

**A REPORT OF THE AMERICAN  
COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION**

**February 2014 Site Team Visit**

**West Texas A & M University**

**Reviewed Units:**

**Department of Communication**

In 2010, the American Communication Association, in compliance with its accreditation procedures, fully accredited the programs of the WTAMU Department of Communication for a period of 5 years -- following a one year period of conditional accreditation awarded in 2009.

In February 2014, the ACA sent an evaluation team to Canyon, Texas, with a purpose of reviewing the Department of Communication programs for possible re-accreditation. This team will make recommendations to the Board of Directors of the American Communication Association at its next meeting, and a full report will be provided to West Texas upon formal accreditation action by the ACA Board of Directors.

A Brief History

In the fall of 2007, shortly after becoming an independent department, the West Texas Communication program began the self-study process. The Department of Communication is one of five departments in the Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts. The department offers baccalaureate degrees in:

- Speech Communication (Renamed Communication Studies in 2010)
  - Corporate Communication,
  - Graduate School Preparation, and
  - Speech Performance. And,
- Mass Communication:
  - Advertising/Public Relations,
  - Print Media,
  - Broadcasting with emphasis areas in
    - Sports Broadcasting,
    - Electronic Media or
    - Film and Recording Industry.
- The Master's program offers areas of emphasis in:
  - Corporate Communication,

- Mass Communication, and
- Performance.

In 2009, ACA reviewed the program. In that report, WTAMU was found to be in compliance in Governance; Curriculum (partial); Library; Public Service; Faculty Evaluation, Tenure, and Promotion; Mentoring; Due Process; Student Organizations; and Student Advising -- but out of compliance in the remaining areas. The ACA awarded the program one year provisional accreditation, and planned to review the program again in 2010 to determine its final status.

In the follow up report in 2010, the program was found to still be in compliance in all of the above areas. Additionally, the following out of compliance (or partially in compliance) areas were found to be now in compliance: Curriculum; Instruction; Faculty (with serious long term concerns); Facilities and Equipment; Faculty Scholarship, Research, and Professional Activities; Alumni; Budget (with serious long term concerns). Consequently, the program was awarded full accreditation for a period of five years.

The following is the February 2014 reassessment of the WTAMU Department of Communication using the American Communication Association 2014 accreditation guidelines.

### **STANDARDS OF REVIEW**

**GOVERNANCE: The chief administrative officer of the Unit should provide the leadership to advance the cause of the Unit. Faculty control over basic educational policy is imperative. The chief administrative officer of the Unit must have the expressed confidence of both the faculty and the higher levels of administration in the institution. Students should be represented in governance within the policy and philosophy of the institution.**

#### **2014 Assessment**

As in the 2009 report; students, faculty (full and part time), administrators at all levels, and alumni report that Dr. Hanson provides excellent leadership via strong administrative and communication skills. She clearly provides leadership to advance the cause of the unit. This is evidenced in a number of ways including the continued success and growth of the program.

Full time faculty control the basic educational policy of the department, including class size, program structure, and course sequencing. Part time instructors (PTIs) also have the

ability to offer their input as well. Students are represented in governance of the institution in the typical fashion of programs such as WTAMU, including the SGA and a wide variety of department-sponsored student organizations. Governance continues to be seen as a positive area for WTAMU.

***2014 Review Recommendation: In Compliance***

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**CURRICULUM: Students should be well served by the Unit curriculum. A model curriculum should clearly reflect the social science dimensions of the field of communication. At a minimum, students should take coursework in mass communication history, research, theory, as well as law and ethics. No student should be graduated without coursework in presentational skills, both written and oral.**

**2014 Assessment**

The WT Department of Communication is in compliance with this standard. Continue the excellent Senior Portfolio process and the graduate student public presentation reinforces their confidence and the skills needed as a graduate. By adding the Introduction to Mass Comm class to the core solidifies the foundation of the course.

The name Corporate Communication may be a selling point but consider changing the name to Communication Studies to more accurately reflect course offerings, or, focus course offerings around Corporate Communication issues (i.e. Crisis Management, Advanced Writing, Managing Organizational Change, etc.)

***2014 Review Recommendation: In Compliance***

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**INSTRUCTION: Quality instruction is crucial to effective education and should be encouraged in every way possible. A regular program of teaching evaluation should be in place. Teaching loads in the Unit should be consistent with the institutional balance of emphasis on research and service. In the case of certificate programs in which instruction is focused upon individual areas such as public speaking, public relations, training and development, or interpersonal**

**communication, the curriculum should reflect both the theoretical grounding and the practical applications of the areas taught.**

### **2014 Assessment**

The department was found to have the requisite evaluations of instruction in place by students, peers, and chair. Additionally faculty submit a professional summary each year. Part time faculty teaching, especially those teaching the basic course, receive more than adequate observation and evaluation to insure quality instruction.

ACA Site Team members observed quality instruction in the class room, faculty members displayed a through understanding of material and student involvement in the process was excellent.

While the teaching load of faculty members is higher that is desirable given the need for research and service by faculty members, the teaching load is comparable to similar institutions in the region.

The curriculum provides the students with both a the theoretical and practical knowledge required for success in the field.

The site team recommends the addition of at least one full-time tenure track faculty member. Efforts should be continued to reduce faculty load when possible under university guidelines through additional release time given the heavy load faculty members assume in helping students in a wide number of activities.

### ***2014 Review Recommendation: Partial Compliance***

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**FACULTY: Faculty should be academically qualified for their responsibilities in the Unit. All full-time faculty should hold at least Master's degrees in a communication discipline. Part-time faculty should have not less than 18 graduate hours in a communication discipline. Full-time faculty must have primary responsibility for teaching, research, and service.**

### **2014 Assessment**

The Department of Communication includes 12 full-time faculty members, 2 administrative appointments, 12 part time instructors, and 1 graduate assistant. All full-time faculty hold a Master's degree in the communication discipline, seven hold a doctorate. All part-time

faculty have a Master's degree in communication or a related field. WTAMU prohibits graduate teaching assistants from being listed as instructors of record.

All faculty in the Department of Communication are academically qualified, both full time and PTIs. They all meet the educational requirements. Further, many of the faculty, both full-time and PTIs, maintain professional connections that help to keep them up to date on the latest industry standards. The full-time faculty have primary responsibility for teaching, research, and service -- although PTIs contribute significantly to teaching as they do at many institutions.

PTIs are supported by faculty in a variety of ways, but it is suggested that these be supplemented by additional avenues to share information and advice, such as a listserv or a special area of the WTAMU learning management system (LMS) where ideas and exercises could be shared. It is also recommended that the department work with the university to find ways to offer graduate students limited teaching opportunities so that they can gain this experience to better prepare them for their post-master's degree future.

#### ***2014 Review Recommendation: In Compliance***

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**FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT: The Unit must have equipment and facilities of sufficient quality and quantity to complete its mission. Faculty offices should have privacy, ample space, and in-office access to the internet and World Wide Web. Students must have access to the internet and WWW, and have sufficient technical support and available hours for access. Units with courses in technical or scientific areas of the field (e.g., media production, psycho-physiological measures, etc.) must support these curricula with adequate equipment, studios, and labs.**

#### **2014 Assessment**

The Sybil B. Harrington Fine Arts Complex, is one of the region's premiere educational and performance facilities, which is kept in prime condition thanks to an endowment. Faculty offices have the necessary technology, Internet access and are roomy enough to accommodate more than one student and private enough to counsel. The campus is small enough where most if not all the facilities are within walking distance including the 24 hour open access computer lab with over 100 stations for use by students.

The department has four speech labs with white boards, computers, TVs with recording capabilities. A forensics practice room that has a computer with internet access and a printer and a variety of resources in for the speech team to access and the room is equipped as a smart classroom. All classrooms in the building are smart classrooms, additionally; there are meeting rooms and a seminar room with smart classroom technology. The Communication Department's broadcasting facility includes (underwritten by AT&T) is the first high definition studio in the area. The Prairie Lab, now serves as a news room for the student newspaper. Cable access was added so that live feeds of news broadcasts can now be accessed through viewing the 3 wall mounted monitors. Additionally, there is a professional recording studio with a digital mixing console and Pro-Tools software. Students also have access to four audio editing suites, five video editing suites equipped with Avid Editing Software and a 6000 watt student operated radio station.

Technology rapidly changes and as such we recommend the department develop improved ways to get faculty computers replaced.

***2014 Review Recommendation: In Compliance***

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**LIBRARY: Library budget and holdings should be adequate to support the Unit's mission. Journal holdings should reflect the mainstream interests of the discipline as well as the specific expertise of the faculty of the Unit.**

**2014 Assessment**

The library holdings easily meet the criteria for accreditation. The physical library facility has sufficient holding both in books and journals for research. The online holdings are similar to other institutions and easily accessible by students either on campus.

While no actual library budget exists for the department practically any acquisitions desired by the department will be purchased by the library, as explained by the library staff.

The library staff provides excellent support for both faculty and students.

The ACA site team was pleased to learned that the library in moving forward with acquiring more online digital media resources such as movies and TV programs.

***2014 Review Recommendation: In Compliance***

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### **FACULTY SCHOLARSHIP, RESEARCH, AND PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES:**

**Communication educators have a responsibility that extends beyond the limits of the classroom. This obligation includes scholarship and professional activities. These activities should be institutionally supported through such resources as computer facilities, release time, travel support, direct or in-kind support of research costs, laboratory space, and mentoring.**

#### **2014 Assessment**

- all points met except travel support.
- Endowed Professorships are not meant to be utilized for travel.
- need one more line

Faculty members of the Department of Communication are active researchers and involved in a variety of professional activities. From 2010 to 2013 (the time the department's self-study was completed), the faculty had delivered 34 conference presentations and published 22 scholarly and professional works. A number of faculty also continue to work in professional arenas.

In most cases, these activities are institutionally support, primarily through resources and mentoring (when requested). Although building resources are regularly addressed through a maintenance budget, it is a bit more difficult for faculty to obtain computer upgrades for their offices. Teaching loads are reduced to allow for research. Although loads are somewhat high by the standards of research institutions, they are consistent with schools similar in size and focus to WTAMU.

One area that is woefully lacking, due in part to economic circumstances that may have been out of control of the university, is the travel budget. Faculty receive on average \$600 - \$800 per year for travel to conferences even though one conference can easily cost more than \$800. The administration has suggested that more endowed professorships would be sought. However, monies from endowed professorships are meant to be an award for excellent teaching, research, and service -- not to be used for expected travel. Some faculty have taken it upon themselves to do extra work outside the university to raise the money to go on trips that are a function of their career at WTAMU. Although this works, it is not a fair and equitable solution for those individuals. It will be a struggle in tight budget times, but the university must find ways to offer more significant support of faculty travel.

## **2014 Review Recommendation: Partial Compliance**

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**PUBLIC SERVICE:** The unit should be able to show evidence of service to the general public and the community. This service should take the form of pro bono faculty contributions to the community in their various fields of expertise.

### **2014 Assessment**

Faculty in both Mass Communication and Communication Studies make active contributions to the community. Giving back to the community is the rule more than the exception. Some but not all of the organizations the small staff support and give time and skills to are:

- Southwest Education Council in Journalism and Mass Communication Board
- Marketing/Promotions Panhandle Plains Historical Museum
- American Advertising Federation Chapter Advisor
- Society of Professional Journalists
- Texas Association of Journalism Educators
- Amarillo Area American Advertising Federation Member
- Public Relations Student Society Advisor
- Texas Academy of Performing Arts-Charter Board Member, Secretary
- LGBTQ Safe Zone Training
- Family Support Services
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- Panhandle Aids Support Organization
- Boy Scouts
- High Plains Food Bank
- Canyon Independent School District Foundation
- Girl Scouts
- Amarillo Independent School District
- Texas Speech Communication Association president
- TEJAS Storytelling Association's Board of Directors
- National Communication Association PR Interest Group officer
- Association of Educators of Journalism and Mass Communication-PR Division
- American Advertising Federation-Amarillo

Faculty members in the Department of Communication have received a number of awards for their service:



***2014 Review Recommendation: In Compliance***

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**ALUMNI: The Unit should track its graduates, utilizing their feedback in the assessment process.**

**2014 Assessment**

The department shows improvement from the previous visit in this area.

The site team observed an event in which present students were able to meet and talk with alumni who are active in the communication professions in the local area. Alumni are definitely involved with the program and are very supportive.

The area of alumni tracking is frequently handled more at the university level than the department level. Given the lack of resources departments have for engaging alumni this is an area of challenge for most departments. The efforts made by the Department of Communication at WTAMU in this area are to be commended.

***2014 Review Recommendation: In Compliance***

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**FACULTY EVALUATION, TENURE, AND PROMOTION: Detailed standards developed by the faculty should be published and readily available to the evaluation team. Faculty evaluations should occur at regular published intervals, but not less frequently than annually. Appeal processes should be in place.**

**2014 Assessment**

The site team reviewed the department, college, and university standards and find them clear and appropriate.

Faculty are evaluated at regular intervals, the retention and tenure process is clearly defined, and an appeals process is in place.

***2014 Review Recommendation: In Compliance***

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**MENTORING: The ACA strongly supports a program in which senior faculty serve as mentors for their junior colleagues. Faculty mentoring of students is also strongly encouraged, again particularly Peer mentoring of fellow undergraduates by senior majors in also encouraged.**

### **2014 Assessment**

The Department of Communication at West Texas A&M University engages in four primary levels of mentorship: faculty-to-faculty, faculty-to-student, student-to-student (professional), and student-to-student (classroom).

#### *Faculty-to-Faculty*

The Department of Communication takes a proactive approach when mentoring new faculty. Newer faculty members are paired with senior faculty members every year to conduct mutual course evaluations. This offers senior faculty members an opportunity to guide newer faculty, and the newer faculty members have the opportunity to observe senior faculty in a classroom setting. Senior faculty members routinely mentor newer faculty in an unofficial capacity, as well, during coffee shop conversations, conference travel and after work activities.

#### *Faculty-to-Student*

It is a primary responsibility of Communication Department faculty members to mentor students in both the classroom setting and during extracurricular activities. Classroom mentorship is achieved through the delivery of course content, in-class and out-of-class assignments, and evaluation. Mentorship through extracurricular activities is achieved primarily through advising. Examples of organizations that benefit from extracurricular advising include the department's student media outlets, service organizations and honor societies.

#### *Student-to-Student (Professional)*

Students studying within the Department of Communication have numerous opportunities to fill leadership roles among the department's student media outlets, service organizations and honor societies. Students who accept these obligations are encouraged, and expected, to mentor newer students within these organizations. The department benefits from this "students mentoring students" model because it allows for both stability and flexibility as students accept new leadership roles to replace graduating seniors.

### *Student-to-Student (Classroom)*

The Department of Communication occasionally selects a senior student to serve as a teaching assistant in a certain course. These students have shown outstanding leadership and are specifically assigned to mentor current course students. Under the supervision of the faculty member, these students lead course discussions, provide help in the classroom, and offer feedback on assignments.

The program offers many mentoring opportunities. Still, if time and resources permit, the site team offers a few additional mentoring suggestions. First, graduate students may benefit from occasional brown bag events (perhaps once or twice a semester) to address issues not as frequently discussed -- such as collaborative research, preparing work for conferences, and planning for Ph.D. application. Additionally, and in a similar vein, the department may wish to ask one of the senior PTIs if s/he might be willing to coordinate the PTIs and help to ensure that they mentor each other as well as stay connected to the department.

### ***2014 Review Recommendation: In Compliance***

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**DUE PROCESS: The Unit must have procedures in place for dealing with complaints and grievances of students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Such procedures may include, but are not limited to grade appeals committees, tenure and promotion committees, appeals of annual faculty evaluations, etc. Such procedures must comply with the principles of due process.**

### **2014 Assessment**

WTAMU has a thorough, fair, and just process more specifically The policy for handling student complaints is outlined in Appendix III of the Code of Student Life. Faculty grievances are governed by the policy in the Faculty Handbook (Section V, Part D). Faculty grievances may be handled by the Ombuds Officer whose role is to provide a confidential place for faculty and Professional Librarians to collaboratively explore complaints, clarify issues, and consider options. Staff grievances are brought to the Grievance Committee for Non Faculty, overseen by Vice President of Business and Finance, consisting of both classified and non-classified staff members. check Trudy's self study

**2014 Review Recommendation: In Compliance**

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**STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS: Units are encouraged to promote student organizations in the various interest areas reflected by the unit.**

**2014 Assessment**

The Department of Communication offers a variety of student organizations. They actively promote student participation in professional organizations and university operated organizations to gain hands-on experience and create projects students can use in their portfolio and resume. Some of the organizations and highlights are:

Ad/PR Society

- Amarillo Addy Awards
- Houston Student Advertising Competition
- High Plains Food Bank annual canned food drive
- PASO (Panhandle AIDS Support Organization)

American Advertising Federation, College Chapter

- Scholarships
- Internship opportunities
- Career guides
- Industry mentors
- Networking with top agency and corporate recruiters

Public Relations Student Society of America

Alpha Delta Sigma - The honor society within the American Advertising

Eternal Flame – The university year-in-review publication

Forensics Team

KWTS – The non-commercial college radio station

Lambda Pi Eta

Live Crew - University's live sports broadcasting

National Broadcasting Society

NewsOne - live, weekly newscast that broadcasts from the fully digital studio

One Sessions Crew - A student produced music show. Earned a Bronze Telly award from nearly

11,000 entries from all 50 states and numerous countries.

Panhandle Storytelling Guild

The Prairie - Student-run newspaper

Society of Professional Journalists

WTTV - The campus' closed circuit television channel at WTAMU.

**2014 Review Recommendation: In Compliance**

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**BUDGET: The Unit's budget should be sufficient to meet its mission, including support for student financial assistance, faculty research and travel, office and lab space, technical and secretarial support, and other such services. If unit needs are supplemented by budgets external to the Unit, these must be available and document how resources will be allocated to meet Unit needs.**

### **2014 Assessment**

While few academic departments receive all the funding needed to do the best job possible, the department receives adequate support to provide a quality education to students. As stated in the previous report the budget process lacks transparency, while more transparency would make the process less cumbersome the department chair has done an excellent job of running the department given the current system

The site team is impressed with funding for student organizations.

Equipment and facilities funding is more completely examined in another section but the department at WTAMU is well ahead of many similar institutions in providing a quality learning environment to the students. Problems noted in the earlier report as to maintenance of equipment have been some some degree resolved. The replacement schedule for computers is still an area of concern.

Funding for faculty travel does not seem to have increased since the previous report and is now more of a concern with the increase in funding required to attend conferences. The site team applauds the efforts of the department in being creative in finding ways to increase faculty travel funding but for faculty to be appropriately involved in the field and to share their many accomplish more travel funding is needed.

***2014 Review Recommendation: Partial Compliance***

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**STUDENT ADVISING: Quality of student advising is extremely important and should receive appropriate weight in the Unit's mission. A documented process for advising should be available and consistently followed.**

### **2014 Assessment**

With a goal of each faculty member having no more than 30 advisees, students are assigned to a full-time faculty member based on the student's program of instruction. All graduate students are advised by the director of the graduate program.

WTAMU has a "greenlighting" program policy in place. Students are not able to register for classes until a hold has been lifted by their advisor. This ensures that students have been directly advised at least once before they register.

Additionally, students are advised both formally and informally in a variety of ways, with redundancy to ensure that fewer students make registration mistakes that might slow down their progress in the program.

The Annual Review of Faculty Performance includes a section under Intellectual Contributions which includes student advising, as highlighted in the following excerpt. All faculty are evaluated according to this criterion.

### ***2014 Review Recommendation: In Compliance***

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### **SUMMARY**

Since 2010, the WTAMU Department of Communication has made significant progress in a number of areas, while losing a bit of ground in others. Much of the latter situation appears to be due to the global economic slowdown which has affected higher education worldwide. Despite that, it is still important that the university do its utmost to attempt to support the program with appropriate levels of staffing and funding.

In 2014, the Department of Communication at WTAMU was found to be in compliance on 12/15 ACA accreditation criteria: Governance; Curriculum; Faculty; Facilities and Equipment; Library; Public Service; Alumni; Faculty Evaluation, Tenure, and Promotion; Mentoring; Due Process; Student Organizations; and Student Advising.

Additionally, the program was found to be in partial compliance with three ACA accreditation criteria in the following areas: Instruction; Faculty Scholarship, Research, and Professional Activities; Budget.

The program was not found to be out of compliance on any of the 15 ACA accreditation criteria.

### **OVERALL RECOMMENDATION: FULL ACCREDITATION**

The site team will recommend to the ACA board of directors that it vote to reaffirm full accreditation of the WTAMU Department of Communication. The board meeting will occur in March of 2014 and the accreditation status, if conferred by the board, would be effective immediately and for a period of 5 years.