

## **UCC Program Review Committee Summary of Review**

**Program:** Communication Studies

**Date of last review:** AY 2014-2015

**Date of this review:** AY 2021-2022

The program offers the following degrees, minors, and certificates:

- Ph.D. in Communication Studies
- M.A. in Organizational Communication (online)
- Graduate Certificate in Communication and Change (online)
- Graduate Certificate in Team Leadership and Communication (online)
- B.S. in Communication
- Minor in Communication Studies
- Undergraduate Certificate in Political Communication

**Recommendation:** This program is found to be viable.

See report for commendations, concerns, and recommendations.

The report was forwarded to the school's director and the college dean. Their responses are attached.

The Graduate Council's comments are included as well.

**Ohio University Curriculum Committee  
Academic Program Review**

School of Communication Studies

Sarah J. Tracy, External Reviewer, Interim Director and Professor, The Hugh Downs School of  
Human Communication, Arizona State University

Nukhet A. Sandal, Associate Professor, Department Chair, Department of Political Science

Kristine Ensign, Assistant Professor of Instruction, School of Applied Health Sciences &  
Wellness

October 14-15, 2021

The School of Communication Studies underwent a 7-year program review on October 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021. The Academic Program Review committee was comprised of one external reviewer, Sarah J. Tracy (Interim Director and Professor, Hugh Downs School of Human Communication, Arizona State University) and two internal reviewers, Nukhet A. Sandal (Department of Political Science) and Kristine Ensign (School of Applied Health Sciences & Wellness).

This report is divided into seven sections, organized per the guidelines of the Ohio University Academic Program Review Committee.

**Overview**

The School of Communication Studies (COMS) offers a liberal arts education emphasizing scientific, artistic, and humanistic aspects of communications. It offers a single undergraduate degree (B.S.) with emphases in 1) organizational communication, 2) health communication, and 3) communication and social advocacy, and a minor in communication studies. It also contributes to the Communication degree offered online by the E-Campus. COMS offers three different doctoral degree programs with foci in 1) health communication, 2) interpersonal/organizational communication, and 3) rhetoric and culture. The school also offers a fully online MA in organizational communication through Regional Higher Education and is in process of launching two graduate certificates: 1) Team Leadership and 2) Communication and Change. COMS faculty also significantly contribute to the Barbara Gerald's Institute for Storytelling and Social Impact.

Bachelor of Science student enrollment ranged from a low of 586 majors in Fall 2014 to a high of 628 majors prior to Fall 2019. The number of degrees has remained steady with an average per year of 594. An average of 238 students earn a B.S. each year. The number of degrees granted at the RHE campuses is an average of 63 degrees per year. The number of minors completed is an average of 97 a year. Master of Science student enrollment averages 43 majors per year. An average of 18 students earn an M.A. every year. The Doctoral program averages 43 students per year. An average of 9 students earn a Ph.D. every year.

Overall, COMS has 25 faculty; five are probationary tenure-track, seven are located on one of the five regional campuses, and two are instructional faculty. The current number of faculty is low to fully carry out the needs of the department. The department is facing increased demand from students in multiple areas including health communication and organizational communication, which cannot be properly met by the current number of faculty members. Since the last review in 2014, the number of tenure and tenure-track faculty has decreased by 30%.

Tenure and tenure-track faculty on the Athens campus typically teach a 2/2 load, devoting approximately 40% of their time to scholarship and creative activity, 40% to teaching, and 20% to service. RHE faculty typically teach a 4/4 load with about 80% of their time devoted to teaching, 10% to research and 10% to service.

The department's level of research and creative activity is strong for the program, especially given the size of the faculty and the resources available to the department. During the review period, the faculty created over 350 scholarly projects, which include a mix of journal articles, book chapters, textbooks, scholarly books, performances, and films. They regularly publish in the strongest high impact communication journals, are leaders in the communication field in terms of editorships and book authorships and are award winning scholars in cutting edge areas of the communication discipline including critical-cultural studies and arts-based approaches to health communication. The faculty regularly include and collaborate with graduate and undergraduate students in their research. Although not required nor expected in this program, some faculty secure external research funding--something that could be pursued more extensively (if desired by the unit) with more interdisciplinary collaborations and team-based research.

The breadth and depth of the school's undergraduate and graduate teaching and advising is remarkable given the decreasing number of faculty and staff. In addition to teaching a 2/2 load, tenured faculty advise an average of 15 undergraduate students in addition to PhD mentorship. In addition to advising, the RHE and instructional faculty typically teach 8 courses a year, which sometimes requires 8 different preps. Athens campus service expectations create an unsustainable level of stress on RHE faculty, given their already high teaching load and the service requirements of their home campus.

COMS faculty and staff engage in substantial service to the university, profession, and community. They hold significant and prestigious professional leadership positions and edit disciplinary journals. They contribute to college service by advising several undergraduate student organizations, leading the University's award-winning forensics program, and offering various workshops and collaborating on events. They offer substantial university service by holding critical positions, including those in the University Senate and on the Institutional Review Board. Further, they regularly offer their expertise in public service related to technology transfer, culture, and the local community.

The department has appropriate library resources and most of the technology needed to fulfill its mission. The school has access to a range of technology options but various extras like SPSS add-ons seem to be missing and require individual payment. Classrooms in Schoonover and Radio & TV are equipped with newer technology allowing for adaptive teaching modalities. Students and

faculty generally have access to quantitative and qualitative data processing software, but some graduate students have reported trouble easily accessing software like NVivo.

COMS has insufficient financial resources and staff for its mission. Administrative support in the Scripps College of Communication has decreased since 2020 because of budget reductions. This has resulted in their downsizing to just three administrative support staff to serve five schools within the College. Travel funding is low compared to peer institutions, limiting presence at research conferences. Options for summer teaching have been mostly eliminated which hinders recruitment and retention, especially of junior faculty and graduate students, and especially in the absence of robust salary raises and competitive stipends.

Multiple stakeholders indicated that they appreciated the new facilities of Schoonover Center but missed the camaraderie of common spaces available in their previous building. COMS has one large and updated classroom space (SCH 450) that allows for efficient use of technology through multiple projector screens and TVs on the walls. The rest of the teaching spaces are shared amongst programs in the Scripps College of Communication. This allows for collaborative classroom activities. There is also the Communication Resource Center (CRC) staffed by a graduate assistantship to coach and assess undergraduate students in communication courses. There is a computer lab dedicated to COMS students (graduate and undergraduate) in which students can access some software (such as SPSS) and printing. There is a COMS research lab and control room that has traditionally been used for focus group-based studies and is equipped with microphones, cameras, and sound proofing panels. The research lab and control room are being eliminated and given to the Gaming Program. There are currently discussions about how the technology (which includes special software to analyze focus group results) will remain available to faculty for future research projects. There is no other dedicated research space for COMS faculty and students. There is some concern that loss of dedicated research space may affect future faculty recruitment. There are graduate student offices available for students but several of the graduate student offices are significantly disconnected and in another building from the faculty. Some graduate student offices are in the main faculty office area. Throughout the building of Schoonover, there are ample places for students to sit, hang out, and study.

Finally, and maybe most importantly, our meetings and private communications (as committee members, we made ourselves available for individual calls and emails, which many faculty members took us up on) revealed a continuing and serious faculty climate problem. We noticed these tensions and concerns were also part of the previous evaluation, but the concerned faculty (who come from all ranks and classifications) noted the current school leadership has not helped the situation. The faculty reported concerns about school leadership, including dismissiveness, disrespect, censorship, sharing incorrect information and lack of advocacy, which impact faculty performance, evaluation, and retention. We will turn to these concerns in our final section.

## **2. Undergraduate Program:**

**a. Is the unit fulfilling its service role, adequately preparing nonmajors for future coursework and/or satisfying the needs for general education?**

COMS is meeting its service role to the university by providing numerous general education courses. To count a few, COMS 1100-Communication Among Cultures is an intercultural explorations foundation course, COMS 1030-Fundamentals of Public Speaking is a Bridge course that meets speaking & listening, ethics & reasoning, and diversity & practice requirements, COMS 4800-Capstone Seminar in Communication meets the capstone requirement, and COMS 3920-Practicum in Communication Education and COMS 4920-Practicum in Communication Studies meet the learning and doing requirement. The COMS 1030 course has 25 sections offered a year with enrollment of 25 students. Several sections of COMS 1030 are offered online. COMS 1100 is becoming a more popular course to enroll in. COMS also offers a Communication Studies minor and Political Communication certificate programs. COMS collaborates with the Ohio Program of Intensive English (OPIE) to offer COMS classes to students from Chubu University in Japan.

COMS also supports the Forensics team (The Speaking Bobcats of Ohio) that has a 211-year history at OHIO. The John A. Cassese Director of Forensics, Jennifer Talbert, does a commendable job supporting the 25 students (which include COMS majors and non-majors) through private coaching sessions and travel to competitions. The Forensics program currently relies on the Director and two PhD graduate assistants to coach the students. However, when there are no graduate assistants, the workload falls completely on the Director. The addition of an instructional faculty member could help stabilize the Director's time commitment to the program and the student experience. The Forensics program has dedicated space which provides undergraduate students a place of community and one of the few communal student spaces in COMS.

**b. Is the program attracting majors likely to succeed in the program? Is the number of majors appropriate for the program? Is the program attracting a diverse group of students?**

The undergraduate program has a six-year degree completion rate of 74.7% at the Athens campus and 65.1% at the regional campuses. COMS relies on general university recruiters for recruiting first year students to the program. A large proportion of students learn about COMS after they have arrived on campus (including regional campuses). COMS has a more rigorous program for students at OHIO who change their major to COMS. Current OHIO students must be in good standing with the University and write a 300-word essay. The essay is evaluated to make sure the student understands what COMS is and if it will match the career goals. Because of this application process, the six-year graduation rate for students changing their major to COMS is 89%. COMS also has the Lambda Pi Eta Honor Society (LPH) for students who are academically high achieving and provides an academic outlet for communication research through regional and national conventions.

The number of majors is appropriate for the program; however, enrollment has been declining since 2019. The number of students selecting the minor has also been decreasing. These declines can be attributed to the pandemic. Bachelor of Science student enrollment ranged from a low of 586 majors in Fall 2014 to a high of 628 majors prior to Fall 2019. The number of degrees has remained steady with an average per year of 238 students earning a B.S. each year. The number of degrees granted at the RHE campuses is an average of 63 degrees per year. The number of minors completed is an average of 97 a year.

The undergraduate program is majority white (82.79%) and women (63.93%). Racially, the program has not changed in the past seven years with about 5% of the students identifying as Black or African American and 3% of the students identifying as Hispanic or Latino. However, the proportion of men in the program has steadily increased in the past seven years from 29.67% in 2013 to 36.07% in 2020. The unit would benefit from a more targeted effort to recruit diverse students including students from the Southeast Ohio region to provide representation from students who come from a lower socioeconomic status background.

**c. Does the undergraduate curriculum provide majors with an adequate background to pursue discipline-related careers or graduate work following graduation?**

The undergraduate curriculum can be customized, offering students the ability to engage in multiple opportunities including certificates, teaching experience, and research experience. The major consists of five components: core, theory, research methods, communication electives, and a related area. The curriculum provides an opportunity for students to complete coursework that is career specific, such as a certificate in coaching, sales, social media among others. The program equips students with competencies desired by employers including strong oral and written communication, effective interpersonal and group communication skills, critical thinking, meeting planning, and problem-solving/decision-making.

Students are assisted with career exploration by inviting alumni back for “Bobcat to Bobcat” alumni panels and connecting students with the Career Achievement Network. Students indicated interest in meeting with “just recently graduated” alumni. Few students continue directly onto graduate work after completion of the curriculum. While some undergraduate students have been participating in research and earning authorship on manuscripts (even without being part of an honors program), more research opportunities through an official honors program may introduce a larger number of students to research careers in communication studies.

Students are also encouraged to pursue internships, even though it is not currently required for the degree. An internship coordinator helps to match students with internship opportunities. Some students elect to take academic credit for their internship. On average, 26 students complete an internship for academic credit each year. However, this number has been declining since 2017-2018. The unit may benefit from tracking how many students are completing internships without academic credit to identify if there is a correlation in the drop. The data could also be used to market opportunities students gain because of the program, as internships are a way for students to secure employment upon graduation. Tracking this data with graduating students could also be beneficial for the program.

A growing area of interest and demand is health communication; however, the curriculum does not have enough course offerings in this content area because of the low number of faculty with this specific expertise. Focusing on growing health communication offerings, increasing enrollment in these classes, and partnering with other programs on campus could provide students opportunities to be prepared for health communication careers.

COMS students may benefit from more direct career counseling from faculty and student success advisors. Currently, students are resorting to sources outside of COMS to identify their career

opportunities. While students are not sure of specific career pathways after graduation, they report feeling prepared to enter discipline-related careers and that the curriculum gives them the opportunity to pursue a variety of careers. They said they appreciated skills-based courses like event planning.

Students would benefit from Student Success Advisors who are trained in COMS in order to help students navigate career opportunities. Faculty may also benefit from professional development workshops that help them work as an advising team with the Student Success Advisors to better support students.

**d. Are the resources and the number of and distribution of faculty sufficient to support the undergraduate program?**

COMS has 25 faculty including seven who are located on one of the five regional campuses. The current number and distribution of faculty is insufficient to meet the needs of the curriculum. The department is facing increased demand from students in areas such as health communication and organizational communication, which cannot be met by the current number of faculty members in these areas. Since the last review in 2014, the number of tenure and tenure-track faculty has experienced a decrease of 30%. The department could benefit from more instructional faculty to help meet the content area demands of students. The faculty on RHE campuses have higher teaching loads which helps meet the course needs of students on RHE campuses to complete a high-quality degree.

**e. Are pedagogical practices appropriate? Are program learning outcomes adequately assessed?**

Similar to most communication programs, the instructors use a mix of pedagogical practices including written assignments, tests, lectures, group activities, and game-based learning strategies (e.g., Kahoot, which seems to be popular with students). Semester projects usually take the form of written papers but also include videos, group projects, and creating pamphlets that are immediately applicable to end users (e.g., a “patient advocacy pamphlet”).

An assessment of the program learning outcomes is conducted by an assessment committee which was formed shortly after the previous program review. The assessment committee reviews sample oral work, papers (COMS 3400, 3500, and 3600), and a capstone project in COMS 4800 (20% of graduating seniors (COMS 4800) and 20% of juniors (JE courses)). The assessment plan presented provides 6 aspirational goals with the ten program learning outcomes generally embedded. The assignments are scored by the assessment committee (separate from the grade the student receives on the assignment in the course) on a scale that consists of 4 = mastery, 3 = advanced milestone, 2 = mid-level milestone, 1 = benchmark, 0 = below benchmark in the areas of 1) context & purpose of writing, 2) content development, 3) genre & disciplinary conventions, 4) sources & evidence, and 5) control of syntax & mechanics. The unit reports that benchmark goals are consistently met. The assessment plan may benefit from a review to aid in continuous program improvement and may be more responsive and adaptive to program learning outcomes.

### **3. Graduate Program:**

The school offers a fully online MA in Organizational Communication, and one of the oldest and largest doctoral programs at Ohio University with concentrations in Health Communication, Interpersonal/Organizational Communication, and Rhetoric and Culture. Two online graduate certificates (in Team Leadership and Communication and Change) are being launched.

All tenured and tenure-track faculty located in Athens are actively involved in teaching and mentoring Ph.D. students. The online MA program has 40 students and has only recently launched an assessment plan.

**a. Is the program attracting students likely to succeed in the program? Is the number of students appropriate for the program? Is the program attracting a diverse group of students?**

Yes, the program is attracting students likely to succeed in the program. The PhD program has a robust international student body. There are recruitment efforts to increase the diversity among the domestic student body; the school sends information to HBCU and other relevant institutions. Over the last three years, they have also developed webinars to inform prospective students about the program.

**b. Does the graduate curriculum provide an adequate background to pursue discipline-related careers following graduation?**

For the MA program, most students are seeking advancement in their current positions rather than a new position. Recently, the number of electives has been increased which will give the MA students more options.

PhD students are overall satisfied with the program but would like to see their relevant seminars more frequently offered. They are concerned that they are not able to take classes that are specific to their tracks. The requirement of a portfolio ensures that the students will be ready for future projects and theses, but the students report the need for a more flexible schedule and information/guidance starting early on, related to this portfolio. They would prefer that it is not scheduled to be completed in their third year during the time they are also working on their prospectus and comprehensive exams.

**c. Does the program provide adequate mentoring and advising to students to prepare them for discipline-related careers?**

We found the program having adequate mentoring and advising for students to prepare them for future careers.

For the PhD program, alumni spotlight panels feature recent PhDs. There are professional development seminars, including pedagogy workshops and panels with guests from the field (such as journal editors). Graduate students are periodically asked about their professional needs and



what they would like to see in terms of initiatives and workshops. The faculty members indicated a long-term goal of keeping records of alumni placement.

The MA program does not have dedicated professional development seminars, but professional development is integrated into applied classes/seminars.

**d. Are the resources and the number of and distribution of faculty sufficient to support the graduate program?**

The resources and the number of and distribution of faculty is currently sufficient to support the graduate programs. The faculty members were unanimous in their excitement about teaching graduate students and how critical the graduate programs are to the school. The graduate students, similarly, are appreciative of working with COMS faculty most of whom have distinguished academic records.

Having said that, not being able to replace faculty is having negative effects on mentoring and graduate course offerings. PhD students especially report not being able to take required and/or relevant seminars in a timely fashion. This is especially a concern for the areas of health and organizational communication.

Online MA has introduced more electives for students. Some RHE faculty indicated that they would like to teach in this program but have yet been unable to do so.

**e. Does the program offer appropriate financial support to graduate students?**

Yes, the program offers adequate financial support to graduate (PhD) students. COMS has 40 graduate teaching assistantships, and all full-time PhD students have a full assistantship for a maximum of four years. An assistantship includes a full tuition waiver and a stipend of \$16,221 as of Fall 2021. This was recently increased after graduate student pressure to do so. The cost of health insurance is higher than at competitive programs; the health insurance is currently coming out of the stipend, and this cost hinders recruitment. Each graduate student gets \$500 a year for travel; college grants are also available via application. This amount of travel funding is lower than typical for peer doctoral programs across the nation and likely inhibits the ability for students to have a robust conference presence.

**f. Are program learning outcomes adequately assessed?**

Comprehensive exams are preferred by students over capstones and theses in the MA program, which challenges meaningful assessment. A formal assessment plan for the MA program was created in spring of 2021. The plan provided involves utilizing an e-portfolio which is housed in COMS 6960 for four of the six program learning outcomes. Student work is assessed by the course instructor (separate from the course grading) on a three-point scale of 1-does not meet expectations, 2-meets expectations, and 3-exceeds expectations. Assignments in COMS 6100 and COMS 7220 are used to assess the final two program learning outcomes.

The assessment plan for the doctoral program appears to be a mixture of a milestone plan and an assessment plan. The program may benefit from separating out the milestones from a formal assessment plan of program learning outcomes. This will provide the program two types of data points, 1) are students attaining program milestones on a timely manner (i.e., passing comprehensive exams, dissertation defense, dissertation completion, etc.) and 2) are students meeting program learning outcomes through the completion of specific activities (i.e., teaching experiences, scholarly community participation, minimum grade in specific course expectations). Typically, a benchmark is set for each program learning outcome and the program reports if the metric is met or not. The program may benefit from evaluating what a meaningful benchmark is and if the benchmarks are consistently being met a different benchmark or method of assessment should be used to help with continual program improvement. According to the most recent assessment report, the assessment committee is thinking about ways in which they can make assessment of the program more robust which is commendable.

#### **g. Are students able to move into discipline-related careers?**

The overall answer is yes, but there is no systematic data that shows placement records. The faculty and relevant directors indicated data collection as a goal. MA students mostly advance in their own positions/careers. PhD students are offered numerous professional/career-related workshops.

#### **4. Areas of concern.**

The committee has identified the following areas of concern:

- Several faculty members are concerned there are cliques in the school that impede an inclusive environment both for faculty and students, and they report censorship and low tolerance for criticism. Overall, the climate in the school continues to be a significant concern, independent of the adverse conditions (lack of merit raises, increases in expectations, and layoffs) that Ohio University overall has recently experienced. The committee members are concerned that these dynamics will have an impact on retention and diversity, both in terms of faculty and students.
- Many faculty members (including tenure track, RHE, and instructional faculty members) expressed concern about the school leadership. In multiple meetings and private communications, we heard the school leadership does not advocate for the needs of the faculty, and at times, even shares outdated and incorrect information, and takes credit for others' efforts at addressing issues within the unit. Significant communication issues will need to be addressed.
- There are concerns that family relations within the Department/College might be interfering with objective evaluations and processes.
- Probationary faculty and RHE faculty are concerned about the lack of clarity regarding annual review requirements, policies, and procedures. RHE faculty recognize the challenges One Ohio poses to all stakeholders. Independent of the overall difficulties posed by One Ohio, they are concerned that their job description, regional campus commitments, and workload are ignored by the school leadership, and that they face unrealistic expectations. Faculty also conveyed that school leadership lacks respect in communications and dismisses critical concerns.

- Instructional faculty report an unclear contract that seems fluid. This results in inconsistent expectations year to year. Additionally, the annual report the instructional faculty are required to fill out each year does not have a designation for instructional faculty resulting in role confusion and their inability to best convey their labor.
- Retention issues with faculty has resulted in a loss of community and has resulted in a decrease in faculty morale.
- DEI concerns were raised in multiple meetings--concerns that negatively impact the retention of diverse faculty and students. There is a perception that some faculty members dismiss DEI concerns as tangential or irrelevant, and do not participate in relevant conversations and initiatives in a meaningful way. Other faculty are concerned that their earnest focus on DEI is ignored or ridiculed.
- Due to the decrease in the admitted doctoral students and increase in the number of minimum students required for offering seminars, there are concerns about the ability to offer the required seminars. PhD students are already concerned that they do not have enough courses in their specific areas.

## **5. Recommendations.**

The committee recommends the following:

- (For the school leadership) Take concrete steps towards restoring trust and improving relations with all members of faculty; recognize the seriousness of the existing tensions; encourage open communication, accept criticism, and ensure respect and accuracy in written and verbal communications.
- Take systematic and visible steps to avoid situations that create real and/or perceived conflicts of interest that arise due to family relations within the Department/College.
- Recognize the importance of diversity and participate in relevant pedagogical and recruitment initiatives/workshops. DEI is a concern for almost every unit at the university (including for COMS, as noted in the self-study). We recommend that the school continues to focus on this as a priority and that faculty engage with one another in a way that can move DEI efforts from awareness to action.
- Consider removing formalized tracks from the doctoral program to provide students with more choice and “crossover” in their courses while still maintaining the goal to admit a mix of students across discipline areas each year. Doing this may encourage the development of more cross-area doctoral courses, more ability for students to take courses that appeal to them that formerly would be “outside of their area” and for the school’s focal areas to slowly adapt as specific communication foci wane and morph within the discipline. Such restructuring may still necessitate representation of faculty from each “track” in recruitment processes to ensure a diverse student body in terms of interests.

- Consider changing the “portfolio” aspect of doctoral student requirements to the spring of year two rather than fall of year three when students are busy with comprehensive exams and prospectus.
- Consider scaling up the fee-based master’s program as a method for bringing the school more revenue and hiring additional instructors.
- Consider revising the P&T document in a way that it would not disadvantage scholars who publish books. The committee has been told that the document is currently oriented towards “products” and there is no meaningful way to distinguish between a book and a forum article. This policy has significant negative implications for scholars who work on book projects.
- Develop instructional faculty contracts with clearly stated job descriptions and expectations. This will allow instructional faculty to experience consistent workloads every year and to be consistently evaluated annually.
- Update the annual report form filled out by faculty to take into account faculty who have different loads and responsibilities from Athens campus tenure-track faculty (i.e., instructional and RHE faculty).
- Create awareness about RHE faculty workloads and the logistical difficulties they are facing; balance expectations in line with their regional campus workloads, service, and teaching, which cannot be modified based on the desires and expectations of the Athens campus schools and units.
- Continue to refine and strengthen the assessment plans used for each program in order to be able to identify areas of continuous program improvement.
- Explore possibilities of hiring faculty member(s) whose addition can be justified by contributions to various programs campus wide. Health communication has been identified by various faculty members as a possible area of hire.
- Track internship and placement data in a way that is meaningful for program outcomes and program promotion.

## **6. Commendations.**

The committee commends the school for the following:

- Ohio University COMS is a widely respected school in the field with impressive research output by its faculty members.
- The pedagogical training of doctoral students is comprehensive and clearly prepares students for their future teaching aspirations.

- The faculty are all enthusiastic about their research, teaching and mentoring, and there is considerable level of care toward students and service.
- Diversity initiatives, such as the IDEAS committee and inclusive pedagogy program, are excellent initiatives directly related to the university and the school mission.
- The range of programs offered is impressive, especially the undergraduate degree programs at RHE utilizing multiple teaching modalities allowing RHE students to learn from RHE faculty and earning a degree of equal quality to the Athens Campus.
- Encouragement for interdisciplinarity emerges at all levels, but especially at the undergraduate level, despite the budget models at the university which limited such endeavors in the past.
- The community that exists among the doctoral students is clear, as is the graduate students' enthusiasm for their program and improving policies and dynamics.
- In terms of community, RHE faculty members convey appreciation for their Athens campus colleagues for having included them in the decision-making mechanisms early on and recognizing the difficulties they face during the One Ohio process. Athens Campus faculty have indeed shared their concerns regarding the heavy workloads of their regional campus faculty colleagues in multiple meetings.
- Probationary faculty expressed appreciation for the guidance and understanding of their senior colleagues in navigating research, service, and teaching expectations.

### **7. Overall judgment: Is the program viable as a whole?**

The review committee found the undergraduate and graduate programs in the School of Communications Sciences to be viable.



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To: Barbel Such, Chair UCC Program Review Committee  
From: Ann Bainbridge Frymier, Director  
Date: November 23, 2021  
Re: School of Communication Studies Response to Academic Program Review Team Report

I am writing this memo as my official response to the report relating to the program review for the School of Communication Studies that I received on November 9, 2021. I have reviewed the report prepared by Professors Nukhet A. Sandal, Kristin Ensign, and external reviewer Sarah J. Tracy from Arizona State University. I wish to thank the reviewers for their time and effort in conducting this review and for their flexibility in conducting the review via Teams. I agree with the overall judgment that all program supported by the School of Communication Studies are **viable**. The School of Communication Studies appreciates the commendations mentioned on pages 11 and 12 of the report. The School will work with Dean Scott Titsworth on the recommendation on pages 10 and 11. My response is divided into three major sections: corrections, clarifications and concerns about statements made in the report, and responses to the recommendations made by the reviewers. I have discussed this report with Dean Titsworth who will provide his own response.

### **Corrections**

#### **Overview on pages 1-3:**

1. COMS offers a PhD in Communication Studies with three concentrations (not three different doctoral degree programs).
2. The online MA in Organizational Communication is an Athens based program (not an RHE program) with courses that are frequently and historically taught by RHE faculty (historically on overload contracts), but courses are also taught by Athens faculty.
3. The School of Communication Studies does not offer a Master of Science. I believe the reviewers were referencing the MA in Organizational Communication.

4. The doctoral program does not have an average of 43 students per year. The number ranges from about 35-40 student enrolled at any given time.
5. On p. 3 the reviewers state, "COMS has one large and updated classroom space (SCH 450) that allows for efficient use of technology through multiple projector screens and TVs on the walls." SCHN 450 is a university-controlled space. COMS does not have any dedicated classroom space.
6. On p. 3 the reviewers state, "The research lab and control room are being eliminated and given to the Gaming Program." The space has been allocated to the animation program, but COMS will keep the equipment that is currently in the research lab and Research Lab Coordinator is currently working on a plan for housing the equipment and making it available to faculty.

#### **Undergraduate Program on page 4:**

7. The reviewers state that, "Several sections of COMS 1030 are offered online." Athens sections of COMS 1030 (public speaking) are offered in-person with an occasional online course. The Regional campuses may teach COMS 1030 online, however the School of Communication does not schedule RHE courses or control the modality of those courses.

#### **Graduate Program on page 8:**

8. In the last paragraph, the reviewers state, "Comprehensive exams are preferred by students over capstones and theses in the MA program, which challenges meaningful assessment." This statement is incorrect. Students have four capstone options: Portfolio Project (COMS 6960), Comprehensive Exam, Applied Research Project, or Thesis. In 2019, COMS 6960 was added to the curriculum, and it is students' preferred capstone experience. COMS 6960 plays an important role in the recently developed assessment plan for the MA in Organizational Communication.

### **Clarifications and Concerns**

#### **Overview on page 2:**

9. In the fourth paragraph the reviewers' state, "Athens campus service expectations create an unsustainable level of stress on RHE faculty, given their already high teaching load and the service requirements of their home campus." The implementation of One Ohio directed departments to integrate RHE faculty into their respective departments. COMS RHE faculty were assigned a COMS committee and included in School meetings to facilitate this integration. Unfortunately, service requirements at the regional campuses were not reduced for RHE faculty resulting in an unsustainable level of stress for RHE faculty. Implementation of the One Ohio initiative continues with pre-pandemic work groups being reconstituted to address university-wide problems and concerns with the One Ohio.

#### **Undergraduate Program on page 5:**

10. In the first paragraph on page 5, the reviewers state, "The unit would benefit from a more targeted effort to recruit diverse students including students from the Southeast Ohio region to provide representation from students who come from a

lower socioeconomic status background.” The School seeks and welcomes diverse majors and is engaged in making COMS courses more inclusive, however, recruitment of students to OU is the responsibility of the Office for Enrollment Management. The School of Communication Studies promotes the COMS major to students interested in transferring to a different major and collaborates with university recruitment efforts, such as meeting with prospective students, participating in marketing efforts, and providing information as needed or requested.

11. In the fourth paragraph the reviewers state that the number of students completing internships for credit “has been declining since 2017-2018.” This statement is misleading. There was one year of decline prior to 2019-2020, where summer 2020 internships essentially disappeared. Prior to summer 2019-2020, the number of students completing internships for academic credit had steadily increased until an unexplained drop in 2017-2018.

#### **Areas of Concern on pages 9 & 10:**

1. In the second bullet the reviewers stated that the Director “even shares outdated and incorrect information.” This implies purposeful misinformation and deceit by the Director. A mistake that is corrected upon discovery is not equivalent to purposeful misinformation and deceit.
2. In the third bullet the reviewers state, “There are concerns that family relations within the Department/College might be interfering with objective evaluations and processes.” This issue was raised during the meeting between the reviewers and the Director. The Director explained the reporting procedures for related faculty members (which follow University guidelines) and explained that there was no evidence of interference. It is concerning that the reviewers dismissed the information provided by the Director.
3. In the fifth bullet the reviewers state, “Instructional faculty report an unclear contract that seems fluid.” An instructional faculty member’s workload expectations were updated to be consistent with current university definitions and workload expectations for instructional faculty. This was based on several conversations and was documented. This update was done at the urging of the Dean to increase workload clarity.

#### **Strategic Priorities**

The reviewers note issues with climate in the overview, concerns, and recommendations sections of their report. As the reviewers note on page 3, similar climate issues were raised in the 2014-2015 review, indicating this is a long-running problem. The current Director (who arrived at OU in August 2019) was immediately made aware of climate issues and began undertaking efforts to fully understand the underlying issues and improve the climate. Efforts have revolved around DEI issues, understanding concerns, creating clear and equitable written policies, and fostering open communication. The first and third reviewer recommendations are tied to the long-standing climate issues and will continue to be a strategic priority in the School of Communication Studies with the goal of creating a climate where ideas can be openly debated, and disagreement is used to reach the best decisions, rather than the basis for attacks.



The second recommendation directs the School to take systematic and visible steps to avoid real and perceived conflicts of interest that result from family relationships within the School. Such steps were taken several years ago. There is a formal written agreement regarding one such relationship that creates an alternative reporting structure and articulates specific procedures regarding evaluation, merit, etc. For the other relationship, neither faculty is in a supervisory role, they do not serve on the same committees except for P&T, and formal steps are taken to prevent conflict of interest if one of them serves on the Merit Committee.

As indicated in the self-study, making improvements to the doctoral program is a strategic priority of COMS and addresses the fourth and fifth recommendations. With the guidance of the COMS Graduate Committee, the faculty have already begun examining potential improvements to the curriculum.

The sixth recommendation to scale up the MA in Organizational Communication began in fall 2021 by increasing the number of courses offered each semester from two to three.

The seventh recommendation is currently being examined by an ad-hoc committee in COMS. In addition to how publications are valued, the P&T document is being revised to address differences in RHE and Athens faculty workload. The annual report and workload policy will also be revised to align with the P&T document, which will address the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> recommendations.

The eighth recommendation focuses on developing instructional faculty contracts with clear job descriptions. The basic job description for instructional faculty is determined by University policy. The expectations for an instructional faculty member were updated to increase clarity.

As indicated in the self-study, revising the assessment process is a current strategy for improvement that will address the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> recommendations.

Finally, COMS welcomes the recommendation to explore possibilities with the Dean of Scripps College on the possibilities of hiring faculty who can contribute to programs that cut across the campus.



OHIO  
UNIVERSITY

Scripps College of Communication

December 12, 2021

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TO: Bärbel Such, Chair UCC Programs Review Committee  
FR: Scott Titsworth, Dean, Scripps College of Communication  
RE: School of Communication Studies 7-Year Review

As Dean of the Scripps College I had the opportunity to meet with the review team for the School of Communication Studies (COMS), review the self-study created by the school, and review the response written by the school (from Director Ann Bainbridge Frymier). I agree with the overall conclusion that COMS is a **VIABLE** program. In this memo I provide some additional information that I presented to the review team but was not meaningfully integrated into the report and I also highlight ways in which the college office will work with COMS on several action items.

During my meeting with the review team, I commented at length on a primary strength of the school, and though there were certainly aspects of those comments that are implicitly highlighted in the report, I want to use this opportunity to crystalize my point more directly. In my view, COMS is a model department/school with regard to its diversification of opportunities for students. COMS provides a large undergraduate major that serves not only students on the Athens campus but also on each of the regional campuses. For online programs, COMS is the lead school for the growing online-only major in Communication, and COMS also has a professionally-focused online MA program in Organizational Communication. Finally, COMS offers a leading PhD program in the field with nationally respected faculty and historic strength in preparing future generations of the professoriate. In short, few academic programs have demonstrated such a sustained commitment to offering a slate of programs that serves such wide student need; when coupled with the academic success of those students, the program is not only viable, but a clear leader at Ohio University in strategically shaping academic offerings to help students and strengthen a department.

In terms of priorities, Dr. Bainbridge Frymier's response letter did an excellent job of articulating where the school stands with regard to each of the recommendations offered by the review team. From my perspective, the following priorities should be emphasized:

1. COMS is currently doing work to revise its PhD program curriculum. I believe such work is necessary, as the current curricular structure is not sustainable from a faculty resource perspective, nor does it best serve the interests of students as the field of communication becomes increasingly interdisciplinary. A revised program that allowed more flexibility for students would result in fewer low-enrollment classes, better utilize faculty resources, and provide students with more flexibility to prepare themselves for vibrant careers as researchers, teachers, and members of the academic and professional communities.
2. I strongly encourage COMS to develop strategic partnerships with other units at the university. Although the school has a very strong relationship with units in HCOM, there have been other opportunities in recent years where COMS could have developed other relationships (e.g., the College of Business) and did not opt to pursue

those. I believe that COMS would benefit from developing and strengthening relationships with other units that follow the work done by the school in the interdisciplinary online Communication degree, the Social Media Certificate, and with the ongoing interconnections with HCOM. I would be supportive of those relationships being focused at the course level, certificate level, or even new interdisciplinary programs as appropriate.

3. Because of the historically strong connection between COMS and RHE Communication faculty, the transition to One OHIO was more seamless in some ways compared to other units, and more complicated in others. I believe this moment is an opportunity for COMS to review and adapt its P&T document, workload document, and associated school policies to address not only the inclusion of RHE faculty but also for instructional faculty. I strongly encourage the Director to continue exploring ways to creatively use faculty resources across the OHIO system to best serve students.

An area of concern raised in the review, which I share, relates to the issue of faculty climate. As noted in both the review and the Director's response, this issue pre-dates not only the current director, but was also an issue raised in the previous 7-year review. In short, this issue has been going on for well over a decade. The college office previously agreed to pay for an external consultant to work with the faculty and will do so again. However, I stress that this long-standing concern will not be solved by anyone external to the faculty. I do not believe the climate will meaningfully improve unless faculty members commit to respectfully communicating disagreement and engage in perspective-taking. I am hopeful that the majority of the faculty will take seriously the climate issue and each act as a leader in improving that climate; finding ways to have civil and respectful relational orientations with colleagues is something that should be actively embraced by everyone in the school.

In closing, I reiterate that COMS is an academic unit that has significant strengths and remains a viable program. Though there are obviously areas for growth, the academic programs offered by the school are exceptionally strong.

Sincerely,



Scott Titsworth, Ph.D.  
Professor and Dean

**From:** [Charlotte Elster](#)  
**To:** [Such, Barbel](#)  
**Subject:** comments from the GC Program Review Committee  
**Date:** Saturday, January 22, 2022 6:35:06 PM

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**NOTICE:** This message was sent from outside Ohio University. Please use caution when clicking links or opening attachments in this message.

Hi Baerbel:

The Graduate Council reviewed the following programs on Jan. 21, 2022:

4. School of Communication Studies.

We concur with the finding of the review committee that the School is viable. We concur with the review's concerns and recommendations, and want to add the School may want to prioritize recommendations and address those of lesser financial impact in a timely fashion.

---Charlotte

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