

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

Name of Accredited Unit: Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute

Name of Institution: New York University

Name of Administrator: Ted Conover, Director

Date of Original Site Visit: November 12-15, 2017

Revisit Date: November 12-14, 2019

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Revisit Team's Recommendation: Reaccreditation (Undergraduate program)

At New York University, the Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute (also known as the NYU Department of Journalism) has been continuously accredited by ACEJMC since 1968. The program was found in compliance on all standards in 2011, but the 2017 site team found the unit's undergraduate program in noncompliance on two standards.

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

Standard 6: Student Services

Reasons cited: A history of student advising deficiencies that impact student flexibility and completion.

The 2017 site team report said the following in its concluding summary for this standard:

“Academic advising has been a problem for years (this is the third time in four ACEJMC review cycles that Standard 6 has been found in noncompliance). The site team heard complaints from many students about the way poor advising had impacted them, and students felt ill-informed about curricular changes. Seldom, if ever, had team members heard such vociferous criticism of advising, with specifics about its impact. The long-time adviser left in 2017, and a new student adviser began in the fall. The signs are encouraging, but the team believed it needed to analyze the situation at the time of the visit, and at that time a number of students expressed significant frustrations at their situations. Conversely, the unit’s Career Services Office does an excellent job of connecting students to alumni for potential internships and jobs, and it communicates events and opportunities in a meaningful way.”

Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Reasons cited: Need to establish an assessment program that covers all designated values and competencies.

The 2017 site team report said the following in its concluding summary for this standard:

“The unit tends to view assessment of student learning primarily through internal eyes rather than through external evaluation ... there is a scarcity of external evaluation that spans the 12 values and competencies endorsed by the unit. The unit is commended for its external review of writing projects, and next needs to think through how best to determine if students are achieving the other values and competencies. While professors engage in course assessment when they award grades, program assessment requires both direct and indirect measures

that seek to evaluate student learning across the spectrum of the program and across the spectrum of values and competencies.”

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.

Standard 6: Student Services

With a trusted student adviser in place and a revised website that students praise for providing quality information about curriculum, Student Services now merits a finding of compliance.

In 2017, students cited curricular flexibility and advising quality as weaknesses. Specifically, students said curricular rigidity (five core courses that must be taken in a five-semester sequence) was frustrating when facing high tuition costs, a requirement to complete a double major outside Journalism, and a desire to study abroad and pursue multiple internships. This played into student examples of having to add additional coursework or another semester because of multiple advisers unaware of the requirements of the other who did a poor job in helping them navigate a path to graduation in the most efficient way possible.

Since then, the Institute has added flexibility to curricular sequencing, permitting students to complete the core and electives in four semesters and, for some, even in three semesters. The unit also has added undergraduate minors in Print & Online Journalism and in Broadcast & Multimedia Journalism, making it easier for students to switch to or from the major depending on their needs and goals.

All 300+ journalism majors now are advised by an experienced student adviser who joined the unit in August 2018 (faculty are resources for career discussions with students, but course scheduling goes through the student adviser). The adviser revamped the website to provide clear information about curricular requirements and offer course planning worksheets for students to map out a four-year graduation plan. A number of web-based systems facilitate a range of advising processes such as declaring a major and scheduling an appointment. In addition, social media is leveraged to share information with students about program updates or special topics courses.

In a session with the revisit team, 15 juniors and seniors complimented the website and said they go to it regularly to check course offerings and to doublecheck graduation requirements. Students also praised the current adviser but worried that she is spread too thin as the only adviser in the unit. In April 2019, the unit conducted a Student Satisfaction Survey ($n=72$) that showed 81% satisfaction for academic advising and 85% for career advising (the highest was

97% satisfaction for quality of instruction). This is a good sign that the Institute has turned the corner on this nagging weakness.

Overall evaluation: Compliance

Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

The program has made progress and demonstrates strong momentum, and Assessment of Learning Outcomes now merits a finding of compliance.

As one faculty member said, the Institute “got religion on assessment” after the 2017 site team visit. In spring 2018, the Institute began to standardize all syllabi at the undergraduate level and drafted a new plan. In the plan, the 12 ACEJMC values and competencies are mapped to five Institute Values and Competencies. The learning objectives are mapped to classes (and, subsequently, appear on corresponding syllabi). All learning objectives are addressed in the required courses for the major. A faculty member oversees the assessment process for the entire Institute, working with the Undergraduate Studies Director and directors of the unit’s graduate programs.

The plan outlines two direct and two indirect measures for the undergraduate curriculum. The indirect measures include an annual review of student awards and review of employment and graduation data. The direct measures are a course-level assessment in sections of an entry-level skills class and a capstone-level assessment in the Advanced Reporting class. The direct measures use a common rubric, and assessors are trained for a high level of reliability in using the rubric. The rubric includes categories that ask assessors to look for evidence of critical thinking, clarity of ideas, correct and appropriate writing styles, appropriate and attractive use of visuals, and appropriate research methods, soundly applied. The Director of Undergraduate Studies reviews the results with a lead faculty member, and they work together to recommend resources or approaches to address weaknesses that are apparent in the student work.

A strong example of “closing the loop” is in the way the course-level direct measure has been used to improve consistency in instruction across all sections of an introductory-level reporting course. Most of these course sections are taught by adjunct instructors. A common mid-term and final writing assignment in all sections is submitted for evaluation using a common rubric, and instructors are alerted when elements of the assignment are weak across their classes. Particular course topics that have been strengthened as a result of the assessment results include news judgment and the construction of hard-news leads. As a result of this measure and syllabus standardization, the course sections are more even in their level of instruction.

Overall evaluation: 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.

The site team listed three other weaknesses in its 2017 report:

- Ability to engage in fundraising to benefit the institute and its students

In Standard 7, the site team report stated that the unit's previous director was actively discouraged from approaching donors and the current director did not consider development to be part of his official charge.

- Lack of digital and social media integration in many courses

In Standard 2, the site team report said that, although the unit offered weekend workshops on digital and social-media topics, students expressed frustration that they often could not attend because of other obligations. The report added that students also said the program needs to embed more hands-on instruction with social media, audience engagement, pitching and entrepreneurship into courses.

- A standard-definition television studio in an age of high-definition

In Standard 7, the site team report noted that the standard-definition studio was a drawback to students in television news courses and that the studio also has challenges with the cooling system and its decade-old set.

No additional concerns were cited by the Council in its letter to the unit.

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.

- Ability to engage in fundraising to benefit the Institute and its students

In 2019, the unit hired a new community relations specialist with a 40% assignment to fundraising and alumni relations. (In practice, she spends 20-25% of her time on these, with more time spent on events planning.) Since her hiring, the unit has sponsored several meetings with NYU's Development and Alumni Relations office to discuss potential donors and ideas for major grant proposals. No noticeable results had occurred at the time of the revisit.

- Lack of digital and social media integration in many courses

Students who were interviewed said that although they wanted more such instruction, they could describe examples of the integration of such material in their courses. One student, for instance, mentioned a requirement in one course to launch and maintain a Twitter account. Others said the broadcasting courses contained instruction on digital and social media. A quick perusal of syllabi demonstrates such emphasis in courses. For instance, one syllabus reads, “I want to encourage students to think about how they can exploit the latest technology in their own projects. For instance, there’s a great video advocacy project out there to be made on TikTok.” A requirement on another syllabus was that students post material on social media related to the class topic at least once a week with a specific hashtag for the class. A module in development for use by faculty focuses on social media verification.

- A standard-definition television studio in an age of high-definition

The unit has good news on this front. Following the 2017 site visit, the unit requested and received design funds to pave the way for upgrading the studio and control room to a high-definition environment. The unit has met three times with NYU’s director of space management, but the project is going slowly. The plan is to redesign three adjacent spaces into a new studio and control room configuration, a screening room for up to 50, and a seminar room. The director’s hope is to have the renovation occur in summer 2020.

5. Summary conclusion and recommendation:

We recommend **reaccreditation** for NYU’s Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute’s undergraduate program.

Because the Institute will undergo the next ACEJMC cycle in just four years, the summary conclusions below provide some considerations and recommendations for the unit to be even better next time. A program will never be perfect in areas such as Student Services and Assessment, but continual attention and effort will lead to continued improvement.

Standard 6: Satisfaction with advising in the unit has greatly improved the past two years. Students cited an informative and helpful website that they often go to and a student adviser who is accessible and knowledgeable. She is the only academic adviser for 300+ students and frequently pulled in other directions by the Institute; one academic adviser may not be enough. Students expressed

vexation at having multiple advisers because of the double-major requirement (one at the College level plus the two majors) and NYU's online Degree Progress Report that is challenging to understand and sometimes quirky or in error. The Journalism adviser noted that the Degree Progress Report isn't always accurate when dealing with cross-listed courses or internships. In describing these issues and the maze of academic advising they encounter, students described the NYU system with words such as *anxiety*, *apprehension* and *the worst part about NYU*. At the unit level, though, the Institute has substantially improved its advising materials, processes and quality of academic advising to benefit students.

Standard 9: The unit's format standardization of syllabi, with the presentation of learning objectives in a consistent manner, provided a strong foundation for clarity in how core courses address ACEJMC values and competencies. Its mapping of the values and competencies to the courses, along with a systematic approach to an annual assessment process, also has moved the program forward. Furthermore, the unit's direct measures ensure quality across all skills courses and consistency in journalism instruction around reporting, writing, research, the use of information and visuals, the application of ethical principles, and other learning objectives. In a program like that of the Institute, where highly qualified adjuncts are readily available, such quality control is critical to ensure strong student learning outcomes. What remains a work in progress is the stronger, more explicit incorporation of values and competencies such as the "demonstrated understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions" and the "understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures" into its direct measures. The Institute's indirect measures for its undergraduate program could also be expanded to better capture student and employer sentiment around a wider variety of values and competencies. Graduation and employment data and student award data are important markers but are limited in their ability to inform the program about the broad scope of student learning goals required by ACEJMC. Furthermore, it is important that the Institute integrate alumni and professionals into the assessment process in a more systematic way. Currently, the involvement of alumni and professionals, while observable, is not required in the new assessment plan.