

## Review of the B.A., B.S. in Mass Media

Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) Code: 09.0102  
Mass Communication/Media Studies

The B.A., B.S. in Mass Media program is housed in the School of Communication within the College of Arts and Sciences. The school also offers a B.A., B.S. in Communication Studies; a B.A., B.S. in Journalism; a B.A., B.S. in Public Relations; minors in communication studies and mass media; and a M.A., M.S. in Communication. The Mass Media program is designed to prepare students for media careers in sales, marketing, production, and management with radio and television stations, video production companies, and sports facilities and with non-media companies.

The B.A., B.S. in Mass Media program at Illinois State University is one of four undergraduate programs at Illinois public universities assigned CIP code 09.0102 by the Illinois Board of Higher Education. The program consistently has the highest enrollment of the four and the second highest enrollment across all mass media programs in the state (second to DePaul University). Enrollment in the mass media program at Illinois has increased from 169 in fall 2008 to 241 in fall 2014.

The B.A., B.S. in Mass Media program and the three other undergraduate majors in the School of Communication were collectively recognized in 2014 as the top undergraduate communication program in a 13-state region by the Central States Communication Association.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT

**Self-study process.** The approach used by the School of Communication in the previous program review cycle served as a guide for compiling the program review self-study reports for the school during the current program review cycle. The school organized its efforts this cycle so program review self-studies for all programs of the school, including Radio Station WGLT, were compiled collaboratively in spring 2015. Program coordinators began planning the self-study process in late September 2014, starting with a program review orientation meeting facilitated by the Office of the Provost and with discussions among faculty and staff regarding data collection. Faculty and staff involved in the self-studies met multiple times per month beginning in fall 2014 and continuing into spring 2015. By the end of the fall 2014 semester, plans for data collection were complete. During the spring 2015 semester, a digital library of data and documents was established for use by all programs, and drafting of the self-study reports began. Alumni of the school were contacted for their guidance with the studies, and surveys of alumni and graduating seniors were refined and administered.

**Program curriculum.** Students in the B.A., B.S. in Mass Media program are required to complete one of our sequences: radio, television production, interactive media, or media management, promotion, and sales. Sequence curricula are designed to provide a balanced foundation of theory and practice. All sequences emphasize research and each has a liberal arts curriculum designed to educate students in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to develop into competent and ethical mass communicators and to pursue careers or advanced study. Faculty members teach and research the arts and social sciences of audio, visual, written, and multimedia communication with emphasis on encoding and disseminating messages transmitted from a single channel to multiple receivers. Courses required in all sequences include introduction to mass media, communication theories, convergent media writing, communication research methods, cultural criticism, media theory, media law, and media ethics. Students in the program benefit from lab experiences (including internships and paid employment) that promote development of media production skills. School-sponsored media assets through which lab experiences are offered include two radio stations (WGLT and WZND), a television station (TV-10), a newspaper (the *Vidette*), and a social media research center (the Social Media Analytics Command Center).

**Program or academic unit faculty.** Since the last program review, faculty members in the B.A., B.S. in Mass Media have published many books, book chapters, creative works, and journal articles; have edited major journals in the field; and have won major national awards. Faculty members are active scholars, award winning teachers, and award winning creative media producers who exhibit a combination of strong, multifaceted media industry

experience and within-discipline academic credibility. The faculty maintains a supportive environment for knowledge expansion by involving students in research activities and media production.

**Program goals and quality indices.** The mission of the B.A., B.S. in Mass Media program is to produce graduates who are theoretically-sound communicators with skills to create messages for a variety of media, are able to demonstrate competence in communication both orally and in writing, and are capable of expressing themselves accurately, clearly, creatively, and with grammatical proficiency. Goals of the program are to help students develop the abilities to describe means of effectively creating meaningful messages in a variety of settings for all media that disseminate audio, visual, written, or media messages; explain effects of variant audio, visual, written, or media messages on consumers' behaviors, attitudes, and aspects of consciousness; explain effects of social and cultural variables on individual media workers, organizations, and industries, including production, dissemination, exhibition, and consumption processes; explain legal and ethical decision-making for production, dissemination, exhibition, and consumption of media messages; and engage in an understanding of the global impact of media on civic life including governing, social responsibility, and information access. Quality indices used to compare the B.A., B.S. in Mass Media program with its aspirational programs include accreditation with the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC), curricular opportunities beyond traditional on-campus instruction, and facilities used for practical experiences by students.

**Student learning outcomes assessment plan and process.** The assessment plan for the B.A., B.S. in Mass Media program sets forth three learning outcomes: students will demonstrate a substantial increase in general knowledge of mass media, students will demonstrate the ability to write professionally, and students will demonstrate evidence of professional competence in sequence-specific technical skills. These learning outcomes are mapped to the course objectives contained in the course syllabi. Sources of data to assess student achievement of the outcomes include pre- and post-tests that comprehensively address fundamental content; a senior portfolio and its accompanying executive presentation that both are evaluated by media executives and academic professionals; surveys of seniors, alumni, and internship providers; and information regarding career achievement, awards, and honors of program alumni.

**Specialized accreditation.** The B.A., B.S. in Mass Media program is not currently accredited by a specialized accrediting body. During the next program review cycle, program faculty intends to investigate the possibility of accreditation through the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC).

**Responses to recommendations resulting from the previous program review.** The program has embraced recommendations resulting from the 2007-2008 program review. The program has prioritized among the numerous and extensive school goals to focus on facilitating academic excellence, enhancing the systems and infrastructure supporting academic excellence, diversifying and enhancing financial support for academic excellence, and sharing, promoting, and marketing academic excellence. After journalism study moved from mass media to its own major, the Mass Media program set new enrollment goals. Mass Media faculty has been more focused, strategic, and systematic in identifying and understanding comparator programs in the state and benchmark programs nationally. A highlight of these efforts was a road trip by mass media and journalism faculty in summer 2009 to other communication programs at public universities in the state. Mass Media faculty has cultivated a stronger relationship with Milner Library, employing a variety of strategies to incorporate library resources and services into mass media courses and the broader student experience. Mass Media faculty also has sought external funding and grants to support programs, services, and facilities of the school as well as to support faculty research. These efforts have included submitting applications for internal and external grants and initiating a joint sales effort across the media assets of the school.

**Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand.** Since the 2007-2008 program review, legacy media and new media have continued to converge. Faculty of the B.A., B.S. in Mass Communication program anticipated the need to evolve the program to reflect this trend, from silos of legacy media to media convergence. The result was transition from the Mass Communication program to the Mass Media program, with significant curriculum changes implemented shortly after the previous program review. The program anticipates strong demand for mass media graduates in the coming years, given the need in most jobs, regardless of discipline, for information and communication technology skills.

**Major findings of this program review self-study.** Since the last program review, the B.A., B.S. in Mass Media program has evolved from its former incarnation as the Mass Communication program and now has clear competitive advantages in serving students from Illinois and the Midwest. Significant opportunities for program improvement and growth remain, although their attainment may be tempered by the needs for additional faculty and other resources. The program is positioned to help meet the demand for converged media specialists in production, design, marketing, sales, social media, and management. To succeed in doing so, the program must keep pace with changes in technology to maintain a program that is relevant and in demand.

**Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle.** Within the context of the School of Communication strategic plan and assuming sufficient resource availability, the B.A., B.S. in Mass Media program intends pursue the following initiatives during the next program review cycle: seek additional faculty; re-examine the current sequence strategy for its continuing relevance to the industry; continue to develop unified sales strategies across school-sponsored media assets; improve facilities; examine the possibility of ACEJMC accreditation; and improve strategies for gathering information from graduating seniors and program alumni.

### **PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the B.A., B.S. in Mass Media to be in Good Standing.**

The Academic Planning Committee thanks the program for a well written, critical, and forward-looking self-study report that evidences involvement of faculty, students, and external stakeholders. A particularly unique and noteworthy input to the self-study process is a report resulting from a summer 2009 site visit by mass media and journalism faculty members to comparator programs at Illinois universities.

The committee congratulates faculty and staff for recognition of Mass Media and the three other undergraduate programs in the School of Communication as, collectively, the top undergraduate program for 2014 by the Central States Communication Association. The committee also commends program faculty members for their extensive research portfolios. A fall 2013 report by the Communication Institute for Online Scholarship cited the graduate faculty in the school as among the most productive communication scholars in the nation.

The committee commends program faculty for efforts to maintain a current and relevant curriculum, including substantial revision of the curriculum in 2009-2010, in a fast-changing, converging, and increasingly global media environment. The committee also commends the program for its strategic integration of pre-professional and professional opportunities with the curriculum, including opportunities available through media outlets sponsored by the school (the *Vidette* newspaper, TV-10, and WZND radio), through numerous registered student organizations, and through the Social Media Analytics Command Center developed by School of Communication faculty since the last program review. The committee also recognizes program faculty members for designing a new student learning outcomes assessment plan to evaluate student learning in the restructured and revised program. Particularly noteworthy are incorporation of pre- and post-tests and use of student portfolios, which are presented to a panel of media executives and academic professionals as part of the capstone/culminating experience.

The committee commends the program for outreach and recruitment efforts which have resulted in a 57.5 percent increase in enrollment between fall 2010 and fall 2014. A key aspect of those efforts, outreach to prospective students of color, has led to increases in the number and percentage of students self-identifying with racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented in the discipline and at the University. The program has also worked to enhance the Honors experience for its students, including efforts to better align with the university-wide Honors program by adding explorations in social media analytics and intercultural communication and a travel experience linked to a 300-level course.

The committee acknowledges efforts of program faculty and staff to connect with alumni, to evaluate those efforts, and to modify them as needed. The program has compiled post-graduation experiences for nearly 60 percent of students graduating between 2008 and 2014, and the committee encourages the program to continue refining these efforts.

Four- and six-year graduation rates for students entering the Mass Media program as external transfer students consistently exceed university-wide averages. The same is true of the four-year graduation rate for students entering the program as first-time-in-college students. However, the six-year graduation rate for students entering the Mass Media program as first-time-in-college students has consistently been lower than the university-wide average, by as much as 16 percentage points during the last five years. The Academic Planning Committee encourages the program to analyze this phenomenon and to develop and implement strategies to reduce the difference between program and university-wide rates. The committee asks program faculty to report its findings in a report submitted by the School of Communication to the Office of the Provost by December 1, 2016.

### Recommendations

The Academic Planning Committee makes the following recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle. In the next program review self-study, tentatively due October 1, 2023, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

- The self-study report indicates that programs of the School of Communication, including the Mass Media program, are scrambling to meet instructional demand resulting from increased enrollment. The report notes that this demand is reflected in student-to-faculty ratios that significantly exceed ratios across all units at the University. The committee recommends that faculty members of the Mass Media program revisit this issue with faculty members of other programs in the school to explore options for addressing this demand and reducing these ratios. Options to explore include, but are not limited to, establishing priorities for new faculty hires and then requesting additional faculty lines for those programs from the College of Arts and Sciences.
- Of full-time faculty in the school in fall 2014, 40 percent were female. Only 5 percent of tenure track faculty members self-identified with racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented at Illinois State. The committee recommends that the program collaborate with other programs in the school to implement strategies for increasing these numbers, particularly among tenure track faculty.
- With facilities serving students in the school scattered across several campus locations and with the trend toward media convergence, the committee recommends that the program collaborate with other programs in the school and with the Office of Facilities Planning and Construction to study long-term space needs. Among options to consider is collocation of some or all school programs and services to promote synergies among students, faculty, and staff. Recognizing the unlikelihood of obtaining capital development funds from the state in the near- or mid-term, the committee recommends exploring external (i.e., non-state) funding for its facilities improvements.
- The self-study report notes the need to make the M.A., M.S. in Communication program more welcoming to students interested in continuing their mass media studies on the graduate level. The committee recommends utilizing alumni connections developed by the mass media program in recent years to solicit input from alumni regarding how the graduate program could better meet the needs of mass media students and practitioners.
- The committee concurs with the faculty recommendation to explore expansion of non-traditional curriculum delivery to provide students greater flexibility in completing the program, to expose students to additional sub-disciplines, and to provide training opportunities for students who might not otherwise enroll at the University. Enhancements to explore include, but are not limited to, additional online courses, online courses offered during the fall and spring semesters, and short courses held on or off campus during semester breaks.
- The committee concurs with the faculty recommendation to periodically evaluate the number, structure, and curriculum of sequences offered by the program for their impact on time-to-degree but also encourages faculty to consider their impact on intellectual advancement of the students. The committee notes that, while developing competence in written communication is part of the program mission, writing ranks lowest among the three assessment objectives adopted by program faculty in terms of its inclusion in course syllabi, according to an analysis cited in the self-study report. As the curriculum is revised, the committee encourages faculty to consider greater emphasis on written communication across all courses.

- The committee commends the school for offering study abroad options in France and South Korea and for developing new options in the Netherlands and Brazil. The committee recommends that the school and program explore establishing a scholarship fund to lower the cost of study abroad for students with limited financial means.
  
- The committee acknowledges work faculty has done to revamp its student learning outcomes assessment plan in conjunction with revamping the curriculum. The committee recommends that the program continue to revise the plan as needed, use assessment results to identify the need for any changes to the new curriculum, and document both its assessment activities and changes made to the program based on assessment outcomes. One assessment matter meriting immediate attention by program faculty is the narrow difference (8.99 points over the last seven years) in average scores on the pre-tests and post-tests that are key elements of the assessment plan. The committee recommends that faculty members analyze this difference to identify strategies for improving student performance relative to learning objectives, improvement that should then be reflected in higher post-test scores.