

**2015-16**  
**Revisit Team Report**  
**for Accreditation in Journalism**  
**and Mass Communications**

Name of Accredited Unit:

Journalism and Public Communication, Department of Journalism and  
Communication

Name of Institution:

University of Alaska Anchorage

Name of Accredited Unit Administrator:

Associate Professor Paola Banchemo, chair

Date of Original Site Visit:

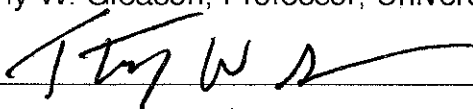
October 20-23, 2013

Revisit Date:

November 16-17, 2015

Revisit Team Chair:

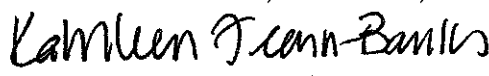
Timothy W. Gleason, Professor, University of Oregon



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Revisit Team Member:

Kathleen Fern-Banks, Professor, University of Washington



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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 6: Student Services

The 2013 Site Team report noted that the department was making a good effort in the areas under review, but found that it had not yet succeeded. It summarized the actions required to address the Standard 6 weaknesses as follows:

The unit (and the University) must do a much better job of ensuring that students are receiving adequate advising all through their education, especially because so many UAA students face daunting challenges on the way to graduation.

The department must align faculty expertise, resources and course offerings to improve a six-year graduation rate of under 18 percent.

It based these recommendations on the following list of weaknesses:

The University does not require that students meet with advisers and not enough students take advantage of advising options.

The most recent version of the University's advising software provided students with incorrect information. For example, students might discover in their final semester that they lacked credits needed for graduation.

Confusion over requirements resulted in some students taking unnecessary courses.

The 6-year graduation rate for the JPC Department was unacceptably low and substantially trailed College and national averages. While the retention rate was better relative to the College rate, both fell well below national averages.

Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

The department had been found out of compliance in 2007. In 2013 the site team again found it out of compliance. It recommended that the unit, "Immediately and effectively execute its assessment plan so that in two years the unit will be able to perform meaningful analysis of its performance."

While the department had been engaged in assessment activities since 2003, the team found that the efforts had been sporadic and uneven. Even though the department had made some progress, for example, it now included professionals in the assessment process, the team found a number of weaknesses in the assessment efforts:

Insufficient data collection to support improvement in the program or to provide a basis for evaluation of the process.

Too great an emphasis on course-based assessment measures, with a lack of program-wide measures.

Reliance on an academic-research senior-capstone class as an assessment tool. Given the focus of the class it did not provide a basis for assessment of applied communication research skills and knowledge.

**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 6: Student Services

Over the period under review the department has taken significant steps to address the concerns raised in the 2013 site-team report. The overarching issue in the 2013 report was the finding that retention and graduation rates in the department were significantly lower than national averages and trailed university averages.

The department engaged in a multi-faceted approach that focused on improving the environment for student success. Some of the changes were informed by assessment data, some were based on less formal feedback from professionals and graduates and others were part of university initiatives.

The Department moved from the Humanities division of the College of Arts and Sciences to the Social Sciences division. This move increased the number of professional academic advisers for the unit from one to two. In addition it provided the department with greater mentorship in the area of assessment.

Following the site-team recommendation, the department redesigned the curriculum to offer two rather than four concentrations; eliminated courses that were not being offered on a regular basis or were out of alignment with the new curriculum; reduced the total number of credits to graduate from 126 to 120, putting the major in line with most bachelor degree programs at the university; reduced the number of credits needed outside the major from 81, with 66 in the liberal arts and 15 in any discipline, to a total of 72 credits outside the major; reduced the total number of credits needed in JPC to 42 credits from 45; and redesigned the capstone research course to meet the needs of professionally oriented students; and redesigned JPC 204 Information Gathering, formerly a core course for JPC majors, into Media Literacy, a general education social science course. Now, Media Literacy should draw students from across the campus and it will serve majors as a core course.

The department also took action to improve advising and to actively reach out to students. It has become more proactive, seeking out students rather than waiting for them to seek help.

It recognized that many UAA students are non-traditional students -- more than 25 percent of JPC students are first generation college students -- and most are working at least one job. Two of the most notable changes are the university's introduction of mandatory advising for undergraduates and the department's efforts to make contact with students who are identified as being close to graduation and encouraging them to complete their degrees. The chair and other faculty track student progress and will reach out to students who they see are only a few credits or courses from graduation. Other improvements include granting tuition waivers to students making good progress in the major; and instituting a yearly orientation session to better inform students about advising, internships and other opportunities.

All of these changes and initiatives build on a student-centered culture within a department where faculty have open doors and know the names of all of their students.

The department is a full participant in a university-wide effort to serve a diverse, non-traditional student population. While the university and department retention and graduation rates remain low relative to national averages, the department rates have improved from the five-year graduation rate of 17.6 percent cited by the site team to a rate in the mid-20 percent range in the last two years. In the last two years the department's graduation and retention rates have been at or above the university norms.

**Overall evaluation: Compliance**

Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

The unit has had an assessment plan and has been conducting assessment activities since 2003. For most of the period under review in 2013 the unit chair took primary responsibility for assessment activities with little faculty engagement. At the time of the 2013 site team visit assessment practices in the unit were in a period of change but the team found that it was "too little, too late." Two years later, the unit has made substantial progress on a number of fronts. Unit faculty are engaged in assessment activities; a well developed draft of a revised assessment plan is under review and scheduled for approval early in the winter 2016 term; the unit is working closely with assessment experts at the college level to develop better measurement tools; and the faculty are using assessment data to inform changes in the curriculum.

The University has a robust assessment program that includes the filing of annual assessment reports. The unit's reports are reviewed at the college level and by the Academic Assessment Committee of the Faculty Senate. There is an ongoing campus-wide effort to use assessment to enhance student success and a

recognition that development of effective assessment plans begins at the unit level.

The two assessment reports completed since the site team visit indicate that the unit is engaged in substantive assessment, that the faculty have used assessment to inform curricular changes, and that more work needs to be done to improve assessment practices.

The current plan and draft revised plan incorporate the ACEJMC competencies and the unit is using a variety of direct and indirect measures including pre- and post-tests in some courses, professional review of student work, surveys of internship coordinators, student awards and honors, and exit surveys.

Faculty are engaged in the implementation of the assessment plan and there is evidence that assessment data are informing curriculum revision. Examples include: The creation of the new Media Literacy course; elimination of courses, for example eliminating duplicative film courses, and the consolidation of all magazine content courses; the creation of a professional applied research capstone course and the offering of at least one section of either the research or the applied research course each term.

There is clear recognition at the faculty and the administrative levels that more work is needed. The two assessment reports identify gaps in current assessment practices and propose changes. JPC faculty are regular participants in workshops and seminars on assessment offered by UAA Academic Assessment; faculty are working with the assessment coordinator in the CAS Social Science division to develop better rubrics for assessment in individual classes and to develop stronger overall program assessment tools; the unit is working to develop a student eportfolio requirement to use in its assessment program as the University launches a campus-wide eportfolio platform; and the faculty teaching the capstone course are working on developing assessment tools for the course that will allow the unit to generate provide program-wide assessment measures.

**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.**

Strategic Plan: The department had a strategic plan that was a recently revised version of a plan adopted in 2006. The team found the plan to be appropriately ambitious but too tactical and lacking in overall direction and priorities.

Connection of Department to College leadership: The team found that College leadership appeared “detached from the needs and challenges of the Department.” As an example it cited the 20 percent reduction in a media support technician position.

JPC 403 Communications and Media Research: The required senior-capstone class was taught once a year by a single faculty member teaching two 20-student sections. Both students and faculty recognized that the ratio was too high. In addition the course lacked a professional applied research focus and it was offered only once a year, which resulted in some students having to delay graduation for a term.

The curriculum needed revision to better align with department resources. Students had difficulty planning their schedules for timely graduation. Some courses in the curriculum were offered on an irregular basis and the capstone course was not offered with enough frequency to meet student demand.

**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.**

Strategic Plan: The department is in a 5-year strategic planning process following the merger with the Department of Communication. It is expected to be completed by the end of fall term. The scope of the plan is the new department. Development of this plan was delayed awaiting the completion of a University “prioritization process,” led by the Provost’s office from 2103 to 2015. The draft plan includes the following goals:

- Goal 1 Maintain and enhance an undergraduate curriculum responsive to the needs of students, potential employers and the community.
- Goal 2 Strengthen participation in our programs (for ACEJMC, this means the bachelor of arts)
- Goal 3 Strengthen connections to all co-curricular activities (for ACEJMC, this means The Northern Light, KRUA FM 88.1, the Public Relations Student Society of America UAA chapter, and the Student Filmmakers Club)
- Goal 4 Improve, modernize and expand Journalism and Communication space and facilities to promote student and faculty success.
- Goal 5 Deepen collaboration with other units, such as the College of Business and Public Policy and the Department of Art
- Goal 6 Reflect the diversity of the community and the state in our department

Connection of Department to College leadership: The College of Arts and Sciences, in consultation with the JPC faculty, moved the department from the Humanities division to the Social Sciences division in CAS. This is a better academic fit for the department and it also addresses significant support needs. Two CAS administrative assistants and an academic adviser are now located in close proximity to the department rather than being located on the other side of campus. For the last two years, the college has funded a media support technician on a 10-month contract.

JPC 403 Communications and Media Research: In 2015-16 the course is scheduled in the fall term, with the section having a traditional research capstone focus. In the spring students can take JPC 492, a new course with a professional applied capstone focus. Student/faculty ratios in the classes are being watched carefully with a cap of 15 students per section. The department will monitor course demand and adjust the course rotation as needed. The faculty teaching the course are working to design both sections to accommodate the career expectations of the students enrolled each term.

The curriculum needed revision to better align with department resources: The faculty engaged in significant curriculum reform over the last two years. It reduced the number of concentrations from four (Journalism, Strategic Communication, Telecommunications and Film and Integrated Communication to two (Journalism and Digital Media, and Strategic Communication) In addition, it eliminated and redesigned courses and better aligned course prerequisites.

## **5. Summary conclusion**

Over the two years since the site visit, the unit has addressed the concerns raised in the initial site team report and made significant progress toward its goal of enhancing student success. The program has organized and focused its curricular structure, enhanced support services and continued to build on the student-centered culture that defines the program. The unit has an assessment plan, is doing yearly assessment and has changed the curriculum as a result of that work. The draft plan currently under review and demonstrated faculty engagement in assessment are strong evidence of the unit's commitment to continual improvement of its assessment practices.



Department of Journalism  
and Communication

UNIVERSITY of ALASKA ANCHORAGE

January 20, 2016

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Susanne Shaw  
Executive Director  
Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications  
1435 Jayhawk Blvd.  
Lawrence KS 66045

Dear Director Shaw:

The Department of Journalism and Communication at the University of Alaska Anchorage would like to respond briefly to the findings of the ACEJMC Revisit Team Report issued to us in November 2015.

The department would like to emphasize that although it has raised the graduation rate in the Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Public Communications to the mid-20 percent range in the last two years, this measure tends to do a disservice to programs like ours: small programs at comprehensive universities with diverse student populations. We urge ACEJMC to find measures of success for programs that actually capture the experiences students are having.

As I write this response, the State of Alaska is experiencing an unprecedented fiscal situation. Oil was trading at approximately \$26. Oil revenue makes up 90 percent of our state budget. The price of oil is well off the \$50 per barrel price that the governor assumed when he created a budget that included \$100 million in cuts to state government. Others think cuts of up to \$300 million are needed. Our final strategic plan will likely reflect the state of Alaska's finances and our ability to deliver quality instruction in journalism and mass communications at a time of great uncertainty. We are pushing back against the sentiment that outside accreditation is not needed, as it has forced us to examine what we do well and what we could be doing better.

We would like to thank the team of Dr. Tim Gleason, Professor Fearn-Banks and the ACEJMC staff for their professionalism and thoroughness throughout this process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Paola Banchemo'.

Paola Banchemo  
Associate professor and chair