semester, and it was revised again in June 2023. The new School of Communication, Journalism, and Media is in process on its strategic plan. It is clear that there is

serious attention to these plans, and it appears they will guide actions going forward.

OVERALL EVALUATION: COMPLIANCE

Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

As with Standard 1, the progress on this standard has been dramatic and impressive. Almost immediately after the 2021 visit, the faculty began looking for ways to update and modernize the curriculum. And with the new School that has resulted from restructuring, the silos cited in the earlier report are being raised, for the benefit of students, who have many more opportunities to take classes in other areas.

Because of the bureaucratic processes involved in changing curriculum, the changes required for Standard 2 are more of a work-in-progress than a completed task. But that progress has been swift and significant. While the primary weakness of this standard in 2021 was the outdated curriculum, this revisit team was met with profound changes and updates, to the extent that one student nearing graduation told us: “I’m jealous of the new students. They have so many more opportunities than I had.”

The unit addressed the modernization challenge in several ways. They surveyed other programs as to their offerings and best practices. They consulted with student advisory groups and with alumni working in these fields. They looked at and acted upon assessment data. While many of the resulting changes are still in process, those already instituted are impressive. Examples include:

- The return and redefinition of a Social Media Certificate
- The introduction of several social-media courses to the Advertising major:
 - *Digital and Social Media Analytics* (required)
 - *Social Media and Society* (elective)
 - *Social Media: Managing the Message* (elective)
 - *Social Media: Reputation, Image and Interaction* (elective)
- The addition of two multimedia course requirements to the Journalism major:
 - *Multimedia Reporting Capstone* (required)
 - *Online Visual Storytelling* (required)
- The addition of two required courses for the Public Relations concentration:
 - *Digital and Social Media Analytics* (required)
 - *Social Media: Reputation, Image and Interaction* (required)

Beyond those new courses, digital, social-media and multimedia skills have been widely incorporated across the curriculum in a manner that was missing previously.

Another weakness cited in the 2021 site-team report was that instruction was siloed, particularly between the Department of Journalism and the School of Broadcast and Cinematic Arts. At the time, these two units were not only not cooperating with each other, they were engaged in a budget- and turf-driven rivalry over credit hours that deprived Journalism students of training they needed and deserved in video, audio and emerging technologies.

Today, those programs reside in a single school and are working together like never before. They are actively planning collaborative programs, new courses and cross-listing existing classes to allow more student access. Issues remain – for instance, while Journalism students can take the practicum Television News class housed in BCA, they cannot apply the credit toward their degree – but solving them is a front-and-center matter. Additionally, a new cross-program major, Broadcast/Multimedia Journalism, has been proposed and is under university consideration.

The third critical finding in the 2021 report was this: “The curriculum shows little if any evidence that it is tied to assessment of student outcomes.”

That critique no longer holds. Most of the many curricular changes made in the past two years were directly tied to assessment findings. Examples are cited below, in the section on Standard 9.

OVERALL EVALUATION: COMPLIANCE

Standard 9: Assessment

The 2021 site team found many serious issues with this unit’s assessment practices. As with the other standards previously found out of compliance, the progress on this one has been swift and significant.

The unit now has a strong assessment plan. The plan includes a curriculum map showing where the ACEJMC competencies are taught and reinforced. After the last site visit, assessment rubrics were updated, exit exams were updated, an exit survey was developed, and the internship evaluation was revised. The

program uses a variety of direct and indirect measures as part of its assessment plan. The indirect and direct measures are the same for each concentration, which makes it easier to evaluate across the unit.

The direct measures include: an exit exam, the capstone project that is usually sent out for external evaluation by a professional, and the internship evaluation. Indirect measures include the exit survey (questions tied to competencies), enrollment, retention, and graduation rates, graduate placements, and honors/awards.

The unit set a baseline or target for each of the measures. For example, the students would have an average score of a 70 percent or greater for the questions on the exit exam tied to the concentration. The baseline score for an internship evaluation is a 3.5 for each competency.

For the exit survey, the baseline states 80 percent of students will "agree" or "strongly agree" that they have mastered the competency. The exit survey has a question tied to each competency whereas the exit exam has questions tied to specific knowledge about journalism and each concentration.

It is easy to track the ACEJMC competencies when reviewing the assessment plan. The competencies are stated as the Student Learning Objectives. It was easy for the site team to understand what was being measured, how it was being measured as well as understand that each ACEJMC competency is being assessed by the exit survey. The rubrics for the capstone projects and internship evaluations are evolving to have questions tied to each competency so it is easier to make the connections between what was assessed and the ACEJMC competency, but it is a work in progress for two of the concentrations (advertising and photojournalism). The Journalism and Public Relations concentrations have already moved to have their rubrics state the competencies. The same wording used on the capstone rubrics is also used on the exit survey, so things are consistent and easy to draw connections.

In summary, the unit has an updated assessment plan, updated rubrics, and are implementing the plan and collecting assessment data on a regular basis.

The previous report stated: "Data has been gathered on a basis enough to comply with university requirements but has not been effectively utilized to inform curricular changes."

In the revisit report, the accreditation coordinator provides a list of curriculum changes and ties in the process assessment played in making those changes.

The updated Advertising curriculum included input from their Advertising Alumni Board. They now incorporate Google Analytics, HubSpot, and other certificates in digital and social media. Internship evaluations led to the additional major requirement of the Digital and Social Media Analytics course. Real-world clients

are used when working in advertising design and copy, social media, and the capstone course. The use of clients also is another way to gain feedback to “close the loop” besides the internship evaluations. One of the major changes to the Advertising curriculum based on external reviewers was updating how faculty discussed/taught research and its tie to the strategies being executed. They have also added more in-class writing assignments and activities tied to numerical analysis. They also spend more time on KPIs, consumer behavior data, social media data and how to use this data to evaluate the effectiveness of the advertising campaigns. All these adjustments were made based on external feedback.

Journalism also relies on external reviewers to “close the loop.” The concentration now requires a skills-based capstone course, more skills-based courses were added in as electives, and there have been electives in the social media area added to address the last team's concern about “modern delivery platforms.” External reviewers commended the students on showing strong ethics and critical thinking skills when producing products.

Photojournalism made curriculum changes based on external feedback as well. They now require students to write a research paper about ongoing changes and trends. There is also more of an emphasis on research tied to telling stories – in addition to measuring a student's ability to understand shutter speed – faculty have started focusing on using data to tell a story.

The Public Relations concentration also used assessment to improve its curriculum. For example, the Digital and Social Media Analytics course is now required by all majors after a survey of recent alums. They also added the course Social Media: Reputation, Image, and Interaction, based on alumni feedback. Students are required to take an internship and develop a portfolio. The internship evaluations have led to updates on course assignments. They also added the PESO model certification, developed by Syracuse University, as a requirement in the PR Seminar Class.

In summary, the evidence provided in the revisit report and faculty interviews indicates they are taking the assessment data gathered and using it to “close the loop” and improve curriculum.

The previous report stated: “Some direct measures, such as the exit exam, have not been implemented consistently. Others, such as professional evaluations of the capstone classes, have not used the feedback to make substantive and effective curricular changes.”

This concern has been addressed. The exit exam has been implemented consistently since the last site visit. Each concentration also updated the questions specific to its content on the exit exam. They have also implemented an exit survey as another indicator. They have also updated the curriculum based on internship evaluations and the external reviews of the portfolios. For

example, they revised the Advertising curriculum to include more quantitative research skills based on feedback from professionals conducting portfolio reviews. Another example is Journalism including more multimedia skills in its courses. The internship evaluations indicated that video skills were lacking, so the faculty revised course assignments to ensure they were exposed to more video skills. Additional examples of using internship evaluations and portfolio reviews for "closing the loop" are listed earlier in the report.

The 2021 report stated: "There is a need for a new champion who understands assessment and can work with faculty to close the loop between assessment findings and curricular improvement."

Many faculty noted the individual who designed the assessment plan and carried it out had left, and there was nobody who understood the complete process after he left. There is now an assessment champion at the college level who has demystified the process of assessment for the unit. More faculty are involved in the assessment process. They work closely with an assessment coordinator at the college level, who has been very strategic in making the assessment measures and reports for ACEJMC work for the university-level reporting too, so the unit does not have to duplicate efforts.

The college assessment coordinator has been an assessment champion along with the unit's current accreditation coordinator to make sure the ACEJMC competencies are being measured through the rubrics, exams, and surveys. More faculty were included in the assessment discussions preparing for the revisit, and it is clear after faculty interviews that more individuals understand the assessment process and the importance of assessment in updating the curriculum and eventually recruiting new students. Faculty discussed using the findings from the internship evaluations and portfolio reviews as a way to improve the curriculum, so the process is clearer now that more people are involved. Specific examples of "closing the loop" are cited earlier.

The unit has addressed the concerns raised by the 2021 site team. It includes faculty in the assessment process. The college-level assessment person has worked to demystify the assessment process and make it work for the unit. She has also made it easier for the assessment completed for ACEJMC work for university assessment process. For the most part, the assessment rubrics and surveys are tied to the competencies. It is easy to see the unit measured the competency for the exit survey and most of the capstone rubrics. The internship rubric is a work in progress. The use of benchmarks makes it easy to see if the unit has achieved the goal it set for each Student Learning Outcome (or ACEJMC competency) and what work needs to be done to meet it in the future.

OVERALL EVALUATION: COMPLIANCE

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

Nearly all of the weaknesses cited by the previous site team can be directly tied to the lack of effective leadership in the unit. In addition to the issues described above, this was the most notable: “A pervasive obsession by faculty with perceived offenses by upper administration toward the department, and a sense by faculty, staff and students that the department is not respected within the university.”

4. For 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.

The faculty input on the administration this time around was 180 degrees from the tenor in the site visit. Clearly, this dean has made a tremendous, positive impact and has quickly won the trust of this unit.

5. Summary conclusion and recommendation:

The chair of this Revisit Site Team has given hundreds of hours to ACEJMC accreditation over the years, as a site-team member, a site-team chair, a member of the Accrediting Committee, a member of the Accrediting Council, and as president of the Council. This visit, more than any other, reinforced his belief in this process and its value.

How the faculty and administration of Central Michigan University received, embraced and acted upon the highly critical 2021 site-team report, and upon the decision by the Council to grant it only provisional re-accreditation, is a profound affirmation of ACEJMC. And it underscores the commitment of this unit’s faculty to their mission and their students.

When the site team presented the 2021 findings to the Committee with a recommendation of provisional re-accreditation, it did so with significant doubt that this unit could effectively address its many issues in just two years. What they have accomplished is surprising and truly inspirational.

The Revisit Site Team enthusiastically **recommends re-accreditation** for this program.