

**2014-15**  
**Revisit Team Report**  
**for Accreditation in Journalism**  
**and Mass Communications**

**Name of Accredited Unit:** Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

**Name of Institution:** Abilene Christian University

**Name of Administrator:** Cheryl Mann Bacon

**Date of Original Site Visit:** October 21-23, 2012

**Revisit Date:** October 19-21, 2014

**Revisit Team Chair:** Joe Foote, University of Oklahoma

**Revisit Team Member:** Barbara Hines, Howard University

**Revisit Team's Recommendation:** Re-Accreditation

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

Standard 3: Diversity and Inclusiveness

**Text from 2012 Standard 3 Evaluation**

PART II — Standard 3: Diversity and Inclusiveness

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

**(a) The unit has a written 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 Department has adopted a diversity policy and plan aimed at meeting diversity goals. The plan was approved by the faculty in April 1998, updated in February 2000, updated in November 2005 and updated again in August 2009. It established a Departmental policy stating that diversity is broader than any set of statistically measurable variables and that a diverse student body and faculty would reflect not only diversity of gender and ethnicity, the traditional variables, but also diversity of age, economic background, and professional and philosophical approach.

The self-study noted that the Department is committed to the university's policy of hiring full-time faculty members who are active members of a local, independent congregation of the Churches of Christ. This is a challenge for the Department in regard to accreditation in that it greatly limits the faculty hiring pools.

University administrators are aware that the policy presents significant challenges, and they have begun exploring options for amending it. This team also believes that the policy should be revisited to allow for greater flexibility in recruiting faculty members.

The Department's diversity plan is essentially the same plan that was included in the 2006 self - study—with its similar eight bullet points. The previous site team believed the plan was insufficient and that it was basically the same plan that had been used in 2000. The 2006 team called for specific changes that included measurements for assessing the effectiveness of the plan. However, there are few evident specific measurements for assessing the effectiveness of the plan in the most recent diversity plan submitted by the Department, and the plan does not include a system for determining progress toward achieving measureable goals.

**(b) The unit's curriculum fosters understanding of issues and perspectives that are inclusive in terms of gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation.**

The Department's self-study indicated that syllabi and classroom discussions routinely include topics targeted to foster understandings of issues and perspectives that are inclusive in terms of gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. The report listed examples of courses in which diversity segments play an important role in at least 10 courses, from the introductory level through the highest levels in each major. The Ad/P.R. sequence had the least amount of information in its syllabi about how diversity is approached and addressed within courses, although Ad/P.R. students were able to cite examples of how they covered diversity and multicultural groups in their classes.

The self-study notes that the Department has made significant progress in the area of diversity within the curriculum. As evidence, 99 percent of those responding in the most recent annually conducted alumni survey reported that diversity issues were discussed in class in JMC and in their other university classes. And 38 percent reported that diversity was discussed to a high degree in their JMC classes, and 32 percent said diversity was discussed to that degree in their other university classes.

The JMC faculty believes a weakness lies in a lack of co-curricular activities specifically designed to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. JMC majors have been active as leaders in the campus-wide organizations that target students of color, and on at least two occasions since the last site visit Ad/P.R. majors have attended the AAF's Mosaic event, but no internal JMC organizations have been established. In the 2012 fall semester, the university is welcoming its most diverse freshman class in the school's history, with more than 30 percent of entering freshmen representing ethnic minority groups. This makes the development of an initiative to identify and cultivate co-curricular activities such as a student chapter of NABJ particularly timely for the Department, which has a 30 percent minority enrollment in its first-year class for the first time.

The self-study indicates that guest speakers are used to expand the Department's efforts to educate and expose students to diversity and multiculturalism. Over the past six years, there have been a number of speakers of color on campus and some in JMC classes. In a number of cases, it is unclear if students were required to attend their sessions or just encouraged. In some cases, majors were required to attend in specific courses. Required attendance, with assignments related to the coursework, is more effective, of course, if there is to be an effect on the program.

**(c) The unit demonstrates effective efforts to recruit women and minority faculty and professional staff and supports their retention, progress and success.**

Although the Department was found out of compliance on the diversity standard in 2000 and 2006, on both occasions the Department at least had minority faculty

members in the classroom. In 2000, it had two adjunct faculty members who were women of color who have since left the area. In 2006, the full-time faculty included a Native American male who has left the university.

Since the last visit, two searches have been completed. In response to the 2006 site-team report, a faculty member was hired to teach advertising. No minority applicant responded to that search. After the unexpected retirement of a print-focused journalism faculty member in 2007-08, a search resulted in the Department's hiring a faculty member with a master's degree and more than 20 years of professional experience and full financial support from the university for him to complete his Ph.D.; he is not from a minority group.

Because the university was aware of the Department's desire to make a diverse hire, the Department was allowed to continue advertising for a position even after the advertising hire was made and even though no line was budgeted for this. One applicant of color was interviewed in 2006 but not offered a position. Concurrent with the Department's continuing efforts to recruit a minority faculty member, SACS requirements mandated an increase in the number of terminally degreed faculty. As a result, the Department made an agreement of support with a white female who is completing her doctoral studies at the University of Florida. She will join the Department faculty upon completion of her degree in about two years. At some point, the Department chair had discussions with two prospects of color, one male and one female, exploring similar arrangements, but both opted to continue broadcast journalism careers. A new faculty search was opened in the summer of 2012, and the chair began a correspondence with a woman of color urging her to apply in addition to placing ads in NABJ and NAHJ job-posting websites.

In the 2012 fall semester, the full-time faculty is made up of five faculty members. Two have doctorates, 40 percent are women, and there are no minorities currently serving. There are five adjunct faculty members, not any one of whom is from a minority group. There are two and one-half staff members, not any one of whom is from a minority group.

The self-study noted that the Department has been successful at recruiting women as full-time faculty members and in employing women as part-time and adjunct faculty; most semesters about half of the adjuncts are women. The Department chair is a woman as is one of the most recent faculty members to be granted tenure.

Church affiliation is not a criterion for adjuncts, but as noted in the self-study, the geographic area constitutes an entry-level media market in a geographically isolated region. So finding adjuncts of any ethnicity is a challenge. Since the departure of the two minority adjuncts on staff in 2000, the Department chair has not been able to identify a person of color in the Abilene area with a master's degree in a JMC field that would satisfy SACS credential requirements for adjunct faculty. (As recently as June 2012, only one editorial staff member of the local newspaper held a master's degree. That was the editor, a white male who has taught as an adjunct in the past.)

While faculty members have regularly invited local media professionals of color as guest speakers, none have been available to serve as adjunct instructors.

The chair regularly checks with local media outlets to identify any employees who have master's degrees and who would be available to teach, but she has not been made aware of any minority professionals in the city who have SACS credentials for adjunct faculty. The team shared with the Department chair that other similarly situated programs use a multi-pronged approach, such as reaching beyond the local market and using new media technology (Skype or Google Hangout) to help them address unmet diversity needs.

**(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.**

There is no Departmental variation from the university admission requirement. A student can become a major after being admitted to the university by declaring that he or she is a JMC major. However, for a major to enroll in JMC 102, Creating Media Messages, and all subsequent courses, the student must have a 550 SAT verbal score, a 24 ACT English score or a 70 Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling Exam score. In addition, the student must have a 2.0 overall GPA in the Department and a 2.25 overall at the university for graduation.

Twenty-three percent of the students in the Department are non-white, which is similar to the university's 21 percent non-white. The most recent data show a four-year graduation rate of 43 percent for the non-white students in the Department, which is equal to the four-year graduation rate for that class as a whole. Of students in the JMC Department during AY 2011-12: 8 percent were black; 9 percent were Hispanic or Mexican American; 2 percent were Native American; and 4 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander.

Forty-seven ethnic or racial minority students declared a major in the Department between the fall of 2006 and 2007. Of that number, 20 earned degrees from the Department by 2011, which is a 43 percent four-year graduation rate for minority students in the program. Others are still making satisfactory progress toward a JMC degree. This ethnic or racial minority graduation rate is better than the university's four-year minority graduation rate for the same time period.

According to the self-study, multiple efforts are made to give every student help that is carefully tailored to his or her needs. Retention of minorities is important to the Department, and the chair and faculty believe advising is the front line of this effort. The self-study notes that the level of high student satisfaction with academic advising can be partially attributed to ongoing faculty involvement in mentoring of majors.

The university used a Multicultural Market SWOT Analysis to assist with its recruitment efforts. It used the analysis to better understand how to communicate with prospective minority students. It also used community resources, including the Hispanic Leadership Council and several African-American church alliances. In addition, the fact that ACU offers small classes, personal attention and appropriate close relationships with professors is attractive to multicultural students and majority students alike. As a result, ACU has a higher student diversity ratio than most of its competitors, and it rivals that of the state competition. Faculty members noted that minority students have flourished in the Department and succeeded in job placements. Some minority alumni maintain contact and relationships with faculty members. Some current students reported that they feel welcome and supported in the Department.

**(e) The unit has a climate that is free of harassment and discrimination, accommodates the needs of those with disabilities, and values the contributions of all forms of diversity.**

The Department subscribes to the institution's policies and guidelines regarding harassment, discrimination and the needs of personnel with disabilities. They include such items as creating positions that offer growth opportunities for which women and ethnic minorities are strongly considered; promotion and hiring of women and minorities to administrative and other leadership roles; use of the Gallup Organization's StrengthsFinder analysis tool to reveal the strengths of each person, regardless of rank, gender or ethnicity; and the Quality of Life Task Force, which assessed the state of employee morale and planned ways to improve it.

The institution is in full compliance with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and it regularly conducts employee informational sessions about harassment and discrimination in the workplace.

Faculty members include in their syllabi discussion of the Department's policy with regard to harassment and discrimination, the accommodation of the needs of students with disabilities, and the value of all forms of diversity. Each of those areas has been addressed also by efforts at the institution-wide level and are fully supported and implemented by the Department.

**Summary:**

The Department has made efforts to meet the guidelines found in the diversity and inclusiveness standard. It has done well on recruiting students, as well as on developing a curriculum that systematically focuses on diversity in a climate that is free of harassment. The challenges for the Department are its written diversity plan and its lack of domestic diversity in faculty and staff positions. This is the third accreditation site-visit team where concerns about these areas have been raised by the team. It is the third time the diversity standard has been found out of compliance.

It is clear that some elements are beyond the Department's control at present, preventing it from readily increasing the diversity of the faculty and staff. In light of that, the Department's plan to pursue the avenues described in its self-study as it seeks some candidates who can meet the requirements of SACS and the Churches of Christ membership need to be vigorously carried forward, particularly if the details of the plan include such items as encouraging university administrators to address the hiring policy; seeking minority professionals in the area and having them as guest lecturers in a regularly scheduled required course or at regular intervals by means of Skype or a similar system if necessary; forming a partnership with another university that has faculty members of color or with one of the Historically Black Universities (HBCU's), and continuing to seek eligible faculty members of color. Several years ago, the Department was successful in recruiting faculty members of color—so it can be done.

The team believes the Department could more vigorously embrace those factors that are within its control, as other ACEJMC-accredited, church-affiliated universities have done under similar circumstances.

First, as noted in the 2006-07 report of the on-site evaluation of the Department, it still may be missing opportunities. For example, although there has been an increase in the number of guest speakers of color invited to speak in the Department since the last site visit, the speakers' work is not necessarily tied back into the courses in a meaningful way, so there is a minimal effect on the academic program. And the Department has not invited professionals of color to become team teachers who interact with students by electronic systems as well as in person.

Second, the Department's Diversity Plan needs to be strengthened. The 2006 site visit team and the current site visit team take issue with the brevity, lack of measureable goals for assessing the effectiveness of the plan, and the fact that it has not been significantly broadened. The plan does not provide specific tactical actions or a system for determining progress toward achieving measureable goals to be undertaken to achieve full compliance.

Third, the Accrediting Council places a strong emphasis on domestic racial diversity, while the Department places an emphasis on international diversity, both of which are important; however, it needs to be separated and approached as separate goals. Moreover, if the Department made domestic racial diversity a priority, it might focus more of the resources and attention on strengthening the curriculum in this regard, increasing the number of guest speakers, and motivating faculty members and students to pay closer attention to the original intent of the diversity and inclusiveness standard, which is clearly an area of concern about this program within the Accrediting Council, as noted in the previous two site visit reports.

Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: **Noncompliance.**

**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 3: Diversity and Inclusiveness**

Summary of findings:

This has been a period of growth and introspection for Abilene Christian University's Department of Journalism and Mass Communication. The faculty reviewed and enhanced course syllabi, established benchmarks for domestic and international enrollment, created a Diversity Fund with a gift of \$100,000 from an alumna to support diversity initiatives, explored affiliations with professional organizations of color, increased faculty and staff minority hiring and explored challenges related to university hiring requirements.

#### **The Diversity Plan**

The department strengthened and expanded its Diversity Plan to include measurable objectives in five key areas: graduates, enrollment, hiring, curriculum and co-curricular activities. By setting goals, a clearer picture emerges of the department's efforts related to diversity and inclusiveness. Each of the goals has measurable objectives, and the plan separates data for domestically diverse populations and international students.

One area of the plan that has become especially productive is the measurement of increasing minority enrollment. The department has clarified that it is seeking to achieve and maintain a domestic ethnic minority student enrollment of 30 percent, increasing the rate by one percentage point every two years until a minority enrollment of 35 percent or better is achieved. In 2012, the department's enrollment of domestic ethnic minority students was 22 percent; the university's was also 22 percent. In 2013 the department's enrollment was 27 percent; the university's was 25 percent. Based on fall 2014 figures from the 12<sup>th</sup> day of enrollment, the department's enrollment was 30 percent; the university's was 27 percent.

#### **Curricular/Co-Curricular Initiatives**

A major thrust during the past two years has been the development and implementation of more specialized coursework on diversity issues. The department redesigned a special topics course, Race and Media, and replaced it with two courses: JMC 302, Race and Media and JMC 303, Colloquy on Race and Media. JMC 303 must be taken two times once students have sophomore standing. The colloquy helps students develop a deeper understanding of race and multiculturalism in media environments, and focuses more on domestic diversity.



While JMC 302 meets weekly for eight weeks, the JMC 303 course brings noteworthy professionals to campus for a weekend seminar based on a syllabus developed in conjunction with the JMC 302 faculty coordinator. Topics and speakers in JMC 303 rotate to insure relevancy to the department's three majors: convergence journalism, advertising/public relations and multimedia. Work and activities completed in the weekend seminar are highlighted across other classes. Faculty report that student enthusiasm from JMC 303 has encouraged them to innovate more in other classes regarding diversity.

JMC 303 seminar instructors have included J. P. James, the former director of account planning at SpikeDDB, NYC; Robert Rivard, director of the independent news site, *The Rivard Report* and former editor of the *San Antonio Express-News*; and Dr. Mia Moody-Ramirez, director of the graduate program at Baylor University and expert in diversity, media and crisis management.

At a minimum, four of six core courses and at least two other courses in each major include content relevant to diversity issues. A review of syllabi also shows clearer focus on inclusivity.

Additionally, the faculty has shown increased effort to bring guests from diverse backgrounds to speak in courses and at departmental events. With the location of the university in West Texas and a predominantly white media industry, faculty members report putting added emphasis on using technology to bring external voices to their classes virtually.

Through co-curricular activities, the department has initiated a system of measuring and monitoring participation in student laboratory media to assure that paid staff are domestically diverse.

The one area where the department has not yet achieved its goals is the establishment of student chapters of professional organizations. The department discovered that it did not meet the criteria for a student chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists and has not acted yet to establish a student chapter of National Association of Hispanic Journalists although momentum is building to take that action.

### **Faculty Diversity**

At the time of the 2012 site visit, the department's faculty included no one of color, and there was not a hiring opportunity on the horizon. A vacancy created by the elevation of a faculty member to Associate Provost was close to being filled. A few months after the Council's decision on provisional accreditation, the manager of the public radio station, KACU, retired. A previous director of the station alerted the chair that an ACU alumnus in California who is Latino might be interested in the position. While communicating with the alumnus, who had a terminal degree (M.F.A.) and adjunct teaching experience as well as a decade in public radio in San

Diego, the chair discovered that he had a strong interest in a faculty rather than a staff position. By working with the Provost, the chair was able to reconfigure the position as a tenure-track faculty position with half-time responsibility for the public radio station. The radio manager's job had been a faculty position years earlier but converted to staff with the hiring of the previous incumbent.

Nathan Gibbs joined the JMC faculty in late fall 2013, beginning his first complete academic year in fall 2014. He seems particularly well suited to both the faculty and station management positions. Gibbs is an exponent of new media initiatives and has a broad portfolio of interests beyond broadcast production. His M.F.A. projects involved race and identity. Gibbs grew up in California as a mixed-race, acculturated Hispanic who as an adult has become fluent in Spanish. He is highly motivated to participate in diversity issues, including the teaching of the new Race and Media Colloquy in Fall 2015. He is also eager to become faculty adviser to a proposed student chapter of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists.

The Gibbs hire was a solid indicator of the Journalism and Mass Communication Department's commitment to diversity. It was only through the tenacious activity of the chair, the helpfulness of former faculty and the strong support of upper administration that this opportunity was discovered and consummated in such a productive way.

Previous site visit reports have noted the constraining influence of the ACU Board of Trustees' century-old requirement that all faculty be members of the Church of Christ. While this is an issue that has been debated within the university for several years among many constituencies, ACEJMC's decision on Provisional Accreditation in 2012 provided another ripple in the pond. In Fall 2013, the Board of Trustees requested that the Faculty Senate sponsor events to discuss the issue. The opinions of academic and church leaders from outside ACU were solicited as well. The JMC department chair became a highly articulate, informed exponent of loosening the policy and had opportunities to interact with the Board of Trustees on the issue during these discussions. While departments like nursing and music had received waivers for highly specialized hires, the Board had held firm on any official change in policy. The 2013 initiatives indicated the possibility of greater flexibility. A follow-up faculty survey indicated that nearly 80 percent of faculty expressed some level of disagreement with the current policy. A similar survey of staff and alumni indicated similar opinions. In August 2014, the Provost presented the findings to the board. The church membership requirement will be discussed at the November 2014 meeting.

**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.**

“A stretched full-time faculty of only five members currently.”

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

There are currently seven persons on the faculty, including the radio station manager who has teaching responsibilities. Previously, this was a full-time staff position, but has now reverted to a faculty position as discussed under the Standard 3 appraisal. The manager teaches two courses per semester. At the time of the 2012 site visit, the department was conducting a search for a sixth full-time faculty member. A white female was hired for that position. She teaches writing for electronic delivery, electronic publishing, and social media and is co-adviser for 99West, the student-run multimedia agency.

**5. Summary conclusion**

The Department of Journalism & Mass Communication has come a long way in its emphasis on diversity and inclusiveness during the past two years. The chair and the faculty have been diligent and creative to make diversity a bigger part of their efforts. Since the initial site visit, the department has:

1. Recruited a highly regarded public radio manager who is Hispanic and transformed a staff position into a faculty position.
2. Established a diversity fund that provides ongoing funding to bring a diverse group of speakers to campus.
3. Created a required Colloquy on Race and Media that is sensitizing students to multicultural issues and encouraging a climate for additional faculty and departmental activities.
4. Begun efforts to establish NABJ and NAHJ chapters on campus but have not succeeded in doing so.
5. Raised the issue of mandatory church membership as a prerequisite to hold a faculty position with the university’s administration that, along with other grass roots initiatives on campus, has propelled the issue to the university’s Board of Trustees.

Cumulatively, the department is positioned much better to work with its increasingly diverse student population as well as to help all students understand key issues important in a multicultural world. Providing a focus on diversity and hiring a diverse faculty will always be a challenge at ACU, but the chair and faculty

are fully committed to building on the impressive work that they have done during the past two years.