

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

Name of Accredited Unit: Department of Mass Communication

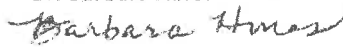
Name of Institution: Southern University and A&M College

Name of Administrator: Dr. Mahmoud Braima

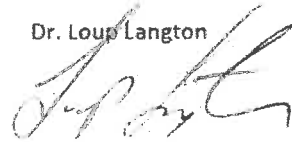
Date of Original Site Visit: January 21-24, 2018

Revisit Date: November 19-20, 2019

Revisit Team Chair: Dr. Barbara Hines



Revisit Team Member: Dr. Loup Langton



Revisit Team's Recommendation: REACCREDITATION

**1. List each standard found in noncompliance and the reasons as cited in the original team report. (Add additional pages as necessary.)**

*Standard 3: Diversity and Inclusiveness*

Reasons cited:

**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 of Mass Communication at Southern University has a departmental diversity plan that is "based on the university's comprehensive Equal Employment Opportunity Policy Statement." The plan does not clearly define the department's definition of diversity. The plan identifies the groups addressed in the university's equal opportunity policy, stating that "no person shall on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, veteran status, or any other non-meritorious factor, be discriminated against in any employment practice."

A statement on equal educational opportunity states that "the department will make all decisions regarding recruitment and all other terms and conditions of admission without discrimination on the grounds of race, color, creed, religion, sex, national origin, age, physical or mental disability." The plan also includes a section on leave and maternity leave.

There is no definition of diversity included in the diversity plan, but a definition was offered in the self-study:

"We define diversity as the inclusion of various races and sexes in academic endeavors as well as in the student and faculty population. The Department's inclusion efforts include accommodations for the disabled."

**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.**

Based on review of the curriculum and the syllabi, it appears that students are learning about global issues and minority issues. There is an African American Media course and in PR Case studies, students review international cases.

There is a lack of consistency when it comes to including an ADA statement in the syllabi.

Not all syllabi included it. Some included an “Instructor’s Academic Freedom Policy” which stated that if a student was uncomfortable with an assignment or course content, the instructor would give another assignment.

**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 faculty within the unit is 100 percent Black/African American. Of the full-time faculty, three are male and two are female and there is one female adjunct. No faculty have earned tenure or been promoted since the last accreditation visit.

The self-study indicates that the department makes an effort to publish job advertisements in publications that reach a diverse audience, but it does not appear (based on the data in the self-study) that the searches are resulting in diverse pools of candidates.

**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 self-study does not include demographics for the unit’s geographic service area. Instead, it offers the campus demographics without a point of comparison. The campus is 95 percent African American and 70 percent female. The student population within the unit is 95 percent African American and 53 percent female. There is no indication of a strategic effort on behalf of the unit to recruit students from underrepresented populations.

**e) The unit has a climate that is free of harassment and all forms of discrimination, in keeping with the acceptable cultural practices of the population it serves, accommodates the needs of those with disabilities, and values the contributions of all forms of diversity.**

***Accreditation site visit teams will apply this standard in compliance with applicable federal and state laws and regulations, as well as the laws of the countries in which non-U.S. institutions are located.***

The departmental Diversity Plan affirms the Equal Employment Opportunity policy. It also offers a university contact if employees have EO questions or concerns. The faculty handbook also includes the University’s policy on sexual harassment.

Some syllabi include an ADA statement, but it was not consistent in all syllabi.

At the time of the site visit the elevator in the 3-story building was not working. Faculty reported that the structure is old, and it is common for elevators not to work. There were also classrooms where the desk organization made the space inaccessible for any person in a wheelchair.

**SUMMARY:**

There was evidence in syllabi that there is an effort to include diversity related topics in courses and in the curriculum. There is also an effort to create a safe and inclusive environment for employees. However, the departmental diversity plan does not suggest a strategic effort on behalf of the unit to:

- Define diversity within the context of the department.
- Define underrepresented populations based on current demographics and make an effort to recruit those students and faculty.
- Provide measurable goals related to diversity and inclusion efforts
- Provide clear assessment of those goals
- Clearly define separate efforts for students and for faculty

There are no clear goals and no means of assessment. There is simply a statement that says, “The Department of Mass Communication will assess the progress of the diversity plan by understanding that diversity is one of the primary goals of the University.” As an historically black institution the university is serving an underrepresented population, but a more inclusive approach to diversity is encouraged.

**Overall evaluation: NON-COMPLIANCE**

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

**Standard 3: Diversity and Inclusiveness (Cited by Site Team)**

Summary of findings:

While the Department presented a Diversity Plan approved in 2005 and revised in 2019, it lacks formal measurement of goals related to diversity and inclusion efforts and does not provide a clear assessment plan.

The student body is clearly Black-African American. Enrollment records generated by the University’s Office of Assessment and Institutional Research for fall 2019 indicate that only 5 students of 241 are non-native black-African Americans.

Despite the lack of diversity in the student body, the team confirmed some areas of improvement, for example, the hiring of a minority (white) female adjunct faculty member. Students explained that she not only continues to work in the professional

world, but also provides them opportunities within the broadcast industry. There are 3 full-time male faculty members (one international) and 2 full-time female faculty members. Both adjunct faculty members are females.

The Department has also expanded its focus on diversity by increasing the number of speakers representing a range of diversity. All syllabi now include a statement on diversity: "Every student in this class will be honored and respected as an individual with distinct experiences, talents and backgrounds.

"Students will be treated fairly, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identification, disability, socio-economic status, or national identify. Issues of diversity may be a part of class discussion, assigned material and projects.

"The instructor will make every effort to insure that an inclusive environment exists for all students."

Students confirmed that issues of diversity have become part of class discussion, assigned material and projects.

#### **Overall evaluation: NON-COMPLIANCE**

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

#### *Standard 5: Scholarship: Research, Creative and Professional Activity (Cited by Council)*

At the original visit, there were four full-time faculty members and one 12-month employee who serves as part-time instructor and engineer who also teaches. Faculty had limited research, creative and professional activity. In the six years reviewed in the original report, there were 7 awards /honors, 1 internal and 7 external grants received, 3 refereed conference papers and 1 documentary completed. Faculty were required to teach four courses a semester, and there was limited funding to support professional activity.

#### *Outdated and Poorly Maintained Physical Facilities*

When the 2018 team was on site, the governor had just announced a "doomsday" budget for higher education. The Department's budget had shown a slight decrease of 1.4 percent in part-time faculty and clerical. There was an infusion of Title III funds to provide new Apple computers and software for all labs, faculty and staff offices, but they had not been installed.

Despite the infusion of funds, the program is housed in W.W. Stewart Hall, a two-story 1950s building that needed significant repairs. There was no elevator access to second floor, a major ADA concern. The week prior to the visit, Baton Rouge experienced cold temperatures that caused a pipe to rupture adjacent to the building, blocking access to

some faculty offices and labs. The University's library was also affected. Bathrooms were in disrepair.

The Department has a good relationship with the IT division, which helps in its challenge to provide maintenance for its equipment for labs, the radio station, television studio and multi-media room. The department's engineer and television station staff work to keep equipment going. With the resources it has, the department was able to train students for undergraduate careers.

*Inadequately funded program that restricts the unit's ability to improve, through hiring faculty, offering specialized courses, providing opportunities for research and promotion to faculty*

While the University and the Department encourage curiosity, analysis, and free expression, there is little time to spend creating and sustaining work that would help build a national reputation for the unit or the University. By numbers, it is a small faculty with a heavy teaching requirement.

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

*Standard 5: Scholarship: Research, Creative and Professional Activity (Cited by Council)*

In the three semesters since receiving the provisional status, there are five full-time faculty members, still teaching full-course loads. They have completed 1 refereed and 1 invited conference paper, and 1 refereed online journal publication. The Office of Academic Affairs confirmed its commitment of \$4,000 per year for three years (effective October 2019) to support faculty professional development. Faculty members have also participated in grant-writing workshops and completing research crucial to the tenure and promotion process.

It is important to understand that the four/four teaching load is mandated by the Board of Supervisors of the Southern University and A&M College system, one of three university systems under the Louisiana State Board of Regents. At Southern, faculty in each department are required to teach the same load. While the University aspires to increased research, the mandated four-course teaching load serves as an impediment.

*Outdated and Poorly Maintained Physical Facilities*

Renovations to the Department are near completion and look as though they will be finished during the semester break. It was confirmed that the new equipment has been in use and, according to students, has enhanced their ability to complete high-quality projects. Faculty, too, are appreciative of the support from administration and visibly excited about new ways of approaching their courses.

*Inadequately funded program that restricts the unit's ability to improve: through hiring faculty, offering specialized courses, providing opportunities for research and promotion to faculty.*

In addition to the installation of new equipment and renovations to the facility, the University has provided funding for an adjunct faculty member to teach one of the professional courses and add diversity to the faculty.

The University has also committed to fund presentations at conferences for all faculty who have had research accepted in their respective disciplines.

While there have been no promotions since the original team visit, two faculty members have submitted their credentials for promotion and tenure.

A new course, Mobile Journalism and Social Media, has been approved and will be taught beginning in 2020. This course was successfully developed and a prototype taught through a summer study-abroad experience.

#### **5. Summary conclusion and recommendation:**

Since the 2018 site visit, much has changed at the Department of Mass Communication at Southern University and A&M College. W. W. Stewart Hall has been renovated, new equipment is in place, the faculty has expanded and there have been improvements with issues of diversity, both in faculty hiring and curriculum. There's an assurance of additional funding to support faculty promotion and development.

During a meeting with the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, the team was impressed that he took notes, was engaged and promised to continue to invest in the program. A recent leadership assignment puts him in a better position to effect change.

Concerning the diversity issue, the Department needs to learn how to assess themselves more effectively and to make changes based on those assessments. Intuitively, they have been making functional, yet successful changes. That comes through strongly with discussions with students, who seem well prepared, confident and eager to move on to their professional careers. They expressed strong appreciation of the faculty who set high standards for students to achieve. However, they still need to address the lack of diversity in the student body. There seems to be some question on their part on how to create a strategy for doing so. In discussion, the Vice Chancellor said he would work with the Department chair regarding strategy development.

#### **REACCREDITATION**