

Report of On-Site Evaluation

ACEJMC
Undergraduate program
2017-2018

Name of Institution: Nicholls State University

Name and Title of Chief Executive Officer: Dr. Bruce Murphy, president

Name of Unit: Department of Mass Communication

Name and Title of Administrator: Dr. James Stewart

Date of 2017-2018 Accrediting Visit: Oct. 29-Nov. 1, 2017

If the unit is currently accredited, please provide the following information:

Date of the previous accrediting visit: Nov. 13-16, 2011

Recommendation of the previous site visit team: Reaccreditation

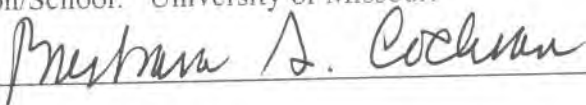
Previous decision of the Accrediting Council: Reaccreditation

Recommendation by 2017-2018 Visiting Team: Reaccreditation

Prepared and submitted by:

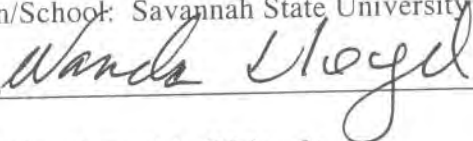
Team Chair

Name and Title: Barbara S. Cochran, Curtis B. Hurley Chair in Public Affairs Journalism, Missouri
School of Journalism
Organization/School: University of Missouri

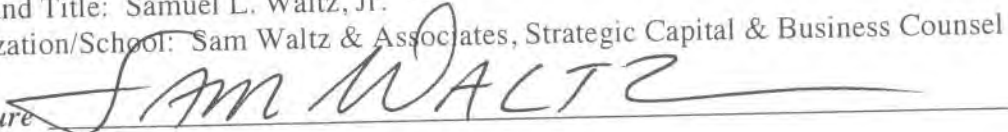
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Team Members

Name and Title: Wanda Lloyd, associate professor, Department of Journalism & Mass Communications
Organization/School: Savannah State University

Signature 

Name and Title: Samuel L. Waltz, Jr.
Organization/School: Sam Waltz & Associates, Strategic Capital & Business Counsel

Signature 

PART I: General information

Name of Institution: Nicholls State University

Name of Unit: Department of Mass Communication

Year of Visit: 2017

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

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

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

Public

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.

Act 284 of the Louisiana Legislature on July 10, 1944, created Francis T. Nicholls Junior College as a branch of Louisiana State University at Thibodaux, La. Act 280 of the Louisiana Legislature on July 11, 1956, transformed Nicholls into a four-year degree-granting institution under the State Board of Education. Act 93 of the Louisiana Legislature on June 23, 1970, created Nicholls State University.

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

Yes with last accrediting visit: Nov. 13-15, 2011

5. When was the unit or sequences within the unit first accredited by ACEJMC? 1994

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

"The Department's mission, reflected in its focus on a broad-based education, is to prepare students for careers in industries requiring mass communication skills and to be successful contributing members of society."

Developed: 1995 **Revised:** May 2016

7. What are the type and length of terms? Semesters of 16 weeks

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

Bachelor's degree

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

A Bachelor of the Arts Degree in Mass Communication
Concentrations in Journalism and Public Relations

10. Credit hours required by the university for an undergraduate degree: 120 semester hours

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

3 Semester Hours

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

Name of Sequence or Specialty	Person in Charge
Journalism	Dr. Shaniece Bickham
Public Relations	Dr. Linda Martin

13. Number of full-time students enrolled in the institution: 4,889

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>
MC-Journalism	69
MC-Public Relations	51
MC-Broadcast Journalism (Old Catalog)	1

15. Number of students in each section of all skills courses.

Spring 2017

Course No.	Course Name	Enrollment
MACO 251	News Writing	16
MACO 252 (3M)	Reporting	15
MACO 252 (5M)	Reporting	13
MACO 261	Photojournalism	13
MACO 317	Public Relations Writing	14
MACO 321	Inform. Technologies for Mass Communication	14
MACO 322	Publication Design for Mass Communication	10
MACO 326	News Editing	11
MACO 362	Broadcast Media Workshop	15
MACO 402	Broadcast Journalism Workshop	3
MACO 440	Public Relations Campaigns	9
MACO 451	Feature Writing	9
MACO 490	Digital Media Convergence	8
MACO 499	Green-screen Production	4
	Average	11

Fall 2017

Course No.	Course Name	Enrollment
MACO 251 (2T)	News Writing	15
MACO 251 (3M)	Reporting	15
MACO 252	Reporting	13
MACO 321 (3M)	Inform. Technologies for Mass Communication	14
MACO 321 (3T)	Inform. Technologies for Mass Communication	16
MACO 322	Publication Design for Mass Communication	14
MACO 350	Web Design for Mass Communication	10
MACO 361	Television Production	14
MACO 401	Broadcast Journalism	6
MACO 430	Public Relations Case Studies	16
MACO 455	Public Affairs Reporting	13
MACO 490	Digital Media Convergence	8
MACO 499	PR 1887 Project	12
	Average	12.77

16. Total expenditures planned by the unit for the 2017 – 2018 academic year:

\$305,405

Give percentage increase or decrease in three years: -5.85 percent

Amount expected to be spent this year on full-time faculty salaries: \$212,456

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

Mr. Lance Arnold	Assistant Professor
Dr. Shaniece Bickham	Assistant Professor
Ms. Nicki Boudreaux	Instructor
Ms. A. Laure Chamberlain Kasovich	Instructor
Dr. Linda Martin	Assistant Professor

Department Head

Dr. James Stewart	Professor
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18. List names of part-time/adjunct faculty teaching at least one course in fall 2017. Also list names of part-time faculty teaching spring 2017. (If your school has its accreditation visit in spring 2018, please provide the spring 2018 adjunct list in the updated information.)

Ms. Felicia Harry	Assistant Professor
Dr. Andy Simoncelli	Associate Professor

19. Schools on the semester system:

72 or more semester hours outside of journalism and mass communications

Year	Total Graduates	Number	Percent
2016-2017 academic year	<u>15</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>100</u>
2015-2016 academic year	<u>16</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>100</u>

PART II — Standard 1: Mission, Governance and Administration

The policies and practices of the unit ensure that it has an effectively and fairly administered working and learning environment.

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 Department of Mass Communication is one of 12 programs in the College of Arts and Sciences at Nicholls State University. The university, located in Thibodaux, LA, serves an eight-parish region in the heart of Cajun country and draws three-quarters of its students from the area. The institution was founded in 1944 as a junior college branch of Louisiana State University and became a four-year degree-granting institution in 1956. It became Nicholls State University in 1970.

Journalism has been taught since the year after the institution became a four-year college. The first degree in Communications Arts was granted in 1975 to meet the desire of students who couldn't transfer to Louisiana State University to earn a degree and the need of local media for qualified personnel. In 1992, the State Board of Regents approved the creation of a Department of Mass Communication. Two years later, in 1994, the department first received ACEJMC accreditation.

Since Fall of 2001, the university has operated under a selective admissions system, requiring students to have at least a 2.0 grade point average and an ACT score of 21 or higher. First-generation college students comprise 69 percent of the student body.

The department confers a Bachelor of the Arts degree in Mass Communications. Students choose a professional emphasis of journalism or public relations. There are 121 majors in the department. There are seven faculty, including the department head and a part-time faculty member who also directs the campus distance learning program. The department head has held his position since 1997 and has overseen the department's reaccreditation in 2000, 2006 and 2012.

The state of Louisiana and the region around the university have been hit hard economically by the downturn in oil prices and damage sustained during Hurricane Katrina and subsequent storms. In the past five years, state funding for the university has fallen nearly 20 percent, on top of a 20 percent decline during the previous accreditation period. Still, the administration and unit report progress through a recruitment effort that has reversed declines in enrollment and through salary enhancements for faculty and staff over the past two years and the promise for 2018 of the first salary increases in 10 years.

The department prepares an annual plan in the spring, most recently in May 2017, to align with the plans of the College of Arts and Sciences and the university. The unit's mission statement states: "The Department's mission, reflected in its focus on a broad-based education, is to prepare students for careers in industries requiring mass communication skills and to be successful contributing members of society."

The most significant changes since the last accrediting visit have been the completion of a nearly \$1 million project to update the department's facilities and equipment and curriculum revisions that merged broadcast and print journalism, expanded the core curriculum, integrated multi-media skills throughout

the curriculum, established a multi-media capstone course required of all students and created a requirement for an internship.

With new facilities and equipment and increased attention to recruiting, the department has been able to make good on its goal of increasing enrollment. The department's efforts are part of the university's Student Advising and Mentoring plan, which was adopted as the Quality Enhancement Plan required by the university's accrediting body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

In the first year of its recruiting plan, the department exceeded its goal of a 3 percent increase by achieving a 4.3 percent increase for 2017. This also exceeds the university's increase of 2 percent for the same year.

The department enjoys support from the administration of the College of Arts and Sciences and the university. At the time of the visit, the president had recently announced his intention to resign at the end of 2017 after four years of service. A search for a replacement had been narrowed to six candidates, five of whom have existing ties to the university. The administrators with whom the team met were at pains to say that changes at the top would not only not hurt the department, but might improve support. They said the department is appreciated for the visibility it provides for the university and for student media which aid in communication on and off campus. Under the current administration, the department has received support for an extensive upgrade of facilities and equipment, salary enhancement for faculty and creation of two endowments to award supplemental funds to two faculty members.

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

With only seven members, the faculty are in close contact and consult frequently. They operate as a committee of the whole when considering major policy matters, such as curriculum changes. Meetings are scheduled on an as-needed basis, occurring monthly on average during the academic year. One meeting every spring is devoted to a discussion of assessment results and possible actions to be taken based on those findings. Minutes are kept on file and shared with college and university administrators. Faculty reported feeling included in department decision-making and the team observed how collegial and supportive members were of one another. A student described the department as fostering "a big family atmosphere."

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 department head reports to the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, the vice president for academic affairs/provost and ultimately to the university president. There is no term set for the department head's service. Rather, the department head is evaluated annually and continues in the position unless the president, provost and dean decide to make a change. The department head is the longest serving academic department head at the university. He has provided stable leadership and been recognized with an award for administrative excellence. Faculty, administrators and others on campus spoke highly of the department head, who also serves in a leadership position of the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication. Two faculty members serve as heads of the Journalism and Public Relations tracks, respectively.

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

There is a process for selecting the department head, but it hasn't been exercised since the current head took the position in 1997. To select the department head, the vice president for academic affairs appoints a committee of faculty members from the department and other units from the campus. The nomination is reviewed by the dean, the vice president, the president and the Board of Supervisors for the University of Louisiana System. In the annual review conducted by the dean, the department head has averaged a very high rating of "exemplary performance" over the past six years.

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

Grievances of faculty, staff and students are first addressed informally, then at the next administrative level. If a formal grievance is filed, it is addressed by a committee and can be appealed to the Board of Supervisors of the university system. The procedures are outlined in the faculty Policy and Procedure Manual and in the Code of Student Conduct. All department syllabi give notice of procedures for students. In the past six years, one student grievance was settled at the informal level with the department head.

Summary

In spite of declines in state funding for operating expenses and a downturn during the accrediting period in enrollment in the university and department, the department has made progress. The department received funds for up-to-date facilities and equipment and has revamped its curriculum to ensure all students master multi-media skills. The result is that enrollment in the department's program is rising and students are getting jobs upon graduation. The department's leadership is respected within the department, the university and the community and the entire department works cohesively to constantly update and improve its program.

COMPLIANCE

PART II — Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

The unit provides curriculum and instruction, whether on site or online, that enable students to learn the knowledge, competencies and values the Council defines for preparing students to work in a diverse global and domestic society.

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

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 university requires 120 credit hours for graduation. The Department of Mass Communication requires 48 credit hours of courses in the major, leaving 72 hours for courses outside the department. The 48 credits include 27 credits for core courses, 12 credits within either the Journalism or Public Relations tracks and 9 credits in electives. Students have 26 hours of elective credits outside the university's general education courses. They are required to use these hours either for a minor in another discipline, which can be completed with 18 hours, or for adviser-approved courses. In the last two academic years, 100 percent of graduating students took at least 72 hours outside the department.

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.

The department undertook significant curriculum changes in the year after the previous site visit, when the team expressed concern that the curriculum was too siloed and not keeping up with current multi-media skills and practices in the profession. Among the steps taken to address those concerns:

- Broadcast and Print were merged into one Journalism concentration
- The core curriculum was expanded from 15 to 27 hours
- Courses were reoriented to include story-telling and public relations campaigns across all platforms
- A multimedia capstone course, Digital Media Convergence, is required of all majors, who produce an online magazine, *Garde Voir Ci (Look at This)*, that utilizes student learning in text, video, audio, social media and public relations.
- A new course in web design was created
- Internships are now required of all students
- A course in visual communication was added to the core curriculum

The core curriculum reflects a mix of theoretical and skills courses. All students in both Journalism and Public Relations take a mass communication survey course and courses in history and principles and law and ethics. They also take skills courses in visual communication, writing, news reporting and information technology. The internship and capstone Digital Media Convergence course are also included in the core.

Each concentration has four required courses. For Journalism students, the courses are News Editing, Television Production, Feature Writing and Public Affairs Reporting. Public Relations students take courses in Public Relations Writing, Public Relations, Practices and Case Studies, and Campaigns. The

most advanced required course in each track provides practical experience. Students in Public Affairs Reporting operate as a news bureau, while students in Public Relations Campaigns plan and execute campaigns for local nonprofit groups.

The department also incorporates theoretical knowledge into skills classes, so that students can learn about ethics, diversity or historical antecedents while producing work. In the Fall 2017 semester, ethics was addressed in the syllabi for 16 of 22 courses and diversity was addressed in 13.

The restructuring allowed both Journalism and Public Relations students to take nine hours of Mass Communication electives beyond the core or concentration to give them increased flexibility to take courses in areas such as production, writing, design and digital media. The electives can include theoretical courses such as Women and Minorities in Media, Media Ethics and Media and Democracy. They can also include specific skills courses such as Web Design for Mass Communication and Broadcast Journalism.

The department maps the curriculum in a matrix with the 12 ACEJMC values and competencies and uses the competencies in assessment. A detailed chart shows which competencies are addressed in each course and further notes which key concepts within a competency are addressed.

Data from the university's assessment of student learning shows the department scores better than the university in eight of nine categories, and improved from the time of the last self-study in five categories, including professional knowledge. Students excel above university ratings in writing, critical thinking and ethics, areas that are especially important for journalism. The most recent survey of alumni one year and five years after graduation shows 79.1 percent felt their preparation was good or very good.

One effect of creating the core curriculum is that Journalism and Public Relations students take a large number of the same courses together. This has broken down the divide between Print and Broadcast Journalism and had the further effect of making divisions between Journalism and Public Relations much more porous. Because of the core curriculum, the wide choice of electives and the capstone course, students from different concentrations find themselves working together and shifting easily between disciplines. One student remarked she uses her Journalism brain for some tasks and her Public Relations brain for others. This holds true for graduates, too. The team met an alum who studied Broadcast Journalism now working in public relations and another who concentrated in Public Relations and now is the digital media producer for a Baton Rouge television station.

Journalism

The department has combined broadcast and print journalism into a single concentration -- Journalism. In addition to core courses in the major, journalism concentration majors are required to take these courses:

1. News Editing
2. Television Production
3. Feature Writing
4. Public Affairs Reporting

Current students and recent graduates express appreciation for the wide-ranging course work not only in the major, but also for the ability to take electives from across the campus. As they move into internships and their first full-time employment, students say they are very comfortable with the quality

of their education. One recent graduate who is now working in production at a TV station has had jobs that utilized his skills in public relations, print/newspaper, web design, broadcasting and video editing. He said he is competing in different parts of the state with graduates from much larger journalism and mass communications programs and he has been able to accomplish success in all of his roles working with colleagues who are graduates of those other institutions.

Students who previously would have pursued a Broadcast Journalism concentration are still able to get skills courses as electives. After completing the required courses in the core of Visual Communication and Television Production, they can take Broadcast Media Workshop in which they learn more about studio production and then Broadcast Journalism and Broadcast Journalism Workshop, in which they learn news-gathering, story production and produce a newscast. These courses give them the skills needed should they pursue a job at a local television station. There are no radio courses currently, but students described getting audio experience by working for the campus radio station, KNSU-FM.

Students in the Journalism concentration expressed satisfaction with their education experience and they are quite complimentary of the relationship between students and faculty. They talk about having good access to faculty via open doors during office hours (and beyond), through emails and through working with them on student media, clubs and organizations. Students say they get good feedback from professors on class assignments, especially writing. Several said they initially struggled with writing, but over time saw their own improvement and gained confidence as interviewers. A junior faculty member who is new in the department leads the Journalism concentration. As a young faculty member with teaching experience at several regional universities as well as professional experience, she is advising student media, leading completion of the convergence of Nicholls Worth, which in the current semester has transitioned from a weekly newspaper to a monthly magazine, with frequent postings online, and video and social media promotion.

Public Relations

The Public Relations concentration is set up with four 3-hour core courses:

1. Intro to Public Relations
2. Public Relations Writing (Spring only)
3. Public Relations Practice and Case Histories
4. Public Relations Campaigns

In addition, Public Relations concentration students also may take:

1. Public Relations Internship Course
2. A series of 1-hour Independent Study Project courses

For the current school year, to support a service project, the unit created the 1887 Project, a fund-raising effort to rescue the remains of victims of a massacre of some 150 sugar cane workers in Thibodaux in the 19th Century.

It's not at all unusual – and even fairly typical – for a Public Relations student to also complete the requirements for a Journalism concentration as well, and those students frequently will take electives in Publications, Web and Broadcast Production to round out their preparations.

Two full-time faculty, one with the terminal degree, teach the public relations courses.

In several separate meetings with students, both individually and in groups, students were able to talk with fluency and in detail about the kinds of jobs they hoped to seek upon graduation, and about how they felt the “converged platform” helped make them more effective in their academic preparation and understanding. One recent graduate talked about his journey from broadcast journalism to public relations and later back to journalism. Another spoke of her interest in becoming a public relations practitioner for the local Roman Catholic diocese. Yet another talked about using his skill set to better establish recognition for his Native American tribe in the Louisiana Bayou country. Another talked about seeking a job in video editing, another in event planning, another in TV direction, and another as a radio show host.

The students seemed unaware of the position of community manager, an entry-level position for public relations graduates that has evolved over the last decade and that utilizes a convergence of skills including social media, other digital skills, broadcast, video, events and conventional public relations. Faculty were interested in learning from the team about this developing position.

Representatives from campus departments and community groups indicate great satisfaction with Journalism and Public Relations students who serve in roles as interns and partners for helping to build campaigns. For example, in Culinary Arts, one of Nichols State’s signature programs, they now offer concentrations in three communications tracks – journalism, production and public relations.

All veteran faculty members in the department have been involved in student journalism, both on campus and with high schools in the service area. Based on interviews, student media has the attention of high-up administration, which has noticed the changes and the focus on social media. Most faculty members have been advisers for student organizations, and they have accompanied students to off-campus learning opportunities, including national conferences of College Media Association and National Association of Broadcasters.

Campus representatives praise the variety of skills exhibited by students. A communications professional in the Athletics Department makes use of several majors each semester by offering scholarships and internships for students who produce video, do play-by-play on the campus radio station and help with social media.

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.

The revisions adopted in 2013-2014 were intended to infuse digital and multi-media skills throughout the curriculum. This was accomplished by merging Broadcast and Print, expanding the core curriculum taken by all students, incorporating all platforms into skills classes, introducing digital media at an earlier stage, creating specialized classes, such as Web Design, and creating a capstone that requires students to apply multimedia skills to produce an electronic magazine.

Faculty members have professional experience and many continue to practice their skills through freelance and volunteer work. They attend conferences and workshops. They maintain ties with local professionals through the Professional Advisory Group, through supervising internships and through membership in professional associations.

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.)

In Spring and Fall 2017, no skills class exceeded the 20-1 ratio.

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.

Schools may award academic credit for internships in fields related to journalism and mass communications, but credit should not exceed six semester credits (or nine quarter credit hours).

Students may take up to two semester courses (or their equivalent) at an appropriate professional organization where the unit can show ongoing and extensive dual supervision by the unit's faculty and professionals. Students may take up to three semester courses (or their equivalent) at a professional media outlet owned and operated by the institution where full-time faculty are in charge and where the primary function of the media outlet is to instruct students.

The department encouraged internships but did not begin requiring all majors to complete one until the 2017-2018 Bulletin, so the requirement applies for the first time to this year's incoming freshmen. Up to now, the department's records show three to five students per semester complete an internship.

The department has an effective system to track student performance and uses that information as part of its assessment process. Under the system in place for the past six years, students are expected to work at least 20 hours a week for the full semester in order to qualify for three credits. The internship handbook says employers are expected to pay, in the belief that that offers a more realistic job experience, but unpaid internships are also allowed. Each internship is overseen by a faculty instructor and the on-site supervisor. Most students find internships in the region and some travel to New Orleans or Baton Rouge, one to one and a half hours distant from Thibodaux. They are required to submit a weekly report and to create an online portfolio of the work they produce. At the end of the internship the student produces a report which is presented, along with the portfolio to the internship instructor. On-site supervisors submit an evaluation of the student's performance. The internship is graded on a pass/fail basis.

A summary of employers' evaluations from 2012-2016 showed students averaged a 90 percent "very satisfactory" or "satisfactory" rating on work habits and a 76 percent "very satisfactory" or "satisfactory" rating on journalism skills. A list of internship sites showed a variety of broadcast and public service opportunities in the area. The team heard from students and alumni who said they felt well prepared for their internships and compared themselves favorably to students from other journalism programs, but the number of students encountered who had such experiences was small.

Currently, any faculty member can provide a lead for an internship and supervise the student's experience. This hasn't presented a major burden for faculty up to now with so few students participating in an internship in any given semester. Before the internship requirement for all students takes hold in a year or two, the department will need to systematize its internship advising and cultivate more employers as sources of internships.

Summary

The revised curriculum prepares students with an understanding of theory and equips them with multimedia skills that will serve them well in media careers. Students appreciate the opportunity to practice journalism and public relations across a variety of platforms and to build their skills in a logical progression. The recent renovations of the television and audio studios and control room and acquisition of digital equipment for studios and labs give the faculty the tools they need to foster multimedia skills. With the addition of the capstone course and internship requirement, students should be well positioned to enter the workforce.

COMPLIANCE

PART II — Standard 3: Diversity and Inclusiveness

The unit has an inclusive program that values domestic and global diversity, and serves and reflects society.

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 department has a commitment to diversity for a broad spectrum of diverse populations, believing that it improves the educational experience for the program’s students and ultimately provides a significant benefit to the audiences those students will serve upon graduation. The Department’s diversity policy includes the following (the underlined content reflects an addition in 2017):

“Nicholls State University’s Mass Communication Department faculty recognizes the value of an education that embraces a wide spectrum of human experience. Such diversity, it is believed, helps develop a broader perspective on issues and facilitates more meaningful social interaction. We strive to create a classroom environment that includes the perspectives of groups that have been historically marginalized based on culture, gender, gender identity or race. This includes not only recruiting and retaining a diverse population of faculty, staff and students, but also creating course content and other learning opportunities for addressing media issues relevant to these marginalized groups.”

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.

The unit developed its first formal diversity plan in 2004. An elective course, Women and Minorities in the Media, examines representation and presentation of women and minorities in the media. The self-study indicates that faculty routinely examine syllabi, programs and student organizations to leverage opportunities for inclusiveness. An examination of course syllabi for the spring and fall 2017 semesters indicates that diversity is a focus in course objectives and outcomes in two classes, Public Affairs Reporting and History and Principles of Journalism, but also shows up in class assignments in several other courses. Faculty members and student organizations clearly work throughout the program on projects that highlight diverse topics and audiences. Examples:

-- Digital Media Convergence (the capstone course) produces the online magazine *Garde Voir Ci* (a Cajun phrase meaning “look at this”). Students build the plan for the magazine, including the topic for each semester, and they learn to work on a team in a professional setting. The current topic is “Working to Feed,” an examination of working in the sugar cane industry. The project has students learning how to break down stereotypes and also how to interview workers in the sugar cane fields, not just the managers in the office. The spring 2017 issue was entitled “Geaux Girl – The Women of Bayou Country,” highlighting interviews of accomplished women in the region. Another topic was “St. Joseph Manor / A Place Where History Speaks.” This project was a collection of profiles of residents who live in a building for senior citizens.

-- Students are working with a regional author who researched and wrote “The Thibodaux Massacre: The Racial Violence and the 1887 Sugar Cane Labor Strike.” Students have done historical research and

they have set up campaigns for fundraising and public relations to inform the community about this unique historical project.

-- Several students are working with the campus-based “Bridge to Independence,” a program that affords students who have intellectual disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder the opportunity to have a full college experience by auditing courses at Nichols State. Mass Communications students are in internships and they have produced campaign videos, social media, events, flyers and promotional materials to bring awareness to this program.

According to the unit’s diversity plan, “The unit will offer classes specifically geared toward addressing diversity issues and will make every effort to include diversity issues in each course where appropriate.” Students were able to articulate experiences with discussions about cultural differences and their participation in some of the big projects related to covering and building campaigns for diverse populations and cultures.

In 2014 the faculty held a retreat to revise its curriculum matrix, linking course content with ACEJMC’s 12 core values and competencies. Based on that review, domestic diversity, which encompasses issues of gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation, was addressed in 26 of the program’s 27 course offerings. This includes specific course units (such as a chapter on visual stereotyping in Visual Communication), assignments (such as requiring that students write a 2,000-word feature article on Cajun/Creole culture for Feature Writing) or inclusion within a particular course as relevant (such as discussing diversity-related issues as part of a broader examination of ethics in the Reporting course). In addition, the unit has a stand-alone course specifically geared toward addressing diversity issues (Women and Minorities in the Media).

Students in the capstone course required of all majors (Digital Media Convergence) produce the e-magazine *Garde Voir Ci*. The publication has addressed topics such as telling the unique stories of residents of St. Joseph Manor (a local assisted-living facility) and on the women of the Bayou Region, which included discussions about stereotypical representations of women.

The unit also schedules extracurricular activities, such as special lectures that feature female or minority speakers. Of 18 recent speakers, 13 were women. Three were African-American women. One guest speaker was an Asian male.

Students spoke of a good comfort level with instruction and course projects that include discussions about diverse cultures in the community. One student mentioned having covered a “boat blessing” by riding in a Coast Guard boat to observe the blessing ceremony among shrimpers or fishermen. Another student spoke about attending a journalism workshop in Mississippi where there was a discussion about awareness of diverse people and cultures. In a writing class, students who blog are concentrating on topics such as being a Catholic (by a PR student who plans to pursue a career working for the local Diocese) and “being a black girl at a predominantly white college.” Students say their professors help them get out of their comfort zones and they discuss real-life cultural issues in classes.

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.

The Nicholls State unit is small, with a total of five full-time faculty, one part time plus the long-standing chair -- a white male. Of the five full-time faculty members, four are women (one is African American); one is white male. The population in area parishes in Louisiana is 66 percent white and 34 percent minority based on the last Census. Women make up slightly more than 50 percent of the area population.

There are no Hispanic/Latino faculty members in the unit. In the 2015-16 and 2016-17 academic years, both with one faculty opening, the hiring pool showed three and seven females respectively. One offer to a female was made and accepted. In the same two academic years, there were five minority candidates. In the 2016-17 academic year, two minority finalists were considered. No international candidates were in the recent candidate pools.

The composition of current faculty is different from that in the table below, which shows faculty for the 2016-2017 academic year. In that year, there were four faculty members, two female and two male and all white. At the time of the site team visit in the 2017-2018 academic year, one white male had retired and was replaced by an African-American female and a white female who had been part-time became a full-time faculty member, for a total of five faculty.

The unit advertises for faculty positions in the Insight into Diversity online magazine. The department has recruited applicants by directly reaching out to the state's two historically black universities that have had graduate programs in mass communication. When the next opportunity arises, the unit may consider advertising on some of the industry's most popular job sites for minority journalists and faculty positions -- nabj.org, nahj.org and journalismjobs.com. Expanding job postings to any one of these sites may increase the probability of candidates who are minority. Additionally, sending job postings to the AEJMC commissions on the status of women and minorities would also increase exposure of faculty openings.

Additionally, the department's minority female office assistant seems to play the role of something like mother hen for the entire department – students and faculty. Several students mentioned how she encourages them when they are being challenged in course work or with personal issues.

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.

The unit offers scholarships as a recruiting tool. The Jenny & Co., Film Production Scholarship, is awarded to minority students in Mass Communication with a demonstrated interest in broadcast journalism. The scholarship was endowed at Nicholls State some time ago by actor Lou Gossett, Jr., who was working on a movie in the area. The Bonnie Toups Wells prize is awarded annually to a student who publishes a magazine-length feature story on issues that help preserve the Louisiana French or Cajun culture in publications on or off campus.

The department calls upon its female and minority majors to assist in recruiting efforts by representing the unit at on-campus events held for potential majors. For example, at recent university early-orientation events, African-American majors joined the faculty representative.

The unit continues to attract and retain minority students. For this fourth straight accrediting cycle, the department experienced an increasing minority representation among its student body. The previous self-study reported that minority enrollment had increased from 15 percent at the time of the unit's first accreditation visit in 1994 to 32.5 at that point. Since Fall 2012 the unit's minority enrollment has averaged 38.5 percent each academic year, and continues to exceed the university's average of 31.5. White students make up 59 percent of the population. African Americans are 30 percent; Hispanic/Latino students are 8 percent, 3 percent other.

The department's female enrollment has dropped slightly since the previous self-study. At that time, the average female enrollment was 64.2 percent, compared to the university's female population of 63.7 percent. During this reporting period, the average fall female enrollment was 62.5 percent within the unit. The university-wide average was 64 percent over the same period. The department's female representation exceeds that of the general population within the university's eight-parish service region, which is 50.86 percent.

Minority students are actively involved with student media and clubs and organizations. A minority female was editor of the Nicholl's Worth (student publication) last year; another minority female is an officer in the campus RTDNA chapter. The African American female faculty member is helping to revive the campus SPJ chapter and she is adviser to the Nicholl's Worth.

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.

The unit operates under university policies that protect faculty, staff and students from a hostile work environment and that promote broad access to campus opportunities. The catalog outlines student rights, including "the right to be judged fairly, to be treated with respect, free of harassment and secure in their privacy as individual citizens." Likewise, the catalog specifies that "Nicholls State University assures equal opportunity for all qualified persons without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, marital status, or veteran's status in any of its policies or procedures."

Syllabi provide a link to the university's grievance procedures, and the departmental student handbook outlines the ACEJMC complaints process. All members of the department are required to undergo annual training on the state's sexual harassment policies.

Talbot Hall where the department is located has undergone a renovation, including making the building fully accessible in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Course syllabi list the university's policy of ADA 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.)

SCHOOLS LOCATED OUTSIDE OF THE UNITED STATES should adjust the response and listing below to best represent the racial/ethnic/socio economic groups of the area’s population.

Academic year: 2016 – 2017 Full-time faculty

Group	Female	% of total faculty	Male	% of total faculty
Black/African American				
White	2	28.5%	2	28.5%
American Indian/Alaskan native				
Asian				
Hispanic/Latino (any race)				
Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander				
Two or more races				
Other race				
International (any race)				

Note: Department head is white male

- Unfilled faculty line in 2016-17 was filled fall 2017 with an African American woman, bringing the total to 5 full-time faculty.

Summary

The culture of diversity is woven throughout the program, including staffing, classroom experiences, and student leadership and participation. This culture in the program manifests in the capstone course, and *Garde Voir Ci* online, where students have consistently completed projects with diverse topics, which indicates a comfort level with creating content and campaigns. According to one minority female student who is enthusiastic about her experience at Nicholls State and who is graduating in 2018: “We are one big family.”

COMPLIANCE

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.

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

The Nicholls State unit is a small faculty and they work as a committee of the whole when reviewing information for filling positions for full- and part-time faculty and instructors. After drafting position announcements and sending them through the standard channels in the Department, the College and to the VPAA and business offices through to the president, positions are advertised, usually in HigherEdJobs and the university's own website. The Department also takes out ads in Insight Into Diversity, to help achieve diverse candidates. Faculty also make calls to the state's two HBCUs that have graduate programs – Grambling State University and Southern University. The entire faculty reviews applications as they arrive. Candidates are then narrowed down to phone interviews and then to those who are invited to campus. The faculty then vote and the selected candidate is referred to the dean and provost. The Department has used only two adjunct instructors since the last site visit. One of them was contacted through a local digital media specialist to teach Information Technology in Mass Communications in Fall 2013; in the second case a retired faculty member returned to teach Women and Minorities in the Media in Spring 2017.

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

The standard teaching load for full-time faculty members below the rank of professor is 12 hours in the fall and spring semesters. Professors teach a 3-3 course load. The department head usually teaches six hours in both the fall and spring semesters.

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 unit currently has five full-time faculty members – two with doctoral degrees – plus the department head who also has a doctoral degree and who usually teaches two courses each in the fall and spring semesters. Two of three who taught during the accreditation cycle but are no longer with the unit also hold doctoral degrees.

Nicholls State is a regional university that serves a rural, eight-parish area. The university provides training and practical experience to students who, for the most part, plan to live and work in the area. While the faculty exhibits outstanding creative and professional service, upper administration leaders confirm that a large volume of research is not expected of the Mass Communication faculty. All members of the unit faculty are experienced media professionals, who engaged in these activities:

- Producer of streaming production of Presidential Search Committee Forum the Louisiana Board of Supervisors
- Shot and edited “40 years of the Louisiana Judicial College” for the Louisiana Supreme Court
- Shot and edited “Judicial Candidate Campaign Policies” for the Louisiana Supreme Court
- (In Progress) “Fostering community resilience: The role of source credibility of media, academic, and government organizations among college students in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.”

- (In progress) “Breaking news on social media: The role of perceived source credibility in the acceptance of news as factual.”
- Panelist, Nicholls State University Constitution Week Panel
- Poster presentation at the Nicholls State University Faculty Expeaux, “The Nicholls Worth: Reinventing to Stay Relevant”
- Poster presentation at the Nicholls State University Faculty Expeaux, “Fake News and Freshmen. The new challenges of teaching introductory mass media courses”
- “Book review: One nation after Trump.” *Teaching Journalism and Mass Communication, Vol. 2.*
- Presentation for Leadership Terrebonne “Media Operations.”
- Seventeen years of experience as a freelance videographer/producer.
- Four years as a full-time marketing/PR specialist in the medical field (and another eight years of part-time experience since joining the faculty).
- Two years of full-time experience as managing editor of a regional news service and another two years as a columnist for a metro newspaper (plus three years of full-time PR work with organizations and owning a PR firm since 2012).
- Five years of combined full-time media experience with newspapers, magazines and design.
- Three years as a senior strategist with a California-based PR firm serving a nationwide client base of Fortune 500 companies, celebrities and sports figures (plus two years as a newspaper feature writer and two years as a PR writer/editor for a major oil firm).
- The department head worked for two years as a full-time newspaper journalist and also two years in PR. Since coming to Nichols, he has gained another 21 years of professional experience working with local media on reporting and editing projects.
- Faculty members who left the unit also have outstanding professional credentials.

The department does not organize its own teaching workshops, but faculty members are expected to take part in university-wide training, including workshops during the fall and spring Faculty Institute and other training programs available throughout the year. In addition, through the dean’s office, the university provides funds for faculty travel to professional conferences.

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

The university uses a two-phased process for ongoing evaluation of both full- and part-time faculty. First, each spring the faculty prepare an annual plan for activities in the areas of teaching, research and service. Each faculty member meets with the department head to review the document.

The second phase takes place at that same meeting. The department head assesses faculty performance as judged in comparison to goals outlined on the Faculty Evaluation Agreement. In the areas of teaching, factors that influence the evaluation include results of the Student Instructional Report. Faculty members who dispute the department head’s evaluation have access to an appeals process.

Merit Review Standards

Faculty members must reach a minimum of 150 points in each of the three categories to be deemed meritorious.

Research: Must earn 50 for acceptable; 150 constitutes meritorious

Teaching: Teaching five courses adds 50 points to Research and 25 to Teaching and Service

Service: Must earn 50 for acceptable; 150 constitutes meritorious

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

Each year the Office of Student Affairs presents faculty with Apple Awards for activities directed toward student success. For 2014-2015, a faculty member received an award for advising a student organization (his second), and another received one as a faculty mentor in 2012-2013. A faculty member received a College Media Advisers Presidential Citation in 2016. In 2015-2016, two faculty members received an \$88,650.00 Louisiana Education Quality Support Fund Grant, co-written with History Department faculty, to record oral histories of military veterans. Since 2015, the unit has received five Nicholls Information Technology Support grants totaling \$68,693.23 in support of efforts to ensure that students continue to have access to current technology.

The Office of Student Affairs each semester asks graduating students to identify any faculty member who “significantly contributed to ... [their] success.” All of the unit’s veteran faculty members have received multiple mentions under this program.

Summary:

Faculty members are highly regarded by students, who see their professors and the department as being very challenging yet still offering a nurturing environment. While faculty are not consistently producing high-level academic scholarship, to a person all are involved with professional service and work in service across the university’s campus.

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.

Due to measures at the university forced by consistent budget cuts since the previous visit, the department no longer has its own travel budget. Deans are given a travel budget for the college and units may file requests for travel to conferences as needed. The Department of Mass Communication has fared relatively well under this system. During this cycle, the Dean of Arts and Sciences awarded at least partial funding in response to each request.

Departments also may draw on other sources of travel funds. They maintain accounts with monies acquired through unit fundraising efforts and student publication funds have also been used to cover some travel costs. The department has been successful with on-campus grant applications. It has received funding on six applications for a total of \$157,343. Most of these grant dollars have been used to purchase and improve departmental equipment, which has allowed faculty to stay current on industry changes for technology.

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

As a regional institution under the Louisiana Board of Regents, Nicholls State places a primary focus on faculty scholarship directed at activities that are targeted toward projects designed to enhance the instructional process. This was confirmed in meetings with the dean and the associate provost.

Unit faculty members focus on professional and creative work and most of its activity is in the area of professional ventures. For example, all members of the unit faculty work with local, regional and national media as writers, public-relations practitioners, digital designers or editors. These activities are detailed in response to a similar request in Standard 4.

Faculty have also directed several student service-learning projects with a wide range of nonprofit organizations and they advise student media and Mass Communication student organizations.

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 university's Policy and Procedure Manual states that a faculty member may be granted leave for two semesters for professional or cultural improvement after six or more consecutive years of service. Sabbatical leave may also be granted for one semester to a faculty member who has been employed three or more consecutive years. In addition, tenure-contract or probationary-contract faculty may request leave without pay for one academic year. There were no unit sabbaticals taken during this review time.

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.

All members of the small faculty are experienced media professionals and they remained impressively productive professionally. Faculty members have worked as a columnist, digital-media producer, editor, reporter, public-affairs radio show producer and/or public relations practitioner for a wide range of clients. During this period, faculty produced a book chapter, two articles in refereed journals, one refereed conference paper, six invited presentations and 19 articles in non-refereed publications. Faculty also doubled the number of successful grant applications over the total during the previous cycle. The number of pieces of non-juried creative work increased from 38 to 87. The number of funded grants increased from three to six. Other scholarly work came from a faculty member who retired in 2017.

Scholarship, Research, Creative and Professional Activities	Total from Unit*	Individuals				Totals (8)
		Full Professors (2)	Associate Professors (1)	Assistant Professors (4)	Other Faculty** (2)	
Awards and Honors	3	0	1	1	1	3
Grants Received Internal	5	0	1	2	0	3
Grants Received External	1	0	1	1	0	2
Scholarly Books, Sole- or Co-authored	0	0	0	0	0	0
Textbooks, Sole- or Co-authored	0	0	0	0	0	0
Books Edited	0	0	0	0	0	0
Book Chapters	1	1	0	0	0	1
Monographs	0	0	0	0	0	0
Articles in Refereed Journals	2	0	0	1	0	1
Refereed Conference Papers	1	0	0	0	1	0
Invited Academic Papers	6	1	0	0	1	2
Encyclopedia Entries	0	0	0	0	0	0
Book Reviews	0	0	0	0	0	0
Articles in Non-refereed Publications	19	1	0	2	1	4
Juried Creative Works	0	0	0	0	0	0
Non-juried Creative Works	87	1	0	2	1	4

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

Students and alumni spoke highly of the challenging work their professors expect of them, and they are appreciative of the converged curriculum. They spoke of class discussions that have them challenging stereotypes, including in current news and events. Likewise, representatives from other departments on campus take full advantage of the opportunity to hire Mass Communication students to help document and promote the work they are doing across the campus. These include services in the Athletics Department, Career Services, the History Department and Culinary Arts and the Bridge to Independence, a program for students with challenges of ability.

Summary:

Faculty's output of professional and creative work has been robust during this review period. The unit is respected across the campus by representatives of other departments and the dean.

COMPLIANCE

PART II — Standard 6: Student Services

The unit provides students with the support and services that promote learning and ensure timely completion of their program of study.

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.

Given their small numbers and the highly integrated structure of the program, the faculty members of the Department of Mass Communication, who teach a broad variety of courses, have a high awareness of graduation requirements, courses, student media and other aspects of the program needed for effective advising.

The department is described frequently by both faculty and students as “almost like a family”, and at least “two deep” in capacity to teach any course. Student satisfaction with advising ranks high, according to the university’s survey of graduating seniors. Interviews with students bore that out.

No student complained of “poor advisement” as a reason for lagging graduation rates. The six-year graduation rate for the unit was 47 percent in 2016. That’s an improvement over the 20 percent rate reported in the previous self-study and better than averages for other departments on campus.

The unit is integrating a campus-wide program, Student Advising and Mentoring (developed as part of its Southern Association of Colleges and Schools-mandated Quality Enhancement Program) into its own advising system. “Our expectation is that you connect with your freshmen in the first semester they arrive, continue that relationship until they transition to your department, and make them feel a part of your department throughout their time at Nicholls,” according to a university document.

To carry out this initiative, the department adopted a goal of increasing enrollment by 3 percent for 2017. The department met and exceeded that goal, achieving a 4.3 percent increase, which was higher than the university increase of 2 percent.

b) Faculty are available and accessible to students.

Faculty and the department head perform formal and informal advising functions. Freshmen who have declared an interest in Mass Communication are enrolled in University College and are advised by staff there. Mass Communication faculty begin their advising when students reach their sophomore year. Each faculty member is assigned between 15 and 25 students for academic advising. Faculty use GradesFirst software to track students’ courses, make appointments and even rate the quality of student preparedness and participation in the advising appointment. Faculty maintain established office hours and provide counsel on everything from courses to internships and career goals. Interviews with students and recent alumni indicate that faculty are accessible, available by office hours and by appointment, and students feel that faculty get to know them, their interests, career objectives and “life situations.” Faculty involve students in their own creative and service projects as another way to mentor students.

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

Based upon interviews, students seem well informed regarding the unit's activities, requirements and policies, and a review of syllabi confirms a comprehensive and fully developed approach to unit policies.

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.

Student media provide a robust ancillary opportunity in extra-curricular activities that appear meaningful not only to student development but that also enjoy remarkable exposure and even credibility across the campus, according to interviews, including with administration. Specifically mentioned, in fact, are references to understanding the rights of citizens to access of public records, something emphasized in courses and demonstrated in student media.

Students can work for the Nicholls Worth, the converged student media that includes a monthly magazine and frequently updated web site with video; the university's 250-watt radio station, KNSU-FM; KNSU-TV and the university yearbook, La Pirogue. Student media is independent of the department and has its own budget derived from student fees and advertising, but Mass Communication faculty serve as advisers for all student media.

Both faculty and students identified the opportunity to increase the utility of student media via relocation from a more remote site on campus to Talbot Hall with the academic unit. It would require the dedication of space equivalent to two standard-sized faculty offices.

Perhaps least well developed – with ample room for opportunity and growth – were the student chapter components of larger professional organizations, such as Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) and the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ). The Radio-Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) is an exception, given the long involvement of one of the faculty with the group. Needed is modest support for attendance at meetings in New Orleans as well as some annual conferences that might be convenient to Nicholls State University students and faculty, such as the October 2018 International Conference in Texas of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA).

Finally, one other area frequently utilized for such programs at other campuses which has not been developed at Nicholls State University is a student-run public relations agency. The student agency takes on projects – both on campus and off – with students holding and performing the roles of PR agency professionals. The appetite and likely the market exists at Nicholls State for such an entity, but logistics is the barrier, since it would require the identification and dedication of space equivalent to a normal-size faculty office, where students could work from four or five desks, meet, talk, post flip charts and other creative problem-solving media.

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 department collects and analyzes enrollment, retention, graduation rate and other data and takes steps as part of its assessment process to improve those metrics. Retention and graduation statistics are published on the department's web site.

The unit has recently developed – via its emphasis on upgrading the value of internships – an excellent guide to internship management, for student and faculty adviser to assure the quality of the internship

experience. Still needed, however, is a systematized means of identifying and cultivating new internship sources and leveraging those connections for job placement on graduation.

Summary

Advising is a strength of the program and students appreciate a close relationship with faculty that feels like “family.” Student media play an important role in their learning. As the department works to improve enrollment, retention and graduation rates, it will need to build on measures adopted this year as part of a university-wide initiative to improve student advising and mentoring.

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 economy of the state of Louisiana has been hard-hit during the past six years and that has continued to have an impact on budgets for higher education in the state. Between Fiscal 2012-2013 and Fiscal 2016-2017, state funding for Nicholls State University declined almost 19 percent, from \$18,801,371 to \$15,200,506. The university raised tuition and fees, cut programs, froze pay for faculty and staff and increased centralization of budget controls. Enrollment fell, partially as a consequence of the tuition increases.

The department's budget has stayed mostly flat as the university strives to protect units that have specialized accreditation. Over the past three years, the department's budget has increased very slightly from \$320,478 to \$324,656. Enrollment in the university and the department has begun to grow again. Faculty received a salary adjustment in the past two years and the first salary increase in 10 years was promised for January 2018.

Where the department has done exceptionally well is in capital spending. The department has spent more than \$957,000 on improving its facilities and equipment. The radio and television studios were renovated, departmental labs were upgraded and more than \$800,000 in digital media and radio equipment were added.

The department has been aggressive, and the administration supportive, in obtaining appropriations directly from the state's capital outlay budget and pursuing grants. The department received five awards from the Nicholls Information Technology Support fund totaling nearly \$70,000. These funds are earmarked for expenditures that "directly benefit students." In this case the funds were used for field equipment for students, including light kits and 27 digital cameras.

The department also secured \$120,000 in private donations, which were matched with state funds to create two endowments, named in honor of former faculty members and to be used to enhance support for a current or prospective faculty member. The department also has an endowment for scholarships and dispersed \$77,130 over the accrediting period.

The department believes the support it has received, especially for new facilities and equipment, have made the program more attractive to students and helped it exceed its goal for an increase in enrollment for the year.

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.

During the turbulent past six years, the university has supported accredited departments, including Mass Communications, by preserving faculty lines, undertaking major capital improvements and supporting faculty through promotions and salary enhancements. Although the president of the university is leaving, and there may be other administrative changes, the team was assured by every administrator with whom we spoke that the department would continue to receive strong support and has the wherewithal, if it can continue to increase its enrollment, to expand.

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

The department is housed in attractive offices and classrooms on the first floor of Talbot Hall. The entire building recently underwent a \$9.6 million renovation, including the \$800,000 spent on the department's facilities. The department shares Talbot Hall with the Departments of Music, Art and Theater, and the university envisions the building as a cultural center in which Mass Communications is a good fit.

Administrative and faculty offices are roomy and well-appointed. Instructional facilities include the following: an 18-station writing lab; a 16-station Convergence Media Center with seating for 24; a 16-station audio/video lab; podcasting/audio/editing room; and a television studio with an adjacent control room. The television studio has a green-screen wall on three sides that allows students to experiment with visual backdrops for their programs and even to take a Special Topics course in using green-screen technology.

While the student radio and television stations are located within the department's space, the Nicholls Worth, the student magazine and website, are located across campus. Students and faculty said they would like to see all student media housed in Talbot Hall.

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.

Computer hardware and software are current and recently upgraded. Radio and television studio, control room and editing equipment were all installed in the past two years. Faculty particularly enjoy teaching in the Convergence Media Center, a 16-station lab with seating for 24.

The university survey of graduating seniors showed high levels of satisfaction with computer resources and lab facilities related to the student major, and the department's response average was higher than the university average.

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

On-line library and information resources for research and student development are available through the Ellender Library, which also utilizes LibGuides, a tool to provide access to resources that assist students in their coursework and research. Library staff have created guide pages for specific Mass Communication courses.

Summary

The department has adequate budget for its current program. The recent renovation of facilities and addition of equipment support the department's move to a digital-infused curriculum and could entice a growing number of students to choose to enroll in Mass Communications.

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 professionals and professional associations to keep curriculum and teaching current and to promote a vigorous exchange of ideas.

The Department maintains close contact with educational and professional media organizations on the local, regional and national level. The unit has memberships in the ASJMC, College Media Advisers, Louisiana Press Association, the Southwest Education Council for Journalism and Mass Communication and the Southeast Journalism Conference. The campus radio station, KNSU-FM, is a member of the Louisiana Association of Broadcasters and the National Association of Broadcasters.

Faculty members have also have taken students to both NAB and Radio Television Digital News Association conferences. A retired public relations faculty member regularly accompanied students to PRSA/PRSSA functions, including luncheons in New Orleans, a conference in Atlanta and a special workshop in New Orleans titled, “Social Networking/Lessons from the Oil Spill in New Orleans.” Faculty attended a workshop on developing student media in digital world held at Ohio University in Spring 2016 (the Future of Student Media Summit).

Alumni of the program remain highly engaged in the program, frequently returning to speak to classes; some alumni serve on the unit’s advisory board. University administrators indicated an awareness of alumni involvement, particularly with those working in larger regional media markets like New Orleans area and Baton Rouge.

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.

The unit’s list of public-service activities is extensive and includes work on campus and on the local, regional and national level.

- On campus: Activities include helping the university conduct the annual District Literary Rally for high school students, having two members of the department’s faculty serving on the Faculty Senate and serving on a committee to raise private funds for the renovation of Al and Mary Danos Theater in Talbot Hall.
- Local projects include assisting with groups such as the St. John’s Episcopal Church, the Thibodaux Rotary Club and Service League and Upside Downs (a nonprofit advocating for Down Syndrome).
- Statewide projects include serving on a task force for the University of Louisiana System to develop an online degree in Organizational Leadership. Producing videos for the Louisiana Supreme Court and MacDonell’s Children’s Services.
- Regionally, unit faculty serve as judges for the annual Florida Magazine Association’s annual competitions.
- Nationally, a member of the faculty just completed nine years as editor of Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication’s publication *Insights*.

Faculty members serve as judges each year for the media divisions of the Literary Rally for high school students.

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.

Faculty may apply for funding to travel and other professional opportunities through funding in the dean's office. Individually, unit faculty hold memberships in the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication and College Media Advisers. (Prior to his retirement in Spring 2017, a veteran faculty member was a member of American Journalism Historians Association).

The department head is vice-president of ASJMC. He has attended each of the last nine ASJMC midwinter workshops and five of the past six AEJMC conferences.

Another faculty member has made several presentations at the conference of the College Media Association, often taking students to the organization's national conferences.

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 is working in partnership with the author of a book published in 2016. "The Thibodaux Massacre: Racial Violence and the 1887 Sugar Cane Labor Strike," by John DeSantis, a senior staff writer at the Times of Houma, La. The book examines a situation when white vigilantes gunned down unarmed black laborers and their families during a spree lasting more than two hours. The violence erupted due to strikes on Louisiana sugar cane plantations. This project is part of a special topics course; students are conducting research, developing a fundraising and awareness campaign and producing video projects. Twelve students are currently enrolled in the class.

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

The unit conducts an on-campus workshop for high school journalism each fall. In addition, most members of the faculty also travel to local high schools to give on-site lectures and workshops. Faculty members also serve as judges each year in the media divisions of the Literary Rally for high school students.

Summary:

The unit has an extensive track record with service to the campus, the community and the nation as it relates to journalism and mass communications. Faculty, students and alumni participate in a wide range of activities that make this department relevant to the community and the profession.

COMPLIANCE

PART II — Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

The unit regularly assesses student learning and applies results to improve curriculum and instruction.

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 department head oversees the assessment program, working with a faculty member as assessment coordinator and with all faculty and media professionals at an annual meeting to assess student work. The department’s goals for learning track closely with the 12 ACEJMC professional values and competencies. The document states: “Mass Communication graduates must demonstrate proficiency in reporting, writing, communicating orally and utilizing the technology of relevance to their area of concentration. They must also demonstrate an ability for critical thinking and a knowledge of, and an appreciation for, the ethical obligations of the mass media professional operating in a diverse, dynamic and increasingly global society.”

The department works with a matrix to map the 12 ACEJMC values and competencies to each course to demonstrate which are taught in specific courses. The matrix was adopted in 2007 and updated in 2014 when curriculum revisions were instituted. Tests and portfolio evaluations are judged on how well the student has mastered both skills and principles of journalism and public relations. An examination of syllabi shows that each course spells out student learning outcomes in language similar to the phrasing of the ACEJMC 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 department adopted its assessment plan in the spring of 2002. The plan calls for an annual meeting to assess student learning.

Direct measures include a test administered to freshmen and seniors and student portfolios that are reviewed at the annual meeting. The pre-test/post-test, developed in 2009, is administered in the introductory freshman course, Survey of Mass Communication, and to all students in the capstone course, Digital Media Convergence. It consists of 48 questions relating to the ACEJMC values and

competencies and nine questions on student demographics. The portfolio review, conducted by faculty and professionals in the students' senior years, examines their portfolios, which are now online and can also be accessed by potential employers. Other direct measures are the capstone course required for all students, in which they apply their skills to produce an online magazine, and questionnaires completed by student internship supervisors. Results of the internship questionnaires are aggregated and discussed as part of the assessment process.

Indirect measures include the department's own alumni survey, developed in 2016 to replace the now-discontinued national survey of graduates by the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication, and the Nicholls State University survey of graduating seniors by the Office of Assessment and Institutional Research.

The measures are related directly to the ACEJMC values and competencies and have resulted in significant changes in curriculum to improve student learning outcomes.

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 department collects and reports data using online technology. Student portfolios are now available online along with the evaluations, as are internship evaluations. The department now conducts an electronic survey of graduates at the one-year and five-year marks. The pre/post-test instrument is administered electronically.

Data from tests and evaluations are tabulated and reviewed at the annual assessment meeting. The department reviews goals from previous meetings and sets new ones, including any needed changes in the assessment process itself.

Based on assessment results of the pre/post-test as well as feedback from professionals, alumni and the previous accrediting visit, the department undertook the curriculum revision described in Standard 2. The goal of the revision was to infuse digital technology throughout the curriculum and to give students the multimedia skills they need in today's workplace. Assessment data show these changes have improved graduate satisfaction with the program. In the ASJMC 2013 survey, students asked whether their coursework gave them the skills needed for work gave a 3.29 satisfaction rating, with 1 being "strongly disagree" and 5 being "strongly agree." In the department's 2016 alumni survey, graduates gave their preparation a 4.59 on a five-point scale as "good" or "very good." The university's survey of graduating seniors showed improvement between 2013 and 2017 in responses on how well-prepared students feel for work and how well they can use computers.

Two areas for improvement were identified during the previous accrediting cycle – critical thinking and math skills. Steps taken during the current accrediting cycle led to improved math scores for department students in the university's exit survey of all graduates and improvement in five of nine categories

related to professional competencies. Changes in scores on critical thinking have improved slightly, but the department believes the indicators used to test critical thinking should be re-evaluated.

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

The department has addresses for 93 percent of its 809 alumni, mails a newsletter to them annually and solicits them to contribute news items. The department also maintains a Facebook page and hosts a Homecoming tailgate party for alumni. Because many alumni remain in the immediate area, casual interaction is frequent.

Alumni are involved in most phases of assessment. They participate in portfolio reviews and assessment meetings, contributing to such efforts as creating the matrix to map ACEJMC values and competencies to the curriculum. Alumni serve on the Professional Advisory Group and as internship supervisors.

Beginning in 2016, the department initiated a survey of graduates one and five years out to use as an indirect measure for assessment. This survey replaces one distributed nationally by ASJMC and one sent to graduating seniors by the university, both of which were discontinued during this accrediting period.

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

Media professionals, like alumni, participate in portfolio reviews, serve as internship supervisors and complete the evaluation questionnaires and serve on the Professional Media Advisory Group. Media professionals interviewed by the team said students they encountered as interns or hired for open positions were well prepared and had the necessary skills. The department's survey of one-year and five-year graduates showed 75 percent are working in a mass media position currently or had been within the previous six months. This is higher than the national average of 61.4 percent from recent ASJMC surveys.

Summary

The department has had an assessment plan for 15 years and it has matured into a valued process that is led by the department head and embraced by faculty. Assessment has been essential to the department's progress over the accrediting period in creating a current, relevant curriculum. It is a living process in which results are analyzed every year and changes are made. Assessment results triggered ongoing efforts to improve recruitment and emphasize internships. Alumni and media professionals are engaged in the process and the department makes sure to include their input in planning. The result is a tool that enables this small program to adapt and progress.

COMPLIANCE

PART III: Summary by site visit team

1) Summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the unit.

Strengths:

- A revised curriculum that combined print and broadcasting and created two concentrations in Journalism and Public Relations, that infuses multimedia skills into all courses and that tests the application of those skills in a capstone course required of all graduates
- Renovated facilities, with new labs and digital equipment and an up-to-date television studio, that support the new curriculum
- Collegial faculty who embrace digital technology and keep their professional skills current through service and creative projects
- Enthusiastic students who welcome opportunities to work on a variety of platforms in the converged curriculum
- A close and supportive atmosphere among administrators, faculty, staff and students
- A committed unit leader who is respected by students, faculty, peers in other departments and administrators
- A well-developed assessment process that is used annually to guide changes in the program

Weaknesses:

- The need to develop opportunities and a system to support the new requirement for every student to complete an internship for credit
- Room for improvement in scholarly research
- Uncertainty about future funding to update software and maintain equipment

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

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

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

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 mostly well-done and clean with few errors. In cases where information was incomplete or not clear, the department head and faculty members were able to quickly clarify and provide information, or suggest who to call quickly. In some areas, information was repetitive.