

**2013-14
Revisit Team Report
for Accreditation in Journalism
and Mass Communications**

Name of Program: Department of Mass Communication

Name of Institution: Southern University and A&M College

Name of Administrator: Mahmoud Braima, chair

Date of Original Site Visit: January 22-25, 2012

Revisit Date: January 15-17, 2014

Revisit Team Chair: Trevor R. Brown, Professor Emeritus, School of Journalism,
Indiana University

Revisit Team Member: Jannette L. Dates, Dean Emerita, School of
Communications, Howard University

Revisit Team's Recommendation: Re-accreditation

Reorganization

In its January 2012 report, the site team noted:

In light of a \$10 million budget shortfall, financial exigency was approved by the Board of Regents in late 2011. The university is in the middle of a reorganization that is expected to be completed by Fall 2011, and the provost projected there would be some faculty/staff layoffs in the university announced in late February although none are expected in the unit.

Southern University reduced the number of colleges from nine to six and laid off a number of faculty members. In the process, the Department of Mass Communication experienced these changes from January 2012 to January 2014:

- In January 2012, the Department, chaired by Professor Mahmoud Braima, was in the College of Arts and Humanities.
- On June 12, 2013, the Office of the Chancellor informed Susanne Shaw, ACEJMC executive director, that as part of the reorganization of academic units across campus, the unit would become a program in the Department of Mass Communication, English, World Languages and History in the new College of Education, Arts and Humanities.
- On August 28, 2013, a week after the Louisiana Board of Regents approved the reorganization plan, VerJanis Peoples, executive vice-chancellor of academic affairs, informed Professor Shaw that Dr. Braima had been selected as interim chair of the new department and would also serve as leader of the Mass Communication Program. Professor Shaw informed the chancellor that Mass Communication's status as a program within the merged department might endanger its eligibility for accreditation. She told the chancellor she would rely on the revisit team to decide whether the Communication Program has "a clearly designated and articulated budget, faculty and administrative structure" and is eligible for re-accreditation.
- In late December 2013, Professor Braima told the revisit chair that the University had informed him that the former Department of Mass Communication would be re-established in January 2014 in the College of Education, Arts and Humanities and he would be chair. (A copy of the memorandum from the executive vice-chancellor of academic affairs informing the interim dean of the College of Education, Arts and Humanities of the decision of the Leadership Team at Southern for Mass Communication to become an independent department with a division head is attached.)

- By January 15, 2014, when the revisit team arrived, the University had re-established the Department of Mass Communication, with Dr. Braima as chair.

Problems and Deficiencies

The 2012 site team found Standards 4 and 5 out of compliance and expressed concern about faculty-student ratios in skills courses in its summary of the problems or deficiencies that must be corrected before the next evaluation. This concern arose in Standard 2, Curriculum and Instruction, which the site team judged to be in compliance. Because the team raised this issue as a faculty resource problem, this revisit report addresses it as part of the concerns about Standard 4.

Standard 4, Full-Time and Part-Time Faculty

In its summary, the site team required the Department to:

Address the lack of full-time faculty issue to meet growing undergraduate student population by fall 2012 semester.

In its report on the standard, the site team wrote:

Full-time faculty members have primary responsibility for teaching, but the unit has had to rely increasingly on the engineer (who holds an MA in Mass Communication from Southern) to help teach classes. He typically carries a 2/3 teaching load. In the past, the unit has used adjunct instructors sparingly, but the reality of a faculty of four has forced the unit to rely a bit more on adjuncts. Four part-time faculty were teaching five classes during the semester when the site team visited.

There are not enough bodies to teach all of the required courses every semester, and certainly not enough to teach both the required courses and a reasonable number of electives.

Departmental Action

Southern University's student population continued to decline from 6,915 in fall 2011 to a low of about 6,400 in fall 2012, a decrease that contributed to financial exigency. It rose to 6,817 in fall 2013 and, according to University administrators, was expected to increase to more than 7,000 in fall 2014. Throughout these fluctuations the number of pre-majors and majors in the Department of Mass Communication was constant, at about 250 a year (approximately 60 pre-majors and 190 majors). In 2010-11, the year before the

site visit, the Department graduated 43 students; in 2012-13, the year before the revisit, the Department graduated 52 students.

At the end of spring semester, 2012, a full-time faculty member retired, reducing the tenured and tenure-track faculty to two. The assistant professor/engineer continued to teach two to three courses a semester. The University authorized the hiring of a tenure-track faculty member and the Department hired an assistant professor in public relations in August 2013. At the time of the revisit, then, the full-time faculty was back to what it had been in January 2012: three-and-a-half full-time faculty members. The chair was teaching two courses a semester, the other two full-time faculty members were teaching four courses each, and the assistant professor/engineer was teaching two courses. The teaching load of the chair and of the full-time professors is standard across all departments of the University.

In August 2013, the Department submitted a request for an additional tenure-track position. In a meeting with the revisit team, the executive vice-chancellor of academic affairs gave the form authorizing the search to the chancellor, who signed it. (A copy is attached.) The Department expects to have four full-time tenured and tenure-track professors and the assistant professor/engineer in fall 2014.

To enable the Department to meet its instructional responsibilities, the University increased funding for adjuncts from an average of about \$25,000 annually to \$45,000 in 2013-14.

A more significant response to the site team's concern was the Department's decision to eliminate the master's program, which had enrolled 23 students in fall 2011. To enable the timely progress of undergraduate and graduate students to completion of their degrees, the Department had had to offer 25 courses and sections per semester, 17 for undergraduates, the rest for graduate students. The Department accepted no more graduate students after the end of spring semester, 2012. At the time of the revisit, only two students from the 23 remained. Because the Department no longer offers graduate courses, these two students were completing their coursework at other universities.

In spring semester 2014, the three-and-a-half full-time faculty members and four adjuncts were teaching 18 courses and sections to about 190 majors.

In its summary, the 2012 site team required the Department to:

Reconsider the human resource allocation considering faculty size regarding allowable guidelines per the university and ACEJMC standards, i.e. – faculty/student enrollment in skills and non-skills classes.

In its report on Standard 2, Curriculum and Instruction, the site team noted:

Many of the sections are well below the recommended ratio. Several sections, particularly in the master's program, enroll fewer than 10 students. With a faculty of only four full-time, the propensity toward small sections might warrant close scrutiny, particularly with so few theoretical courses to balance things out.

ACEJMC's recommended student-faculty ratio of 15-1 (revised in 2013-14) was a suggested maximum; ACEJMC does not prohibit enrollment lower than 15 in skills courses. The site team was more concerned, however, with faculty size than with pedagogy. The re-visit team believes termination of the master's program in spring 2012 addressed the main concern of the 2012 site team. While the Department still does not take full advantage of ACEJMC's allowable maximum of a 20-1 student-faculty ratio in all skills sections, lower class sizes respond to another site-team concern in its summary of weaknesses: *Heavy teaching loads for faculty*. Holding enrollment in labor-intensive skills sections to fewer than 20 students eases the teaching load of four courses a semester and may also free up time to address another site team concern, productivity in scholarship.

Summary

In spring 2014, Southern University was recovering from financial exigency by reorganizing colleges, merging departments and laying off and furloughing faculty and staff. For a brief period in 2013, Mass Communication was a program in a merged department; it regained its independent departmental status in January 2014. Nevertheless, its budget had been functionally intact throughout. In January 2014, the full-time faculty stood at three-and-a-half, as in January 2012. The Department intended to fill an additional tenure-track line by fall 2014. The most consequential response to ACEJMC's concerns was the termination of the graduate program in spring 2012 and the deployment of these teaching resources to an undergraduate program only.

COMPLIANCE

Standard 5, Scholarship: Research, Creative and Professional Activity

In its summary, the site team required the Department to:

Address the lack of full-time faculty who do refereed journal research or juried creative work and meet the university's vision before the fall 2012 semester.

In its report on the standard, the site team noted:

The research mission statement for the university states that "The University is committed to a broad program of research, both basic and applied, and creative work to stimulate the faculty and students in quest for knowledge and to aid society in resolving its scientific, technological, socioeconomic, and cultural problems." Likewise the university has the vision that its research efforts would result in an increased number of publications in refereed journals, greater and more significant opportunities for its graduate and undergraduate students to participate in scholarly activities and research with their professor, and building nationally reputable and competitive academic departments, colleges, schools, and centers.

However, no evidence exists of faculty members publishing in refereed journals since 2006. Three of the five faculty members included in the self-study had presented refereed research conferences papers and only one faculty member who is no longer at Southern has presented anywhere beyond BEA. No evidence exists of collaborating with other units that would build a national reputation for the unit or the university.

The site team noted the challenge for a university with a teaching-service mission, a department with a professional program, and a faculty with a 4-4 teaching load to meet the University's aspirations for more traditional, refereed research. Those aspirations may be particularly relevant for units with graduate programs, which was the case for the Department of Mass Communication when the site team visited.

In a meeting with the revisit team, the interim dean of the College of Education, Arts and Humanities, to whom the Department reports, and the president of the Faculty Senate confirmed that, as the University's faculty handbook and the Department's "Retention, Tenure and Promotion" guide make clear, creative and professional activity is acceptable, especially for a mainly professional department with no graduate program.

Departmental Action

Because a tenure-track faculty member had retired at the end of spring semester, 2012, only two full-time, tenured professors were responsible for doing scholarship for most of the two years since the site visit. A third tenure-track professor was appointed only in August 2013. Their scholarly productivity is mainly in creative and professional work.

Dr. Braima presented an invited paper at the Eastern Africa Public Relations Association conference in Kampala, Uganda, in March 2013.

Dr. Braima founded *Alkhabar Newspaper*, a daily online publication for which he serves as publisher, executive editor, and editorial writer. He began building the Web site in June 2013, and launched the paper in August 2013. The home page covers Sudan and South Sudan; the African pages cover all five regions of Africa; other pages cover the Middle East, International News, Business and Sports (mainly in Africa). *Alkhabar* subscribes to Thomas Reuters, LLC, and uses its wire serves as a primary source. According to Google Analytics, *Alkhabar* receives 200 visitors a day from ten countries, mostly in Africa.

In recognition of his accomplishments, the University appointed Dr. Braima as the Cleo Fields Endowed Professor in Mass Communication in January 2014. He receives a salary supplement and \$5,000 for research.

Dr. Yolanda Campbell, who joined the faculty as a tenure-track assistant professor in August 2013, founded and owns Speak4MeNow, offering public relations consulting, promotional services and event planning. In spring 2013, Dr. Campbell and Darrell Roberson, the assistant professor/engineer, produced a public service video for the Center of Empowerment for Families and Youth, Inc. (COE) in Baton Rouge. In fall 2013, Dr. Campbell created the script for another video for CEO. Both videos are featured on YouTube.

Presented with this record In the meeting with the revisit team, the interim dean of the College of Education, Arts and Humanities said these activities meet the College's and the University's definition of scholarship. She judged the productivity of the Department's tenure-track faculty for the two-year period as acceptable.

Summary

Southern University aspires to but does not require traditional, refereed research. It considers professional and creative activity entirely appropriate scholarship for a professionally oriented department teaching only undergraduates. The interim dean of the College in which the Department of Mass Communication resides judged the scholarly productivity of the three tenure-track faculty between January 2012 and January 2014 to be acceptable.

COMPLIANCE

Overall Summary

Despite the ruckus caused by a temporary and quickly reversed reduction in status from a department to a program within a department merging four disciplines, the Department of Communication has continued to function for the past two years as it had for the previous six, with a full-time and part-time faculty,

student body and operating budget of essentially the same size in January 2014 as in January 2012. In fact, its adjunct budget was significantly increased and an additional tenure-track line is expected to be filled by fall 2014. The most consequential change for the more effective deployment of these resources was the elimination of the graduate program shortly after the site team left. Given the Departmental mission and teaching and service load, the professional and creative productivity of the three-person tenure-track faculty for the past two years is at least acceptable, worthy enough for one member to receive an endowed professorship.

Recommendation: Re-accreditation