

Program Review Self Study  
Department of Communication and Media Studies  
School of Arts and Humanities  
Sonoma State University  
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Program Review Chair  
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## **Program Overview**

### Introduction

This report will examine the development of the Department of Communication and Media Studies since its beginning over 30 years ago. Prior program reviews (1988, 2008) will be incorporated to provide background. Additionally, the most recent program revision in 2013 will be integrated to show the changes to the department in response to media convergence, incorporation of GE teaching, and the lack of tenure-track faculty. The goal is to assess how the department is serving the needs of its students, faculty, and staff in order to determine the future needs and the direction of the program.

As demonstrated by the data throughout this document, since the last program review, the Communication and Media Studies Department has grown in the number of majors, class size, number of GE courses offered, student-to-faculty ratio, full-time equivalent students, advising load, and number of graduates, while simultaneously decreasing in the number of tenure-track faculty and full-time equivalent faculty. Despite the fact that the department is the 4<sup>th</sup> highest in terms of number of graduates in 2017, the 8<sup>th</sup> highest in terms of number of majors, the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest advising load, and the 11<sup>th</sup> highest Student to Faculty ratio, only six departments in the university have fewer tenure-track faculty. This shows that the department has been giving the students the best experience possible both from an instructional and advising perspective given the constraints of having so few tenure-track faculty.

Both the tenure-track faculty and lecturers are dedicated to serving the students and put them at the forefront of everything they do. The faculty are trying to prepare students for future careers in the communication and media industry while also giving them a strong liberal arts perspective to prepare them to be good critical thinkers, writers, presenters, and citizens. All faculty keep up with the developments in an ever-changing media environment by conducting research, participating in creative activities, attending conferences, and attending professional development opportunities.

### Program Overview

The mission of the program is to provide a high-quality education to undergraduates preparing to work in the communications industries in the “art, craft, and analysis of communications media” (<http://web.sonoma.edu/communications/home/about.html>). As is stated on our web page: The Department works to achieve its mission by offering a diverse range of courses. Faculty encourage students to fuse the theory and the practice of communications. Students learn critical-analytical thinking, advanced written and oral communication, the mastery of media technologies, and both individual and group projects, all of which prepares students to work creatively in the communications industries, and to become discerning citizens and consumers. The program has developed a reputation for providing students with hands-on professional experience by training with faculty in the department’s four student-run media businesses: The Star; KSUN Radio; Studio Blue; and the newest addition, Primitivo PR, along with its requirement that students complete an internship.

The program plays a unique and important role in the mission of the university. It gives students access to an excellent liberal arts education while providing hands on experience and internships that prepare them for employment in the growing field of communications. With its emphasis on both career training and media literacy, Communication and Media Studies is ideally situated near one of the top and most culturally diverse media markets in the country (the San Francisco Bay Area). Further, the department's four media outlets encourage student engagement in the on-campus community as well, contributing to the intellectual and entertainment interests of all SSU students.

The program serves the community's regional and state needs in a number of important ways. 1. It affords students access to a stimulating major of which more are drawn than can be accepted across the state. 2. Similar to Business and Nursing, the curriculum is designed to help majors acquire the real-world skills needed to secure employment upon graduation. The program's internship requirement helps provide employers (on-campus and off) with a steady stream of motivated students who, in kind, gain access to competitive opportunities to learn on the job. 3. It encourages students' awareness to act responsibly toward their community in a field uniquely designed to wield great power. Last, the program contributes to California's economy by educating the state's future leaders of tomorrow in a wide array of professions beyond media production (including law, politics and sales)

### Program Requirements and Program Learning Outcomes

Communication and Media Studies offers 44 units of coursework in the major exposing students to a rigorous study of media history, ethics, law, theory, research and technical skills. Students must complete core required courses including a senior capstone course, learn at least one skill, work for two semesters for a media outlet, complete an internship, and enroll in a variety of electives. It also offers GE credit in four areas (A3, C1, 2 & 3).

Below is a basic overview of the key program requirements in the Department of Communication and Media Studies:

#### Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies

- Major Core (24): All students complete 24 units of required coursework.
- Major Skill (4): All students complete 4 units of skill coursework
- Major Outlet (8): All students complete 8 units of media outlet coursework.
- Major Electives (8): All students complete 8 units of COMS elective courses.

Total Units Required in Major = 44

Communication and Media Studies majors have access to a stimulating and diverse curriculum that prepares them for graduate study as well careers in journalism, broadcasting, video production, filmmaking, and public relations. In addition students are given the tools to become more critical mass media consumers. All of the department's PLOs are incredibly important to the identity of the department and are integrated in the vast majority of the courses.

The Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) of the Communication and Media Studies Department that were assessed during this program review are the following:

1. Improve written, oral, and multimedia communication skills
2. Practice collaborative learning and leadership skills
3. Critically analyze media messages and understand media theory, research, law, and ethics
4. Demonstrate a practical skill related to a media industry
5. Integrate and apply academic skills in experiential learning

Some additional Program Goals that were not assessed during this program review but that are important to the Department of Communication and Media Studies. These Program Goals are more holistic and are areas that we believe make alumni better and more engaged citizens when they graduate:

1. Find own voice (Imagination & Freedom)
2. Write from own experience (Imagination & Freedom)
3. Apply legal rulings and ethical standards to real-life situations (Logic & Justice)
4. Develop sense of public good (Helpfulness & Equality)
5. Understand media content as cultural discourse (Critical Thinking & Wisdom)

### Department History

Communication and Media Studies (known as "COMS" for short) was founded by SSU Professor Carl Jensen, founder of the nationally acclaimed media watchdog organization "Project Censored." Although Jensen was a Professor of Sociology, the department landed in the School of Arts & Humanities. It was difficult to convince other scholars that the program belonged in a liberal arts college because long established departments resented the competition from a field that became an extremely popular destination for students. Over the years other majors shrank while maintaining the same size in staffing. In contrast, while the number of majors in Communication and Media Studies grew, faculty hiring remained stagnant.

Professor Elizabeth Burch used the program review to successfully lobby for one new tenure-track, who started in fall 2013. During this time, Professor Marco Calavita started teaching the Freshman Learning Community courses which were the first GE courses for the department. When Calavita became chair in fall 2014 he worked to redesign and implement the new curriculum proposed in the 2013 Program Revision. As part of that revision and in the semesters that followed, he added two additional GE courses to the curriculum. He also brought in another new tenure-track hire in the area of video production in 2016-2017. In fall 2017, Associate Professor Ed Beebout took over as department chair. Also new, is the department's Administrative Coordinator (AC), Shelly Stephens. Already she is becoming an integral part of the department.

The Department has always endeavored to mount a curriculum that meets its academic goals given the number of majors and faculty resources. Professor Melinda Barnard came to the department in 1990 and created the 'core' and 'elective' structure. Electives were taken both in

and outside the department as one way to meet the student demand. Additionally, the department was told in 2013 that it needed to take on some responsibility in teaching GE courses or risk losing instructor funding for its student newspaper and radio station. Two full-time faculty members began teaching in the Freshman Year Experience (FYE) living-learning community from 2014-2016 and 2016-2018. With replacement funding, the department began to hire new adjunct faculty to teach some of the core curriculum.

Despite all the cuts, students regularly petition the faculty to add the major or get into classes. The department accepts change of majors based upon specific criteria and continues to lobby for support to address its impaction. Considering all that has happened since the 1980's, it is a testament to the department that it remains so committed to its mission. The role of the internet and social media in society has expanded the need for the study of media and communications. The type of skills taught in journalism, video and radio broadcasting are now sought across the business world. The Department's curriculum is relevant for today's society.

The historical development of the department continues to define its identity in some important ways. As a visionary, Professor Carl Jensen succeeded in creating the department because he persisted. The current faculty has learned from his example how to lobby on behalf of SSU's Communication and Media Studies students, and in so doing, the progress continues. But this program review will outline the obstacles that still need to be overcome to keep the program thriving.

The department has great pride in its on-campus media organizations, which give students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience. It is home to The Star, the campus newspaper; KSUN, the campus radio station; Studio Blue, the student-run video and film production; and Primitivo Public Relations, the student-run PR firm. Each outlet has its own dedicated lab space, compared to only two officially dedicated spaces a year. However, outlet space is still an issue that will be discussed later in this document.

The Star, directed by different adjunct faculty over the years, changed dramatically since the 1980s, when it was housed in the student union and regarded largely as an extracurricular activity. Since, then, slowly but steadily it has become much more a part of the academic program. There is now much more of a focus on teaching of writing, editing and what it means to put out a weekly newspaper in print and online. At the same time, there is an increase in First Amendment rights and protections for the students. At one time, there was a publication board for The Star, created by then President David Benson, as a mechanism to monitor, control and if need be censor the student-run paper. The board's existence proved to be cumbersome and controversial. Students rightly saw it as an arm of the administration and resented it. The department abolished it, and since then the newspaper has been far less volatile. More recently, it has undergone dramatic improvement under the guidance of its newest Faculty Adviser, Paul Gullixson, editorial director from the region's largest newspaper, The Press Democrat. These tensions have served as a mechanism for student learning. Today, the paper continues to serve as an integral experience within the major, allowing students to develop clips (writing examples) for future employment.

SSU's radio station has existed since the early 1970's. It began as a 'club' loosely affiliated with the English Department. When the Communication and Media Studies Department was established, KSUN as an educational activity came under this new major. In the early years, KSUN broadcast without a license from a makeshift studio near the residential community. The Federal Communications Commission gave Sonoma State notice to stop the illegal broadcasts, and so in 1985 the station converted to a cable-only distribution. In 1995, KSUN created an on-campus only broadcast capability that was unlicensed so was halted. Three commercial cable companies as part of the 'educational access' provisions of their contracts carried KSUN, without charge. With the advent of web-based broadcasting KSUN began to be an Internet station operating independently. The long-time faculty advisor is Nate Campbell, who has worked full and part-time in Sonoma County radio since 1995.

The video production program has also gone through significant change and growth. In 1985, now-retired Professor Michael Litle created a video magazine called, "Detour Sonoma." Students produced episodes that aired over local cable television. Its output grew until 1995, when the campus video technician (who managed the studio facility in Stevenson Hall) died. A short time later, the studio was shut down and turned into an I-T storage space. When the opportunity came for a new tenure-track position, the department decided to re-energize its video course offerings. Ed Beebout was hired in 2007 and put in charge of creating a student-run video production outlet called *SSUTV* (the program has since been rebranded as *Studio Blue*). Key to the success of this venture was reopening the studio for student use, purchasing professional grade equipment, and installing a \$30,000 LED lighting system.

Primitivo Public Relations is the newest media outlet in the department and was created due to the popularity of public relations as an area of interest in the major. It is a student-run PR firm and was first taught as a class in spring 2014. Assistant Professor Emily Acosta Lewis was hired in fall of 2013 as a tenure-track faculty and faculty advisor of Primitivo. One of her primary responsibilities was to create the student-run PR firm, develop the course and curriculum, fund the program, and locate a space. Though it took a few years to get a space and Primitivo was recently relocated to the Schulz Information Center, the course allows students to get hands-on experience working with real-world clients on public-relations related issues. Primitivo is one of about 30 student-run PR firms across the country on college campuses.

### **Outcome of Previous Program Reviews**

The first departmental program review in Communication and Media Studies was conducted by Michael Litle in 1988 when he was department chair. Melinda Barnard and Jonah Raskin served as chairs after that time. In spring 2002, the department submitted its Interim Program Review to the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) committee and SSU's Educational Policies Committee (EPC). To complete the review the department conducted a retreat in which Psychology Professor Charles Merrill was hired to facilitate the department's self-assessment of learning outcomes. WASC recommended that the department develop three types of learning objectives for each course: Curriculum Specific Objectives, General Learning Objectives, and Value Objectives. Each faculty member wrote out learning objectives for their courses. From their descriptions, statements were written and evaluated. Once objectives were adopted each professor applied their courses to a matrix, indicating how each course they taught met those goals. Surveys for graduating seniors were developed using those same objectives. The insight and information that the department gained from this entire process was used to reformulate the senior level experience into a capstone seminar. The skills sequence was restructured and electives were added. In spring 2002 EPC reviewed the department's assessment. EPC responded with criticism of the department's rhetorical arguments, reflecting confusion about the major. The department continued to work diligently in department meetings on clarifying learning objectives, structure and content for its capstone senior seminar course, COMS 402. The internship program was also reevaluated. Faculty teaching these courses prepared written reports on objectives and conducted informal surveys of graduating seniors, which they shared with the department. Interim annual reports were sent to the Provost and Dean in 2004, 2005, and 2006.

The department's last full Program Review was conducted in 2008, with Elizabeth Burch as Program Review Chair. During the recession of 2008 the university underwent one of its most challenging periods in recent history. Faculty salaries were furloughed and promised raises never came. The 2008 program review was received favorably at all levels of review. Dr. Robyn Goodman of Alfred University observed the department in her External Review.

“The program's very success may contribute indirectly to some of the problems it...has been so successful for so long at offering a high-quality Communications education on a shoestring budget with dismal resources that its significant vulnerabilities often go unnoticed.”

It was not surprising that her astute comment was repeated in every level of review because it summed up the situation exactly.

Given the need for resources, the reviewer recommended that Communication and Media Studies retain its part-time faculty to run its media outlets and hire at least one additional tenure-track faculty. William Babula, the Dean of the School of Arts and Humanities at the time, agreed (2009).

In 2008, Dr. Jeffrey Reeder, Chair of the School of Arts and Humanities Curriculum Committee, wrote “Coms now is the university's fifth largest program in terms of number of



graduates” (In 2017, it was the fourth largest in terms of number of graduates). “However, despite this growth in the number of declared majors, FTEF has only increased by 6.25%, from 5.28 to 5.61 during the period of time covered by this review, whereas FTES has increased by 36.6%, from 106.9 to 146. In addition to other problems, this places a heavy advising burden on the faculty.” This burden continues today averaging at an astounding 91-1 advising ratio.

One priority in the 2008 Program Review Plan for the Future was to hire more tenure-track faculty. Through lobbying, the department was eventually able to hire two new full-time faculty members since 2008. One, Emily Acosta Lewis, has begun a new media outlet (Primitivo PR). The other, Talena Sanders, has filled an enormous gap in the department’s video production program. While good news, in point of fact, what was gained through the hires was simply a replacement for two full-time faculty retirements. In terms of faculty, the original members of the program either retired (Jonah Raskin), took part in the Faculty Early Retirement Program (FERP) (Michael Litle) or was hired as an administrator (Melinda Barnard served as Vice Provost and Associate Vice President of Faculty Affairs for several years). Melinda Barnard returned to the department to FERP in 2017.

Much of what the external reviewer recommended in 2008 was supported by the university, in theory, but once the housing bubble burst, it quickly became clear that those changes would have to wait. The CSU had entered a new zone, and administrators called it, “The New Normal.” The budget drove the curriculum and the faculty were powerless to stop it.

The lack of recent program reviews does not mean that the department has neglected to improve the curriculum. There was a major program revision completed in fall 2013. Sparked by reduced departmental funding in the wake of the economic crisis (as opposed to a more pedagogical origin), the challenge faced by the department was how to streamline the program in a way that still provided quality education to students, while also bringing the program more in line with a 21<sup>st</sup> century media model. This program review entailed a major overhaul of the core curriculum as well as a name change to the department in order to more closely align with the true nature of the department. The previous department name was Communication Studies and was changed to Communication and Media Studies. Though this seems like a minor change, a traditional Communication Studies Department generally includes course offerings on interpersonal communication, oral communication, and group communication. Since the department does not offer courses in those areas, by adding Media Studies to the title of the department, it is more representative of the type of department that we are—a media studies and mass communication department.

During this program revision, the department removed a two-course required sequence in an area of interest (e.g. journalism, public relations, radio broadcasting, and video production) in favor of a model that is more in line with the current environment of media convergence. This allowed students to take an introduction to video production class even if they ultimately want to become a public relations practitioner which would let the students learn valuable skills that would translate into the PR world and make them more versatile when going on the job market. The

previous approach with a two-course sequence was not as conducive to students experimenting in several areas with the department and getting skills across different areas.

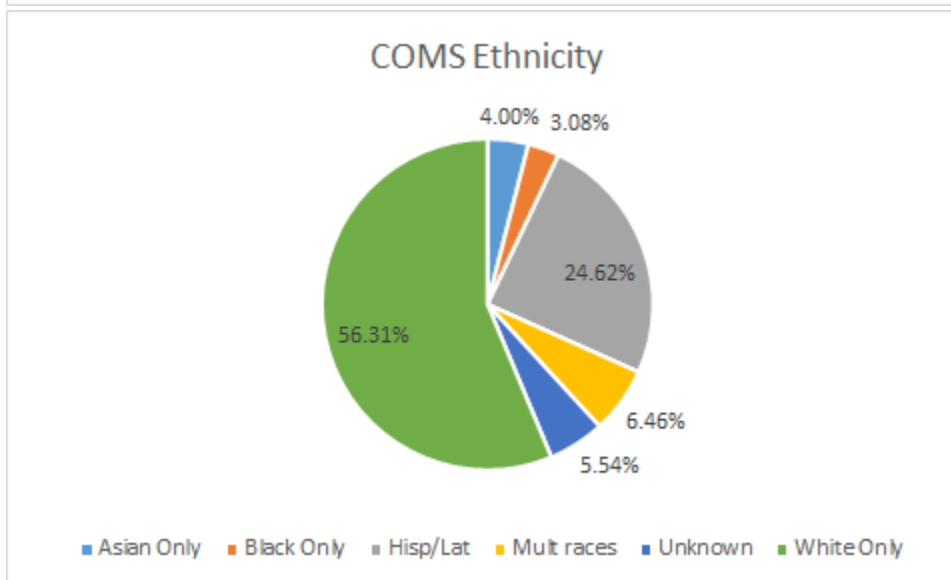
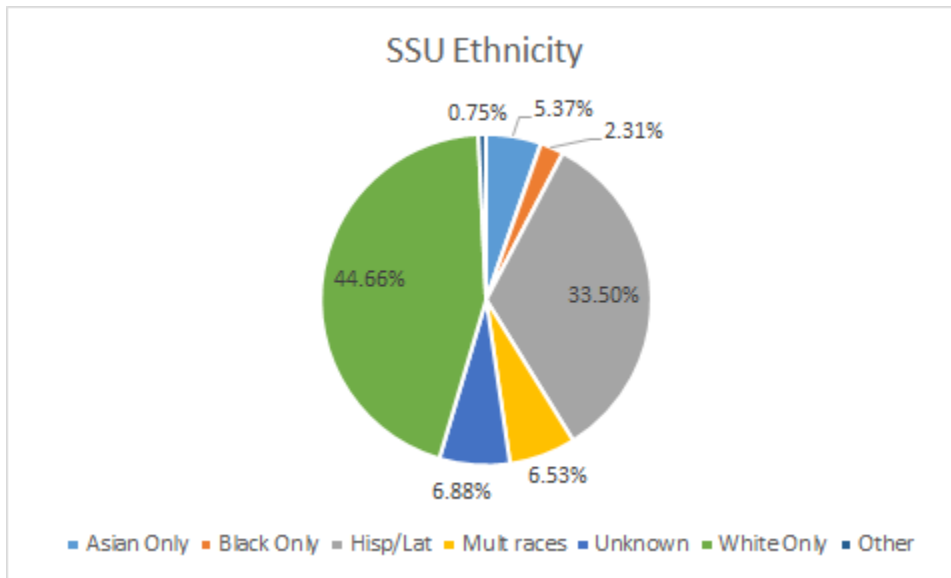
Additionally, in the previous program revision, two Communication and Media Studies Freshman Learning Courses (FLC) were added to the curriculum. These courses are required for all incoming freshmen who are Communication and Media Studies majors. They allow freshmen to begin taking courses within the major a full year or more before they had previously. The FLC serves as a substitute for one of the required core courses and counts for elective credit in the major, in addition to fulfilling the requirements of A3 and C3 in the GE pattern. In addition, instructors and student peer mentors provide transitional content to students designed to enhance their ability to become successful college students. Another change in the previous program revision was to lower the total number of units from 48 to 44. By combining Media Ethics and Media Law, which were previously two separate courses, into one course, it lowers the number of units in the major and allows students to graduate in a more expedited manner. The change was primarily motivated by the retirement of Media Law instructor Jonah Raskin and the fact that we did not get a replacement hire. It was determined that Combining Media Ethics and Media Law into one course was the least impactful way to deal with the reduction in full-time faculty. Both the name change of the department and the lowering of units in the major were recommended by the external reviewer from the 2008 Program Review and were implemented during the previous program revision. Additionally during the last program revision, it was decided that new media and online content would be integrated in all courses to help reflect the current digital media environment.

An additional change that has occurred since the last program review is the addition of GE teaching in the department. Starting in fall 2015, the department started teaching GE courses, including the aforementioned FLCs. The department also added a new course to the curriculum in fall 2015, COMS 275: 21st Century Television as Art, which fulfills GE Area C1. The department also continues to teach in the Arts and Humanities Second Year Research and Creative Experience (SYRCE), which fulfills GE Area C2. Two year after starting to teach GE courses, the department had 139 students enrolled in GE Communication and Media Studies courses. We started teaching the COMS FLC, SYRCE, and COMS 275 without additional faculty members though teaching these courses took faculty away from teaching courses within the major. In the wake of Executive Order 1100 from the CSU Chancellor's Office, Sonoma State University will be required to mount GE A1 (oral communication) courses. COMS has been asked to consider housing a significant number of these courses. Key to the department's ultimate decision on this issue will be a sufficient commitment of support and funding from the university that protects the both the media-based focus of COMS and the educational experience of students within the major.

## Student Profile

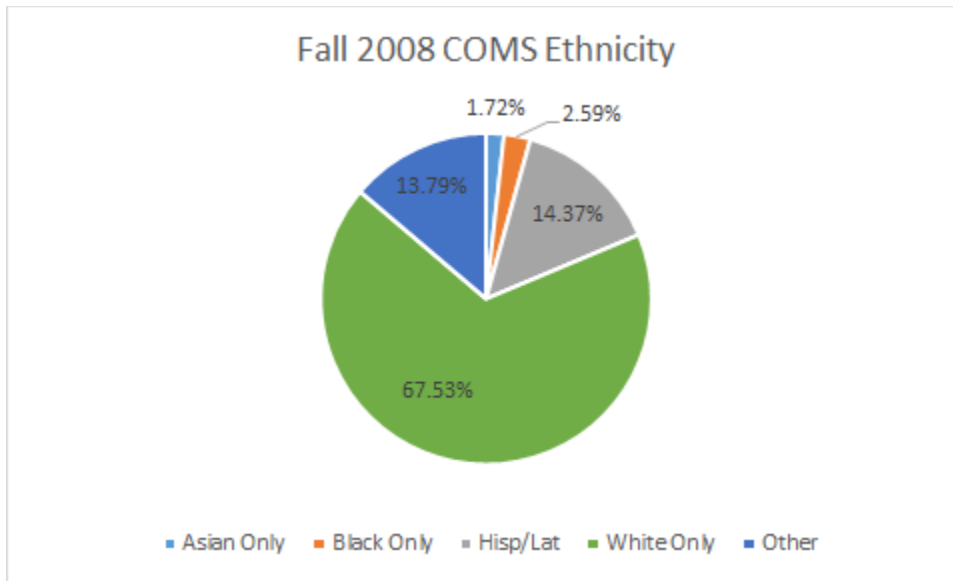
Nearly all of the 364 students in the Communication and Media Studies Department are from California with only one being from out of state. Though we do not have data on this, it appears that approximately half of our students are from the Bay Area. Out of the current majors, 163 (44.8%) are first-time freshmen, 130 (35.7%) transferred from another major, and 71 (19.5%) transferred from another university.

The ethnic makeup of Communication and Media Studies students is similar to Sonoma State University's in terms of multiracial, black only, Asian only, unknown, and other. The department does have significantly more white students than the university (56.31% versus 44.66%) and significantly fewer Hispanic/Latino students (33.50% versus 24.62%).

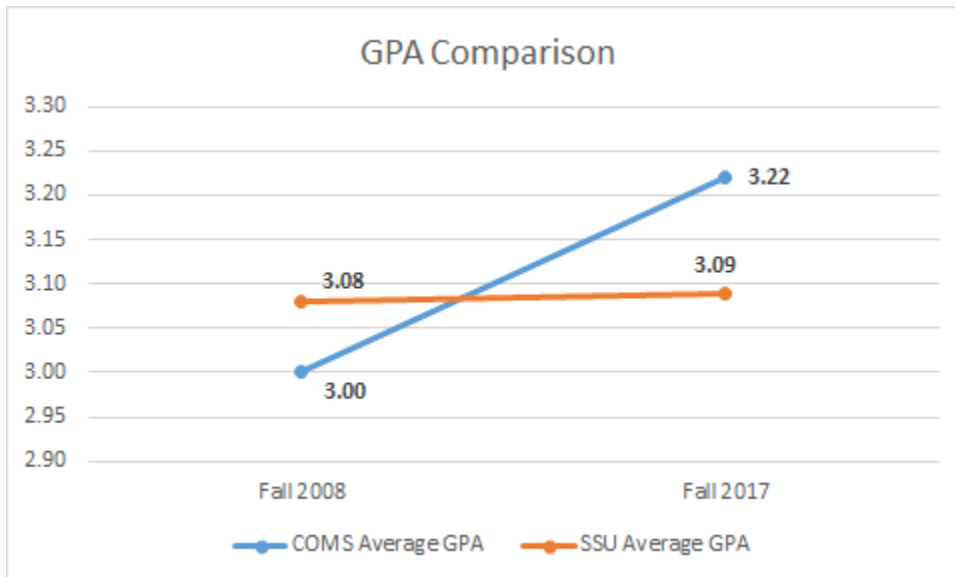


However when compared to the department's numbers from the last program review in 2008, the students within the department have become more diverse. During fall 2008, we had

67.53% white students and 14.37% Hispanic students. As indicated above, we currently have 56.31% white and 24.62% Hispanic. This is a 71% increase in Hispanic students over the past nine years. There is also a very small increase in the number of black students in the department.



At the time of the last program review, the Communication and Media Studies GPA was lower than the average GPA of the university by .08 points, however, now, the average GPA in the department is higher than the university's GPA by .13. Of note is that the average GPA in Communication and Media Studies has risen by .22 points during this same time, which shows that we are attracting a higher caliber student.



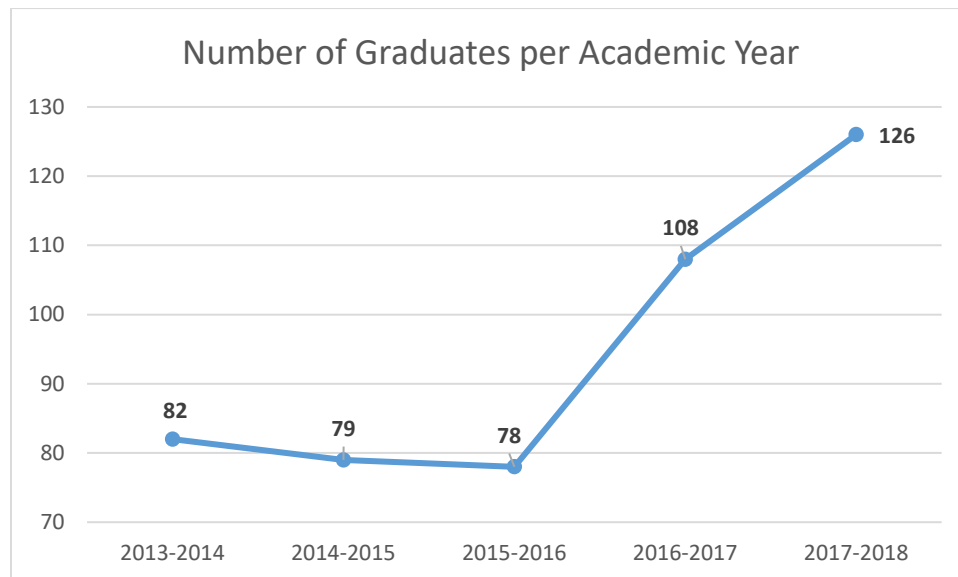
We tend to have students in Communication and Media Studies who engage in student leadership positions on campus, including as peer mentors, community service advisors, and in student organizations. Additionally, the vast majority of our students work at least part-time

while they are taking courses full time and a few are returning students. This is likely true across the university and does not necessarily make our students unique but is a defining characteristic. Communication and Media Studies students have a lot of obligations outside of their coursework, which can sometimes hinder their ability to fully engage with coursework.

The number of degrees conferred in the department has remained fairly steady in the fall but has trended upward in the spring. Below is a chart showing the number of students who have graduated in our department since fall 2013:

Fall	Number of Graduates	Spring	Number of Graduates	Summer	Number of Graduates	Total Per Year
2013	16	2014	59	2014	7	<b>82</b>
2014	21	2015	53	2015	5	<b>79</b>
2015	11	2016	62	2016	5	<b>78</b>
2016	21	2017	80	2017	7	<b>108</b>
2017	36	2018	85*	2018	5*	<b>126*</b>

\*Estimated number of graduates based on the number of Spring/Summer graduation applications submitted



In 2016-2017, the Department of Communication and Media Studies had a total of 108 graduates, which was the fourth highest in the University behind Business Administration, Psychology, and Sociology. Additionally as seen in the graph below, our number of graduates per year has ranged from 78 to 125 students with the highest number of graduates estimated for this year.

According to the freshmen survey, students often choose the major because they want to pursue a career in media and communications. A secondary reason is to learn about the media in

general. Anecdotally, faculty have learned that students also pursue the major to gain valuable skills in writing, research, oral communication, and because of the practical and hands-on components of the major.

## Faculty Profile

The Communication and Media Studies faculty use a variety of teaching and assessment methods in their courses, including lectures, discussions, exams, research projects, group projects, and experiential learning. Faculty strive to create a comfortable environment where students are encouraged to express their opinions and engage with the content of the course.

There are three female and two male full-time faculty members. Two are full professors, one is an associate professor, and two are assistant professors. There are six lecturers who teach on a regular basis and a pool of experienced media professionals for elective courses. These media professionals have experience in TV, film, public relations, journalism, marketing, and radio. One professor has been at Sonoma State University for 20 years. The most recent full-time faculty member is in her first year. Four of the five have terminal degrees (Ph.D. or M.F.A.) and all attended top-tier graduate programs. Faculty in the department are expected to get at least 3.5 on all categories within the Student Evaluations of Teaching Effectiveness (SETEs). Additionally all junior faculty are observed in their classrooms at least once per semester by other faculty. The current Department Chair, Ed Beebout, plans to implement peer observations for all part-time faculty beginning in spring 2018.

The faculty members have diverse backgrounds, academic interests, research agendas, and creative endeavors. The Reappointment, Tenure, and Promotion (RTP) policy for Communication & Media Studies measures workload for each faculty according to the following weights agreed upon within the department: 50% teaching; 20% scholarship and/or creative and professional activities; 20% university service; and 10% community service. The primary focus of the department is excellence in teaching and providing students with valuable learning experiences both in and out of the classroom. The faculty members attend professional and research conferences on a regular basis. Additionally, all faculty members either conduct research on a regular basis and/or participate in creative and professional activities (e.g. filmmaking) despite teaching loads and larger than ideal class sizes in an impacted major. Elizabeth Burch was awarded sabbatical for spring 2017, Marco Calavita was awarded sabbatical in spring 2018, and Emily Acosta Lewis was awarded sabbatical for spring 2019. Elizabeth Burch's research while on sabbatical was for her study on social media and climate change refugees by conducting interviews during the height of cyclone season in the remote South Pacific island nation of Tuvalu. While on sabbatical, Marco Calavita is at work on a new book, tentatively titled *Unreal Media and the American Crisis: How Hollywood and the News Distort Reality and Fuel the Right*. Emily Acosta Lewis recently published an article on identification with favorite television characters and how that might impact viewers' self-image and will be working on a service-learning research project while on sabbatical next year. Edward Beebout recently finished a documentary titled "Immigration Politics: A Sonoma County Perspective" that aired on Bay Area television. Talena Sanders was recently an artist-in-residence in San Francisco and had a film selected to screen in a juried show at Southern Exposure Gallery in San Francisco. Both Emily Acosta Lewis and Talena Sanders received Arts and Humanities Innovation and Strategic Priorities Funding Awards in spring 2018. Especially with the ever-

changing media environment, all faculty believe that keeping current with media research, trends, and production is key to giving our students the best experience in the classroom.

Communication and Media Studies faculty are highly active in departmental, school, university, and community service. Faculty regularly serve on university committees and active participants in many areas on campus. The department chair, Ed Beebout, is the Arts and Humanities representative on the Senate, recently served as chair of Faculty Standards and Affairs, and just completed work on the search committee for the Associate Vice President of Strategic Communications. Emily Acosta Lewis is the faculty-in-residence for the Freshman Year Experience program; serves on the Professional Development Subcommittee, Scholarship Committee, WASC Oral Communication Core Competency Assessment Committee, and Academic Advising Task Force; and is the lead Arts and Humanities advisor for summer orientation. Elizabeth Burch served as the Chair of the Communications and Media Studies Department from fall 2009 to spring 2014 and chaired Ed Beebout's RTP Committee. Marco Calavita served as Chair of the department from fall 2014 to spring 2017, currently serves on the School of Arts & Humanities Travel Committee, and chaired the RTP Committee for Emily Acosta Lewis. With a large, impacted major, all faculty members advise approximately 91 students. Talena Sanders is in her first year and therefore has not had the opportunity to participate in service or advising but looks forward to doing so. Faculty members also engage in community service by teaching service-learning courses, giving public talks about media, and are involved with non-profit organizations.

The number of full-time faculty in the department is five with six part-time faculty who generally teach one class per semester. The department's new hire has one course release per semester for two years; one faculty member has taught in FYE for the past two years, and another faculty member taught in FYE for two years prior to that, which takes them out of the department for one course per semester. Out of every department within Sonoma State University, the Department of Communication and Media Studies has the 7<sup>th</sup> lowest number of tenure-track faculty.

The department has tried to recruit more diverse students and faculty, particularly in our last tenure-track search. The faculty in the department are fairly representative of the university numbers. Of the five current tenure-track faculty, two identify as multiracial, while the others are white only. Three of the five tenure-track faculty members are female. The tenure-track faculty at Sonoma State are 70% white. Of the six regular part-time faculty, three are white males, two are white females, and one is a multiracial female.

#### Full-time Faculty

Emily Acosta Lewis, Ph.D. in Communication Arts from University of Wisconsin-Madison, M.A. in Journalism and Mass Communication from University of Wisconsin-Madison, and B.A. in Communication from San Diego State University is a tenure-track assistant professor. She has taught courses in public relations, new media, mass communication, and freshman learning communities. She is the faculty advisor for the student-run PR firm, Primitivo, and the National



Communication Association Honors Society, Lambda Pi Eta. She has taught aboard the M.V. Explorer with Semester at Sea while visiting twelve countries over 106 days. She believes in giving students hands-on experience through service-learning projects with local and international non-profit organizations. Her research is in media effects with a developmental perspective and a special focus on children, adolescents, and emerging adults. Her primary interest is in the role of media and new media in shaping viewers' perceptions of social reality via persuasion, communication, and psychology theories. Her secondary and burgeoning area of research is regarding service-learning.

Edward Beebout, M.S. in Journalism and Mass Communication, from Iowa State University and B.A. in Journalism from Humboldt State University., is a tenured associate professor. Prior to his hire at SSU, he was a 25-year veteran of the broadcast news industry, working primarily as an on-air reporter and anchor. His broadcast work received honors from the Associated Press and Peninsula Press Club, as well commendations from county, state and congressional representatives. Since joining the Communication & Media Studies Department, he has written, produced and narrated three documentaries which aired on Bay Area television: "News in A New Age" (2011), "Digital Dialogues" (2013), and "Immigration Politics: A Sonoma County Perspective" (2017). Courses he has taught include Broadcast Journalism, Media Ethics and Law, Principles of Mass Media, Methods of Media Criticism, Advanced Presentation, and the Freshman Learning Community. He is also adviser to the student-run video production media outlet, Studio Blue.

Elizabeth Burch, Ph.D. in Mass Media from Michigan State University, M.A. in Broadcast Electronic Arts from San Francisco State University, and B.A. in Music from California State University East Bay is a tenured full professor. She is a Fulbright Scholar, Writer and Documentary Filmmaker. She has taught courses including Media Ethics & Law, Health, Science & Environmental Journalism, International Communications, Video Production, and Internships. Her research, which focuses on the media and environmental issues in the developing world, is published in Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, Media, Culture and Society, and Journal of Film and Video. Her work has appeared in the Santa Rosa Press Democrat and KQED Public Television. She is president of the English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC) for Santa Rosa Charter School for the Arts, and is engaged in campaigns for The Union of Concerned Scientists, 350.org and other groups, including the LGBTQ non-profit: Oregon Women's Land Trust.

Marco Calavita, Ph.D. in Culture and Communication from New York University and his B.A. in Theater Arts-Film from the University of California, Santa Cruz, is a tenured full professor. He has taught Methods of Media Criticism, Senior Seminar, 21st Century TV as Art, Freshman Learning Community, and several other Communication and Media Studies courses. Before arriving at Sonoma he was a Doctoral Teaching Fellow at NYU, where he also worked as

research assistant to Professor Todd Gitlin. His book *Apprehending Politics: News Media and Individual Political Development* was published by SUNY Press (2005), and his journalism, criticism and research have appeared in *Wired*, *Cineaste*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Sports Illustrated.com*, the *Journal of Film & Video*, the *Journal of Communication*, *American Journalism*, the *Communication Review*, and *Popular Communication*, among other publications and outlets.

Talena Sanders, M.F.A. in Experimental and Documentary Arts from Duke University, is a tenure-track assistant professor. She is an interdisciplinary artist interested in the development of individual and collective senses of identity and belonging. Through examining the influences of visual and material culture, dress and adornment, and geographic place, her work seeks to understand the ways in which people produce their self-worth within and against social institutions. Her work has been screened, exhibited and collected internationally, including at New York Film Festival's Views from the Avant-Garde, Marseille Festival of Documentary Film (FID Marseille), Montreal International Documentary Festival (RIDM), Viennale, Edinburgh International Film Festival, Play-Doc Tui and Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art. She has previously taught film production and film studies at the University of Montana and Duke University.

#### Part-time Faculty

Melinda Barnard, Ph.D. in Communication from Stanford University, Ed.M. in Children's Media from Harvard University, and B.A. in Communication from Stanford University returns to the department in the Faculty Early Retirement Program after 8 years as an Administrator. Starting in 2008 she served in various capacities as Vice Provost, Chief Research Officer, Graduate Dean, and Associate Vice President for Faculty Affairs. Prior to her work as an academic administrator she served as Department Chair and taught courses including Media Research & Theory, Children & Media, Public Relations, Advanced Presentation, Women & Media etc. Her research in Children & Media includes early work in the relationship between television viewing and reading achievement and later work in the impact of cyber mobility in preteens.

Nate Campbell, M.A. in Communications and Interdisciplinary Studies has taught Communications and Music classes at Sonoma State since 2000. He has worked full and part-time in Sonoma County radio since 1995. As a professional radio broadcaster, Nate currently works at Wine Country Radio in Santa Rosa in the production and programming departments creating commercials, producing voice-over, imaging, and music database. In the past he has served as Operations Manager, Program Director, and Music Director for the Sonoma County station KRSH "The Krush" as well as on-air DJ.

Ethan De Seife, Ph.D. in Film Studies from University of Wisconsin-Madison. He a film scholar and historian who has written two books on American film comedy: *This Is Spinal Tap* (2007)

and Tashlinesque: The Hollywood Comedies of Frank Tashlin (2012). He has written many articles for scholarly journals and popular newspapers.

Paul Gullixson, B.A. in Journalism from the University of Oregon, is an instructor and serves as faculty adviser to the campus newspaper, the Sonoma State Star. He is Editorial Director for The Press Democrat in Santa Rosa where he oversees the newspaper's Editorial Board and opinion pages, both print and online, and writes editorials and columns. He previously worked as Peninsula Bureau Chief for the San Francisco Chronicle and editor of the Palo Alto Weekly and has extensive professional experience as an editor, reporter and freelance writer. He also is a past president and longtime board member of the First Amendment Coalition based in San Rafael.

Hillary Homzie, M.A., MEd, is an instructor and serves as the coordinator for the internship program. She has worked in a variety of forms of media, including radio news (WMJA), public relations (Pennsylvania Ballet, Institute of Pennsylvania Hospital), and print journalism (New York Newsday). She has been awarded a Regional Public Relations Society of America first place award, as well as a Bronze, in the Healthcare Marketing Report, national competition.

Kerry Rego, A.A.S. in Computer Business, A.A.S. in Computer Software, is a lecturer on social media. She has been a social and digital media consultant for 11 years. She is also the author of three books.

Alexis Shapiro, M.A. in English, and B.A. in Human Communication, has been teaching in various capacities at Sonoma State University since the spring of 2012. She teaches as a lecturer in the Freshman Learning Community for the Communication and Media Studies department, and also teaches Freshman Composition and various University Studies courses that focus on transitional content and leadership. Shapiro has served as an advisor for Summer Orientation, WEPT reader and advisor, and is the current faculty advisor for Pi Kappa Phi.

#### Administrative Staff

Shelly Stephens is the Administrative Coordinator for the Communications and Media Studies Department. She received her B.A. and Secondary Teaching Credential in Social Science from California State University, Chico. Prior to arriving at Sonoma State, Shelly worked for over 20 years in the nonprofit and public schools sectors, most recently ending a 10 year run with Santa Rosa City Schools.

## Assessment

### Background

As outlined above, the Communication and Media Studies Department has experienced a challenging, tumultuous decade since its last Program Review, and these issues and circumstances have no doubt impacted the department's assessment strategies (and findings). Although the department has for some time been assessing student learning outcomes and other aspects of the program in several demonstrably effective ways, the budget reductions, faculty losses, and an inordinately large faculty advising workload have made it difficult during this time to focus as much as attention as faculty would have liked on expanding and improving assessment. In addition, the department underwent a difficult Program Revision in 2013-2014, on top of the flux created by faculty losses and rough budgetary times, which means the Communication and Media Studies curriculum has been in a state of regular upheaval for much of this past decade. Effective assessment and clear findings in these circumstances have been particularly challenging, but now that the department appears to have navigated through these difficult waters and emerged into somewhat calmer seas, complete with a slightly better budgetary outlook, some new faculty, and a well-tended, revised curriculum, it will also be particularly useful now as a means to see where we are and where we want to go from here.

The Program Learning Outcomes are not available in the catalog or website yet. It is our intention to add these to the website once we are migrated over to the new website design as we were told previously not to spend time on the current website given that the design would be altered dramatically. All faculty are aware of the key Program Learning Outcomes, though we do not include them in our syllabus. Ideally in the future, all core courses would have a syllabus template that includes the Program Learning Outcomes so that both students and faculty would be reminded of which courses are supposed to deliver each outcome.

The Program Learning Outcomes correspond with the WASC Core Competencies very well. As a reminder, our PLOs are:

1. Improve written, oral, and multimedia communication skills
2. Practice collaborative learning and leadership skills
3. Critically analyze media messages and understand media theory, research, law, and ethics
4. Demonstrate a practical skill related to a media industry
5. Integrate and apply academic skills in experiential learning

Our first PLO matches up exactly with the WASC written and oral communication core competency and all of our courses include this PLO. Our third PLO encompasses critical thinking and quantitative reasoning, which is addressed in all of our core courses. Information literacy is addressed in all courses though this core competency does not correspond directly with one particular PLO.

The Communication and Media Studies curriculum map was created in order to visually represent our Program Learning Outcomes in our core, skills, and media outlet courses. Below is our curriculum map.

**Communication and Media Studies Program Learning Outcomes**

	1. Improve written, oral, and multimedia communication skills	2. Practice collaborative learning and leadership skills	3. Critically analyze media messages, understand media theory, research, law and ethics	4. Demonstrate a practical skill related to a media industry	5. Integrate and apply academic skills in experiential learning
<b>Course number and name</b>					
<i>Core Courses</i>					
COMS 160a/b Humanities Learning Community					
COMS 162a/b Humanities Learning Community					
COMS 200 Principles of Media Communication					
COMS 202 Methods of Media Criticism					
COMS 301 Media Theory and Research					
COMS 302 Media Ethics and Law					
COMS 402 Senior Seminar					
COMS 499 Media Internship					
<i>Skills Courses</i>					
COMS 201 Video Production					
COMS 210 Web and Print Journalism					
COMS 240 Public Relations					
COMS 265 Radio and Audio Production					
COMS 325 New Media					
COMS 326 Advanced Presentation Techniques					
<i>Media Outlet Courses</i>					
COMS 340 Public Relations Firm					
COMS 368 Newspaper Writing/Editing (Star)					
COMS 369 Studio Blue					
COMS 385 Media Lab: Radio (KSUN)					

Introduced

Developed

Demonstrated

### Previous and Ongoing Assessment

In addition to the standard SETEs in widespread use for assessment, for several years the Communication and Media Studies Department has utilized an assessment instrument at the end of each course that surveys the students' evaluation of teaching effectiveness—a narrative evaluation to complement the standard statistical evaluations completed throughout SSU. Students offer their perspectives on the teaching of their courses and how well it has facilitated their student learning. Faculty are then encouraged to read all of these evaluations every semester, and are responsible for summarizing them, quoting from them, and analyzing them as part of their Self-Evaluations of Teaching any time they are up for RTP renewal or promotion.

The Communication and Media Studies Department also uses an online student evaluation to survey the students' perspectives on the value and effectiveness of course materials. At the same time that they fill out the statistical course evaluation and the written evaluation of teaching effectiveness, students are asked to respond to questions about the required reading, the use of technology by both instructor and students, the required assignments, and any theories, learning tools, strategies, or techniques that students feel were not sufficiently covered, or which could perhaps be scaled back to allow for alternatives. In a department such as Communication and Media Studies, where such a wide range of courses and topics are offered—from early communication history to video production, from radio broadcasting to media ethics and law, from public relations to film theory—it is essential for faculty to have more specific student feedback about how effectively course materials are being utilized. The use of technology in the classroom in particular is an area too often surrounded by competing extremes of technophobia and technological utopianism, and faculty hope to use the student feedback to chart a smart and pedagogically effective course through that terrain.

The Communication and Media Studies specific student learning outcomes, which range from analyzing media messages, to expressing one's self creatively, to researching communication, have also been assessed within the major courses themselves. In the broadest and most cumulative sense, those outcomes have, with some exceptions, been assessed in the COMS 402: Senior Seminar capstone to their experience and learning in the major. The same can also be said of the more specific and localized student learning outcomes expected in each of the individual courses, which instructors and the department as a whole are able to assess semester by semester.

The most significant student work product of all, a Senior Project, is completed in COMS 402: Senior Seminar. The students' Senior Projects function as a combination of portfolio piece and exit requirement, often in the same area that they have focused on in the major (radio, film/video, public relations, or journalism). Students are required to conceive of and write proposals for their projects, produce them, present them to the class, and then give a copy to their instructor and the department. These Senior Projects are then kept by the department and reviewed by the other faculty as a means of assessing a range of student outcomes.

Several feedback mechanisms have also been in place to provide assessment information to Communication and Media Studies faculty to support program improvements and educational

effectiveness. The most regular and common example of these feedback mechanisms occur at Communication and Media Studies faculty meetings every two weeks. Department faculty meetings often include time set aside for discussion of ways to improve teaching effectiveness and improved learning outcomes. Many of these discussions in the past have revolved around new courses and initiatives, but more general discussions about the major, and more specific discussions about other courses, have also taken place.

Although faculty discussion of assessment at regular faculty meetings has been significant, it was decided years ago that faculty retreats for the purpose of discussing program planning, pedagogy, and assessment would also be of vital importance, and such retreats have been held approximately once a year since 2007. The Communication and Media Studies faculty held its most recent retreat in December 2017, at the Doubletree Inn, to discuss the department and the upcoming Program Review. The faculty are committed to continuing such retreats in the future.

The Communication and Media Studies Department has also for many years conducted a survey of graduating seniors to gauge and better understand the students' perspectives on the structure and functioning of the major, teaching effectiveness, and above all else the quality of the students' learning. In addition to allowing the students to take a more global view with the benefit of some hindsight, the hope is that these surveys allow the students to speak/write a little more freely and honestly than they might while still immersed in the major and its personalities/requirements. These surveys also include questions about some particulars of the major's student population, including where students came from (high school, junior college, reentry, etc.), how many students work and how much, what students are planning to do after graduation, and more. This kind of collected assessment data is useful for the Communication and Media Studies faculty for a whole host of reasons related to pedagogy, student learning, and student advisement.

### Assessment Tools

In summary, the assessment tools the Communication and Media Studies Department has been using on an ongoing basis are the following:

1. Student Evaluations of Teaching Effectiveness (SETE) / In-class peer reviews of teaching effectiveness / Evaluations of course materials
2. Senior Seminar Projects
3. Faculty Meetings / Faculty Retreats
4. Surveys of Graduating Seniors

One new assessment tool was implemented in fall 2017 which surveys of Communication and Media Studies Freshmen. The Communication and Media Studies Department decided in 2017 that another means of determining its majors' expectations, perceptions, goals, and needs would be worthwhile as part of its program planning, and in particular a tool that could gauge such feelings and views at the beginning of students' time in the major. A brief survey was thus

created to collect data about Communication and Media Studies freshmen, virtually all of whom now take the COMS Humanities Learning Community course (in this case, the Fall 2017 class COMS 162A). Although there was nothing particularly eye-opening to be learned in the first group of data collected, it was nevertheless useful in confirming some of what the department already sensed about its majors' feelings and views, most notably that they are highly focused on acquiring the learning and expertise they need to find a good job in the communications and media industries.

### Assessment Findings

#### **Quantitative Data from Surveys of Graduating Seniors (Fall 2017)**

The following are average scores (on a 7 point scale) in response to the question:

To what extent do you feel your education in COMS at SSU helped you to develop the following abilities and prepared you for the future?

1. write well 5.0
2. speak well 5.3
3. use technology 4.3
4. research communication 5.1
5. give and receive constructive criticism 5.1
6. communicate effectively 5.7
7. listen effectively 5.4
8. think critically 5.7
9. read critically 5.2
10. analyze media messages 6.2
11. collaborate/cooperate in a group or team 6.1
12. deal sensitively with a variety of people 5.1
13. develop your creative potential 4.9
14. express yourself creatively 5.7
15. manage your time effectively 5.0
16. reason logically 5.2
17. ask smart questions 5.3
18. challenge assumptions 5.1
19. question authority 5.2
20. think independently 5.5
21. reframe concepts 5.2
22. imagine alternatives 5.0
23. think outside the box 5.3
24. commit fully and follow through 5.3
25. engage with politics/your community 4.6
26. prepare for your career 4.6



#### Notes on the Senior Survey Data:

- Students rated 22 of the 26 abilities/skills as 5.0 or higher on the 7-point scale
- The highest rated abilities/skills were: f. communicate effectively; h. think critically; j. analyze media messages; k. collaborate/cooperate in a group or team; n. express yourself creatively; and t. think independently
- The lowest rated were: c. use technology; m. develop your creative potential; y. engage with politics/your community; and z. prepare for your career
- The data collected in the 2017 Senior Surveys showed a slight uptick in student ratings as compared to data from 2007 Senior Surveys, when students rated 20 of 26 abilities as 5.0 or higher on the same 7-point scale (as compared to 22 now)

### **Quantitative/Qualitative Data from Survey of Communication and Media Studies**

#### **Freshman (Fall 2017)**

##### **WHY DID YOU BECOME A COMS MAJOR?**

Help me get career I want (19)

Learn about the media (8)

Media/communication skills important in a lot of careers (2)

Relative/Friend is a Coms major (1)

Wasn't sure which major to take (1)

Pairing it with a business major degree (1)

An online quiz said I should be a Coms major (1)

Major is broad, and I'm not sure yet what I want to do (2)

##### **WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO GET OUT OF THE MAJOR?**

The knowledge/skills I need to be successful (12)

Public relations (4)

Radio/broadcasting skills (2)

Event planning/skills working with clients (1)

Expanding world view/knowledge (6)

Be a better communicator (public speaker) (7)

Writing skills (1)

Video editing skills (1)

##### **ARE THERE ANY COURSES NOT OFFERED YOU WOULD LIKE TO TAKE?**

Art (1)

Broadcast Journalism (3)

No (10)

Marketing (1)

Not sure (6)

Public Speaking (3)

Graphic Design (1)  
Photography (2)

DO YOU HAVE ANY GOALS YET FOR HOW YOU WOULD LIKE TO APPLY WHAT YOU LEARN TO POST-COLLEGE LIFE?

No (9)  
Good paying job (1)  
Broadcast Journalism (2)  
Film Industry (1)  
Sports media (1)  
Event Planning (1)  
Greater media awareness/skills (5)  
More confidence presenting/speaking (4)  
Public Relations (3)  
Advertising (2)  
Graphic design (1)

#### Assessment Conclusion

Though no changes to the curriculum have taken place yet during this review cycle, this is something that we will be evaluating in the near future as we consider a program revision. Additionally, we will be discussing plans to develop and change assessment strategies for the next program review, including an alumni survey. One issue that arises with assessment of Program Learning Outcomes is that this type of assessment is not the area of expertise of anyone in the department. Also, as always, with the high advising load, service requirements, and research expectations, faculty feel that they do not have the time to properly conduct effective assessment. More faculty support and guidance in assessment would be incredibly beneficial.

## Program Quality and Integrity

### Program Trends, Demand, and Graduation Rates

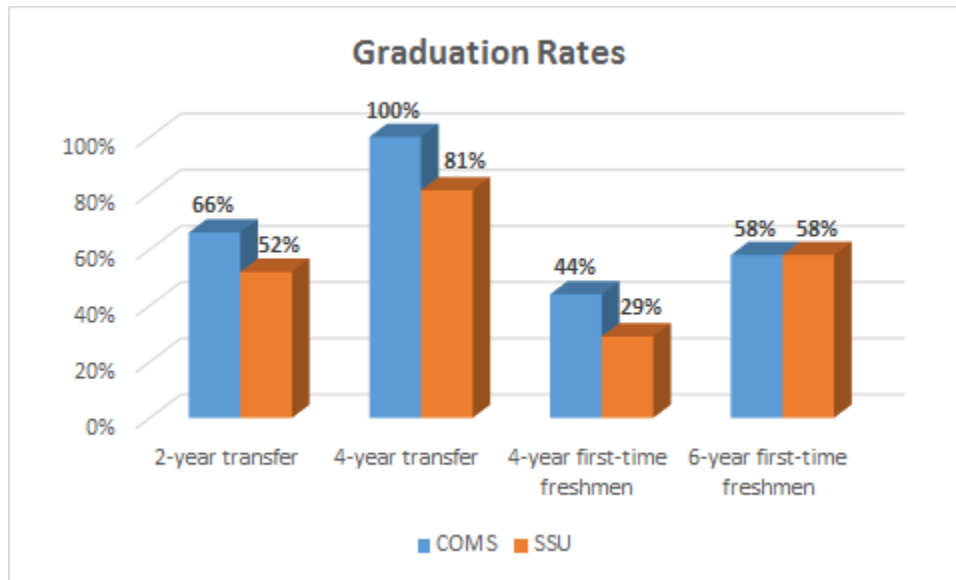
For the Communication and Media Studies discipline and industry as a whole, the ever-changing media environment, particularly the new media environment is difficult to keep up with. Ideally, the curriculum would be updated with all of the new media trends and communication technology, however, this is not realistic given how fast these changes occur and the workload that faculty have. Faculty do try their best to incorporate all of the changes in media and new media by keeping up with current research in the area.

Our numbers for new first-time freshmen (FTF) has increased over the past three years. From fall 2015 to fall 2017, our FTF have gone up 144%. Below is a breakdown of our new first-time freshmen and transfers over the past few years.

Semester	New First-time Freshmen	New Transfers from Outside SSU	New Change of Majors
Spring 2015	0	0	25
Fall 2015	27	32	26
Spring 2016	0	3	25
Fall 2016	43	31	21
Spring 2017	0	12	24
Fall 2017	66	23	19

One reason that our numbers have increased in the past few years is the perception that the main purpose of college is to get a career and our department has a relatively clear career path. Though this is not the department's view of college and its purpose, there is more societal pressure to have a job lined up right after graduation.

Below is a chart showing Communication and Media Studies graduation rates compared with the university's graduation rates. As indicated by this chart, the department's graduation rates are equal to or greater than the university's in all categories. Of particular note is the 100% 4-year graduation rate and the 66% 2-year graduation rate for transfer students, which shows the faculty's dedication to helping transfer students get into courses they need within the major. Additionally the department's 4-year first-time freshmen graduation rate is significantly higher than the university's. Part of this is due to the fact that in nearly every course, the number of students in the course has increased, even when it means that the course itself, classroom environment, and/or professors' workload suffers.



All of the Communication and Media Studies faculty are dedicated to helping the students to graduate in a timely manner. Given the department’s incredibly high advising ratio (72.8 to 1), it is impressive that our graduation rates are at this level in comparison to the University. The faculty in the department teach approximately twelve additional major courses during winter and summer session, which also allows students to take required courses. Oftentimes, students take these courses during winter and summer when they either cannot get into the courses during the semester or they want to try to get ahead in the major. The issue with this is the unwieldy price of courses during summer and winter session at Sonoma State University. Taking courses that cost nearly \$1500 each (including fees) should not be necessary to graduate in a timely manner.

Though our graduation rates are higher than Sonoma State University’s, there are always ways to improve these rates. One way would be to offer more sections of core courses that tend to create bottlenecks in the major. Another way that we could improve these rates is by having a smaller advising load, which would allow for more outreach with advisees. In order to do this, we need to hire more full-time tenure-track faculty to defer the advising load. Another option would be for the department to hire a professional advisor to specifically help Communication and Media Studies majors, which would take some of the advising burden away from faculty. One way that we could help with retention is to get students into core courses earlier in their academic careers. Right now, FTF majors take the FLC during their first year but many of them do not take another course in the major until the second semester of their sophomore year or later. Ideally, students would take the FLC during their first year, then take at least one course in the major each semester. The connection to the major earlier would potentially improve retention rates as students would be able to start taking courses directly related to their area of interest.

### Student Perceptions of the Program

With the addition of the Freshman Learning Courses, incoming freshmen have the opportunity to take a course within their major and with students who have similar interests to them. This allows for the development of a true cohort in which students tend to take many of the same core courses at the same time. This gives the students a sense of community and belonging within the department. It also allows them to get to know a faculty member in the department early in their academic careers which has implications for advising and timely graduation. Students in the department are friends with each other as they tend to have several courses with the same people during their time within the major at Sonoma State University.

After analyzing our assessment findings from Senior Projects, Course and Teaching Evaluations, Faculty Discussion, Senior Surveys, and Freshmen Surveys, the department created a list of statements that reflect the experiences, needs, and wants of our majors:

- Students think the curriculum could be updated more frequently to keep up with changes in media industries, technologies, and perspectives
- Students think the curriculum could be made more challenging
- Students want more and better teaching of writing in varied forms
- Students want better access to high-end technologies and more hands-on training
- Students want more variety of classes in media production skills
- Students want more sections of and access to the major's required core courses
- Students want easier access to and attention from their faculty academic advisors
- Students want more explicit focus on preparing for careers, including more department-sponsored activities/events geared toward media industry insights, connections, and professional development
- Students appreciate the smallness of their classes (when they are actually small), and the interaction with their professors
- Students enjoy learning how to analyze media
- Students appreciate the variety of classes and specialties in the major—the mix of the analytical/historical/theoretical and the practical skill/industry training they receive
- Students appreciate the hands-on semi-professional training and leadership skills they receive as part of their work with the media outlets (*The Star* newspaper, Primitivo PR, Studio Blue [formerly SSU-TV], and KSUN)
- Students appreciate the media internship experiences the major requires and facilitates
- Most students work at outside jobs during their time in the major
- Approximately half of the graduating seniors started at SSU as Communication and Media Studies majors, and about half changed their major while at SSU or transferred from another institution
- Most students demonstrate significant expertise when completing their capstone Senior Projects as graduating seniors, projects which run the gamut—from PR campaigns to short films, children's books to podcasts, research papers to non-profit start-up plans, advertising campaigns to blog

## Alumni Profile

The alumni in the department work in media and communication fields, such as journalism, marketing, public relations, radio, human resources, video production, graphic design, student affairs, and new media. While students are in the department, we do the best we can to help students achieve their goals personally, professionally, and academically. In an ideal world, students would take a course solely dedicated to preparing students for applying for jobs, practicing interviews, networking, etc. The department would also like to include more guest speakers and opportunities to network with media professionals, however, without a budget to do this, it is incredibly difficult to do. Currently, individual faculty keeps in touch with many alumni via LinkedIn and Facebook, however, as a department, we do not do much outreach with alumni. This is an area that we would like to improve upon as a department. Ideally, we would add students to a LinkedIn group while they are current students and this would allow us a venue to keep in touch with them. This would also give a venue to connect current and former students for networking, internships, informational interviews, etc. It would also give the faculty a great pool of guest speakers to draw upon.

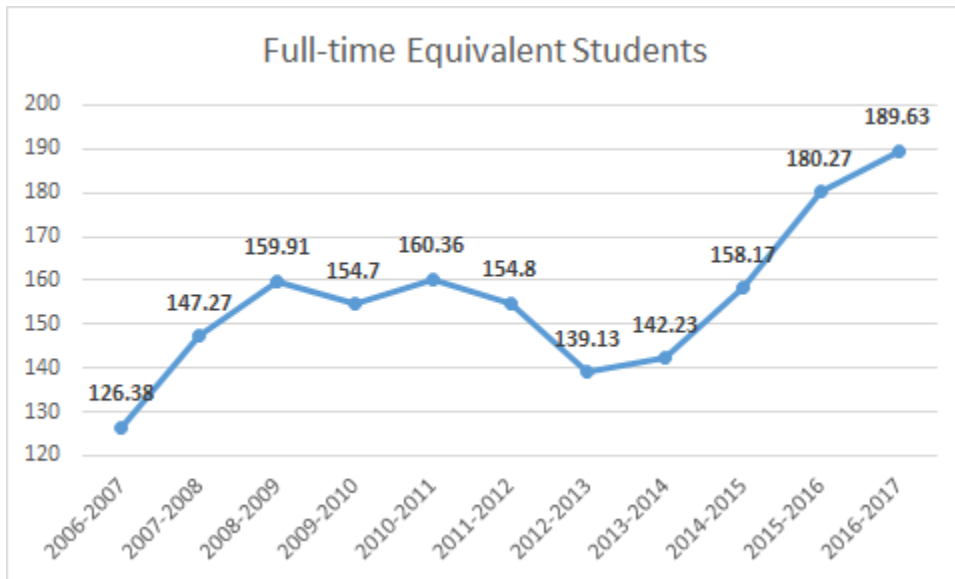
Below are two graphics produced by a former student indicating the types of careers and companies that our alumni work for based on LinkedIn research.



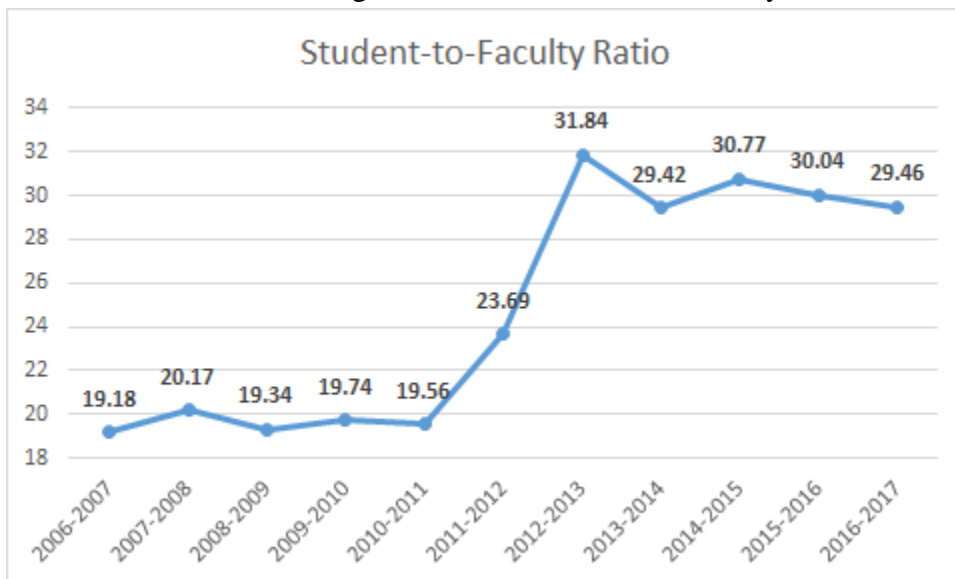
## Instruction, Advising, and Resources in the Program

### Instructional Data

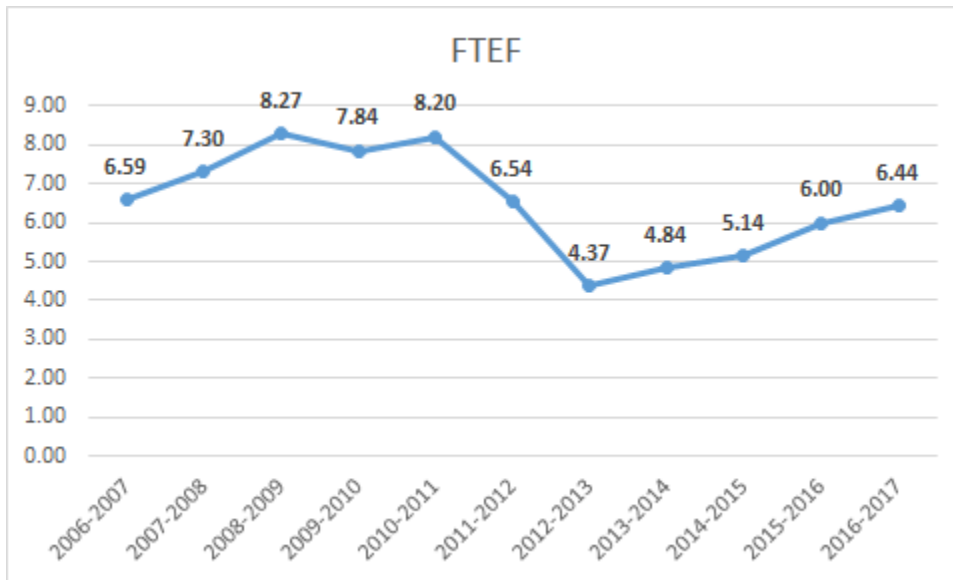
The Communication and Media Studies Full-time Equivalent Students (FTES) has been on an upward trajectory over the past 5 years. The department's current FTES is 50% higher than it was during the last program review cycle. As of 2016-2017, the department has the 17th highest FTES in the university.



The Communication and Media Studies student-to-faculty ratio (SFR) has hovered around 30 since the 2012-2013 school year. Since the last program review in 2008, the SFR has gone up 54%. As of 2016-2017, the department has the highest SFR in the School of Arts and Humanities and the 11th highest SFR in the entire university.



The Communication and Media Studies full-time equivalent faculty (FTEF) has decreased slightly since the last program review. The FTEF peaked over the past ten years during the 2010-2011 academic year and bottomed out during the 2012-2013 academic year. This does not tell the entire story as in 2008, the department had six full-time tenure-track faculty and now, the department has five. Only six departments have fewer tenure-track faculty than Communication and Media Studies and one of them is getting a hire this year, which will make us the 6<sup>th</sup> lowest in terms of number of tenure-track faculty. Despite the fact that since the last program review, our number of majors has increased by 13% and the amount of our GE teaching has increased from serving zero students to approximately 300 per year (this number will go up an additional 50 seats when we start teaching A1 courses next year), the FTEF in the department has not increased. Additionally, the FTEF below includes Melinda Barnard, who is teaching halftime as part of the Faculty Early Retirement Program (FERP) and Michael Litle who was part of the same program for five years and retired officially in spring 2017.



Taken together, these numbers indicate that the Communication and Media Studies FTES and SFR has risen steadily and are among the highest at the university. This combined with the decrease in the FTEF since the last program review indicates the need for a tenure-track hire in the department. Additionally, as indicated in the tables below, Communication and Media Studies majors account for 7.52% of all of the faculty within the School of Arts and Humanities yet accounts for 22.96% of all of the majors within the School.



Department	Number of Faculty	Percent of A&H
AMCS/NAMS	3.5	5.26%
ART	8.5	12.78%
CALS	3	4.51%
<b>COMS</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7.52%</b>
ENGL	10.5	15.79%
HUTCHINS	9	13.53%
MLL	7	10.53%
MUS	9	13.53%
PHIL	4.5	6.77%
THAR	6.5	9.77%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>66.5</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Department	Number of Majors	Percent of A&H
AMCS/NAMS	33	2.09%
ART	161	10.21%
CALS	31	1.97%
<b>COMS</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>22.96%</b>
ENGL	297	18.83%
HUTCHINS	320	20.29%
MLL	127	8.05%
MUS	96	6.09%
PHIL	82	5.20%
THAR	74	4.69%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1585</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

### Advising

Communication and Media Studies is an impacted major. Each year, we have approximately 60-70 incoming freshmen; 24 students who are granted acceptance into the major from other majors at SSU; and 30 students who transfer from other universities. Students who apply from other majors at SSU must complete an application and are awarded entrance into the major based on GPA, previous experience and courses in Communication & Media Studies, and the quality of their essay. Students are encouraged to see faculty for both major and General Education advising at least once per semester. Faculty also engage in advising for prospective majors, graduating seniors, transfer students, and incoming freshmen. Faculty advisors are

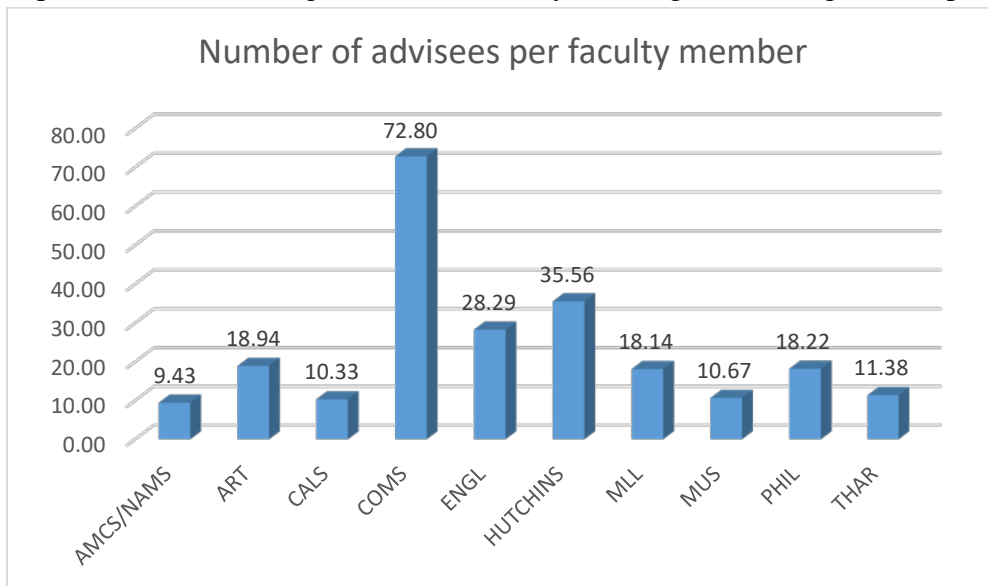
diligent in providing advising to students based on area of interests, professional aspirations, and desired graduation date.

Though there are no official concentrations in Communication and Media Studies, students are made aware early which courses they should take in order to pursue careers in their desired media industry. Several Communication and Media Studies students study abroad each year through the CSU International Programs, private study-abroad programs, and the National Student Exchange. We work with these students to ensure that as many of their courses will count for the major and General Education requirements to minimize graduation delays.

Faculty advisors currently have approximately 90 advisees each semester, which is the highest advising load across campus. This large advising load requires a significant amount of time in addition to teaching, research, and other service responsibilities. Students are divided up alphabetically and assigned to an advisor based on last name in order to maintain roughly equal advising loads between the faculty members. Much of the time during bi-weekly departmental meetings is dedicated to discussing advising issues and discussing ways to improve advising and course offerings to better fit students' needs. All faculty follow the university guidelines on office hours and offer additional hours of office hours during graduation application deadlines and registration times. There is also an Arts and Humanities undergraduate advisor, Donna Garbesi, who sees Communication and Media Studies students for General Education advising. Many of the students also visit the Peer Advising Center, especially when asking specific questions about which GE courses or professors might best fit their learning styles. Though the Degree Planner and Seawolf Scheduler have both been rolled out in the past few years-we have had little to no training on how to use these tools in PeopleSoft, therefore, we rely heavily on the Academic Requirements Report (ARR) when advising students. Though we are technically absolved from advising duties over breaks, many of faculty advisors in the department will respond to emails regarding advising questions over breaks which is a benefit to the students.

Below is the number of advisees per tenure-track faculty member for all majors within Arts and Humanities. The number of advisees in Communication and Media Studies is actually 91 advisees per faculty member as the most recent hire is protected from departmental advising for her first year. Approximately 90 advisees per faculty member has been the average since fall 2013 when Emily Acosta Lewis, our 4th tenure-track faculty, was hired. However, the numbers below will be accurate starting in fall 2018. In the entire university, the department ranks second in terms of the advising load (second to only Psychology faculty who have 74 advisees each). When not factoring in our most recent hire who is protected from advising, our number of advisees is 20% higher than Psychology and is the highest in the entire university. In the previous program review in 2008, the number of advisees per faculty member was 57, which was 35% higher than the next highest department in Arts and Humanities. Now, the department is at 73 advisees which is 28% more advisees than we had in 2008 and 108% higher than the next highest department in Arts and Humanities. It is also 25% higher than during the last program review. Additionally, Hutchins has a half-time advisor exclusively for their program, which makes these numbers even more skewed. If you factor in that the newest hire is

not doing departmental advising yet, the number of advisees is 150% higher than the next highest department and 59% higher than the faculty advising load during the last program review.



#### Adequacy of Faculty to Maintain Program Quality

As indicated by the above data, the advising load, SFR, and FTES are high while the FTEF is low. This shows that the Communication and Media Studies Department is understaffed. Of particular note is the lack of tenure-track faculty (only six departments have fewer tenure-track faculty) given that the department has the 8th highest number of majors in the university, the 2nd highest advising load, and the 11th highest Student to Faculty Ratio (SFR) yet our Full-time Equivalent Faculty (FTEF) is at 6.44. The faculty workload can get unmanageable at times when one is doing this much advising, while also teaching a full course load with overenrolled courses, and engaging in campus and community service. Certainly with this amount of work, it makes it difficult to conduct research, engaged in creative activities, do assessment, develop new courses or revise existing courses, participate in professional development opportunity, engage undergraduate students in research, and conduct service-learning projects. All of our faculty have done a masterful job balancing all of these different areas and many of them do engage in “optional” activities, such as community-based learning, professional development, and undergraduate research. More institutional support in terms of tenure-track faculty would raise the profile of the department, serve the students better with smaller classes and more sections of required courses, increase graduation rates, and better prepare students for careers and graduate programs.

### Student Support Resources

Though faculty in the Communication and Media Studies Department support their students in any way that they need, there could be more resources on campus to support our students, particularly regarding career resources. For the size of our university, a 1-2 person Career Services Center is far too small. Additionally, the faculty spend countless hours each semester coaching students on resumes, cover letters, interviewing, job searching, etc. It would be helpful if they were able to get this information from someone who is trained in this area and who has this as an area of expertise.

The vast majority of our students participate in freshman or transfer orientation. Emily Acosta Lewis has been the lead Arts and Humanities faculty advisor for summer orientation therefore all incoming freshmen get advising from someone in the department, which helps to start their SSU career on the right foot. Additionally, the faculty in the department work together to help with transfer orientation. The department saves seats for transfer students in courses so they get as many required courses as possible during their first semester, which expedites their graduation. As far orientation as a whole, many transfer students feel that their orientation programming is not adequate to prepare them to adapt to coming to Sonoma State University. However, the new Center for Transfer and Transition Programs might fill the gap in this area.

Considering the number of our students who struggle with food and housing insecurity, the university does not have enough financial resources available. Sonoma State University needs to do more to support our students in this regard, particularly with the housing crisis in the area. This ties into adding more support services for first-generation, low-income, and under-represented students. Though there is a more concerted effort to support these students on campus since Dr. Sakaki became President, there is always more that we can do to support our students and help them to succeed in college and beyond.

Many of our faculty engage in community-based learning and help to facilitate internships in the community. The Center for Community Engagement has been an invaluable resource to those in the department to help support the community-based learning that we engage in. Since the School of Arts and Humanities has added an Internship Coordinator, the person in that position has really helped our students and supported the department in facilitating internships in the Bay Area.

### Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Learning Experiences

The core courses consist of six courses that are required for all students in the major. These courses are arguably the most important courses in the curriculum and lay the foundation for all of the other courses within the major. There are eight courses listed below because students either need to take COMS 160A/B or COMS 200 and COMS 162A/B or COMS 202. With the addition of the freshman learning community, it has allowed Communication and Media Studies freshmen to start taking courses in the major from the first semester of their freshman year while also building a cohort of incoming students with similar interests. Students must complete 200 and 202 prior to taking 301, 302, and 402. Generally first-time freshmen take

either 160A/B or 162A/B during their first semester and then take either 200 or 202 during their sophomore year and then proceed to taking 301 and 302 during their junior or senior years. Students must take 402 during their senior year as it is the capstone senior seminar course. Students can take 499 at any point during their studies, though since this is an internship course, it is often taken by juniors or seniors. Though students do not take courses in the exact same order or in the same semesters, Communication and Media Studies students do often take several classes with the same sets of students therefore creating a close-knit group of students, if not a true cohort.

The core curriculum is designed to give students a broad historical, theoretical, ethical, legal, and analytical background in all types of media. The core courses touch on many different areas within the media which often helps students to decide what specific area within the media they may be interested in pursuing further by taking skills, outlet, and elective courses. Even for students who do not ultimately pursue a career in media, they learn how to be more critical consumers of media messaging and be more aware of the influence that the media has on their everyday lives, ideals, and values.

All tenure-track faculty teach at least one course within the core curriculum. This allows most of the Communication and Media Studies students to take at least one course from each of the tenure-track faculty members during their academic careers, which allows students to form a connection with most, if not all tenure-track faculty members.

Skills courses are meant to be hands-on courses where students learn specific skills in various areas within the media. As the media has converged, the department has modified its skill sequence to allow students to take courses in the skills that they are most interested in. This is in line with the fact that in future careers, many students will be expected to know different skills and not just know about one area, such as radio production. For example, students who are interested in a public relations career can also take video production classes, which will make them more marketable when searching for a career. They will be able to bring not only strong writing skills and insight on the strategic side of communications, but will also be able to create and edit videos which will be beneficial for their future career. In the previous version of our program requirements, students got more depth in one area, with the skills courses, students can still get that depth if they want or they can choose to get breadth in many different areas (new media, radio, video, etc.). They can also get depth in one area and still get introductory skills in other areas. This allows students to have more freedom over the skills that they obtain while being students in these courses.

Each of these courses is based in hands-on experience to develop skills in the given area. These are not classes where students are lectured to or where they learn about theoretical ideas. These classes are meant for students to learn practical skills related to the area of course. For example, in COMS 201 (Video Production), students who have no experience with video production will leave the class learning how to create and edit a video from scratch.

The Department of Communication and Media Studies is unique in that it offers students the opportunity to actively participate in student-run media outlets. Students are generally

upperclassmen when they take these courses, however, occasionally underclassmen who show a particular interest or who has strong skills in an area take those courses sooner. The media outlets include a student-run newspaper, radio station, public relations firm, and film/video production. These media outlets allow for students to get experience in many different aspects of the outlet in which they are interested. For example, students in COMS 368 (The Star) rotate between different areas within the newspaper. They may work with sports for part of the semester and then rotate to arts and entertainment for another part of the semester. Additionally, in COMS 369 (Studio Blue), to give students a wide range of video production experiences as well as develop their teamwork and leadership skills. Students have the opportunity to work in one of several activity groups, which often includes short film, campus news, and live streaming and production. Students make their own decisions about what kind of projects they want to pursue. They often partner with other organizations on campus. Past partnerships have included Associated Students, Theater Arts, Music, and the Wine Business program. COMS 385 (KSUN) offers students the opportunity to create and broadcast live over the air in a replicated professional radio station setting. Students hone skills in public speaking, artful creation of show prep, microphone technique skills including interviews and discussion, production skills including imaging, branding, commercials, music and podcast, marketing and advertising with local businesses, and convergence of old media with social media. Students can also take on leadership roles and develop skills in management. Students in COMS 340 (PR Firm) are given the opportunity to work with a non-profit client on a public relations project. The two student general managers present mini-lessons, book guest speakers, recruit clients, and help to oversee student work. Students in the course are put into groups to balance strengths, weaknesses, and skills and are assigned to work with 1 or 2 clients for the entire semester on a public relations issue such as research, planning and programming, communication, or evaluation. Below are the course descriptions for each of the four outlets.

Students are required to take 8 units of elective credit within the major. Depending on the students' interests, the electives are meant to allow students to take courses to get more breadth or depth within mass communications. The electives allow students to take courses that will help deepen their knowledge within an area that they know they want to pursue or to learn more about other areas in the media that they are interested in. Many of the elective courses are more theoretical and analytical in nature rather than hands-on like our skills and outlet courses. Students have the option to take the stand-alone courses below, an additional internship (COMS 499), an additional media outlet, or an additional skills course. COMS 273 and 275 also count for General Education credit. COMS 160 A/B and COMS 162 A/B also give students elective credit as they are year-long courses that include a semester of a core course and a semester of an elective course.

In every Communication and Media Studies course, there are written, oral, and multimedia communication assignments, which is one of our PLOs. Additionally, all faculty believe in fostering a collaborative learning environment and giving students the opportunity to learn with and from each other, which is another one of our PLOs. Many of the core courses and

all of the media outlet courses include group activities and assignments. The PLO that sets our program apart from others is experiential learning. All of our skills and media outlet courses include an experiential learning assignments and activities. This gives our students hands-on experience practicing specific skills related to the media industry they want to pursue. For example, in Introduction to Public Relations (COMS 240), students get practice writing press releases, creating collateral, producing editorial calendars, etc. which are all valuable skills for pursuing a career in public relations. Additionally, many of our courses are service-learning courses, meaning that they use service as a tool of teaching in the classroom. In both COMS 240 and COMS 340 (Primitivo Public Relations), students work with a non-profit community or campus client. In doing so, not only does the student gain valuable experience, but the community partner also receives help with a public relations project or issue.

### Curriculum Comparison

Three comparable institutions in terms of size and mission to Sonoma State are Chico State, San Jose State, and CSU East Bay. Chico State's Journalism and Public Relations Department, CSU East Bay's Communication Department, and San Jose State's School of Journalism and Mass Communication are comparable in terms of goals, mission, and curriculum. All three of these programs are similar to ours in that a primary goal is giving students hands-on experience in the media industry that they wish to pursue. Chico State's program is similar to ours in that they have a student-run PR firm and newspaper, however, they do not have a student-run radio station or video production outlet housed in the department. Chico State does have a student-run radio station but it is housed in Associated Students and is not linked to an academic program. San Jose State's School of Journalism and Mass Communication is similar to our program in that it has public relations and journalism courses, however it does not have video production or radio production courses. It does have advertising courses, which is not something we offer at Sonoma State University. CSU East Bay's program is the most dissimilar to our program from comparable institutions as it is part a media department and part a traditional communication studies department, including such courses as argumentation and debate and group communication. It has two different tracks-media production or professional public and organizational communication. The media production track is similar to our major in that it gives students hands-on experience in various media industry skills, however, it only has a 2-unit public relations course, and students are required to take courses in writing and video production, whereas our students get to choose what areas they want to pursue.

Though none of the comparable institutions have a Communication, Media, Journalism, or Mass Communication department that is exactly like ours, they do have similar components and offer some similar courses. Each of the comparable institutions structures their coursework differently and none of the departments have journalism, public relations, radio, and video production in one department. Of the three institutions, only Chico State's Journalism and PR

Department includes student learning outcomes. Many of their student learning outcomes match up with our PLOs, including the following:

- Apply professional standards and ethical practice of journalism and public relations.
- Understand the history, purpose and relevance of the First Amendment and media law, including privacy, libel, copyright, intellectual property and freedom of information.
- Create audience-appropriate content by conducting research via digital channels, interviewing, fact-checking, writing across multiple platforms and engaging audiences with visual tools.
- Professionally package and transmit information via current and emerging technologies and work as part of a team in producing such work.

Communication and Media Studies departments vary greatly in name, curriculum, focus, courses, and learning outcomes. Therefore, many wrongly group all communications programs into the same category when they are vastly different ranging from those that focus on media, rhetoric, persuasion, interpersonal communication, organizational communication, journalism and mass communication, and various others. However, even within those that focus on these various areas, there are vastly different ways to teach these areas with some programs focusing on more practical skills and others focusing on more theoretical skills. The Communication and Media Studies Department at Sonoma State University prides itself on a balance of theoretical knowledge and experiential learning. Rather than leaning too heavily on one area, we believe that it is important to have a combination of both types of knowledge when graduating from our program.

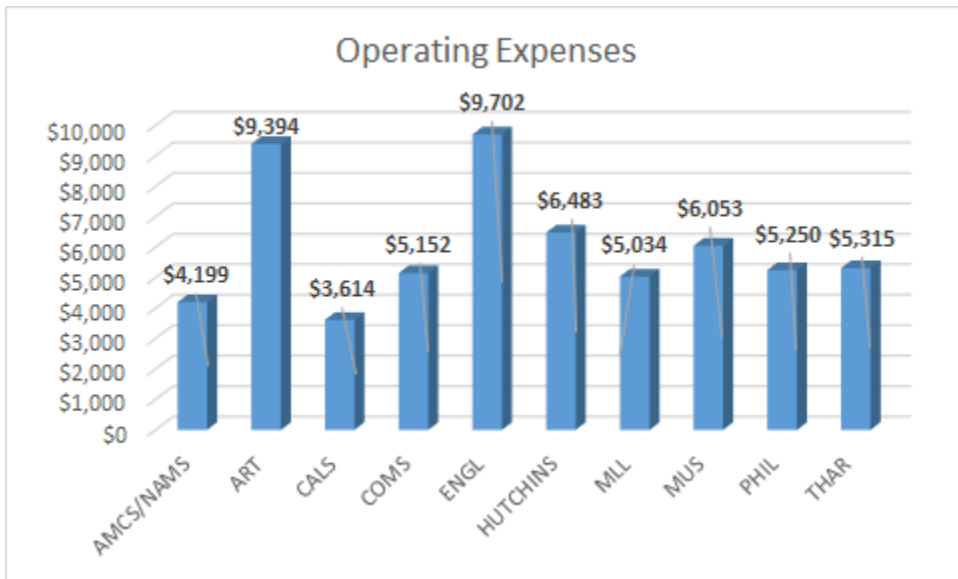
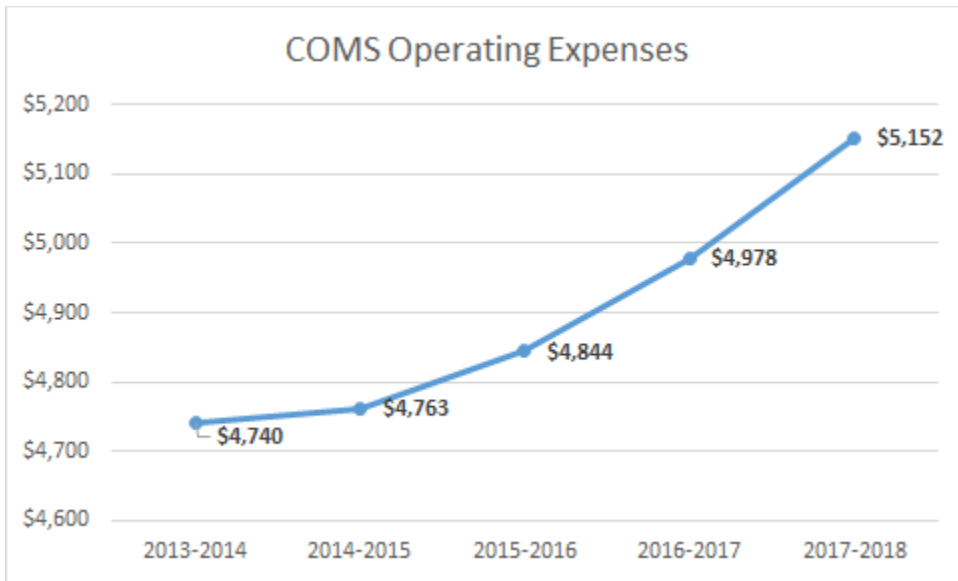
### Institutional Resources

Our administrative staff support is sufficient as our AC, Shelly Stephens, does an outstanding job balancing the different areas of the department while also supporting faculty and students. She does not have an easy job given that she helps to manage four media outlets with their own funding and spaces; helps to process paperwork related to internships, graduation applications, and course substitutions in one of the biggest majors on campus. Adding a professional advisor would certainly increase graduation and retention rates, while also lowering the faculty advising load to a more manageable number. Given the incredibly high advising ratios in the department, this seems like the easiest and best fix to help alleviate some of the workload issues of the faculty in the department.

The Department of Communication and Media Studies receives an operating expense account as an academic department in the School of Arts and Humanities. This is based upon a formula of number of students enrolled in courses and the number of faculty teaching. The number of majors in a department and the number of degrees granted in a department are not taken into consideration in these formulas. The graph below illustrates that the department's' operating expense money has increased over the past five years but only nominally. Additionally, the average amount of money received in other departments in Arts and



Humanities is \$6,020, which is 16% higher than the current operating expense budget despite the fact that we have the highest number of major.



The library and information resources available on this campus are generally sufficient for the needs of the department and when not sufficient, Interlibrary Loan provides the relevant articles or books. The adequacy of technological resources in support of pedagogy is oftentimes enough, however, there are times when we cannot get courses scheduled in smart classrooms with the ability to close windows or block out light. This is often necessary when screening movies or showing online videos, which are often used as a tool for teaching and is especially relevant in our department. The video production classes often do not have enough camera equipment to supply cameras with all students taking the courses. Additionally, the motherboard in the KSUN lab often breaks down and we do not have the funds to fix it. Though Moodle as an online learning management system has its flaws, it is used widely throughout the department. With regards to technology resources for research and scholarship, our department feels that we are mostly supported in this area. The only exception is when one wants to conduct research with a software program that Sonoma State University does not have a license to. In those cases, faculty have had to apply for internal or external grants to fund this software. Ideally, there would be funds to buy such specialty software programs.

In terms of the adequacy of instructional space and facilities, it has become clear to the department that a centralized hub for the media outlets would be the best way to serve the students and the convergence of the media environment. Currently, KSUN is housed in Ives, the Star is housed in Salazar, Studio Blue is in Stevenson, and Primitivo is in a temporary library space. None of the spaces (except for Studio Blue) can accommodate the entire class in the designated lab or studio space. As such, the intention of teaching in the space so that students can do work in a lab or studio setting is not possible. In addition, Stevenson Hall (where Studio Blue is housed) will undergo a major renovation in the next two to three years, leaving video production without a home. Ideally, there would be one space that can accommodate all four media outlets and that would be large enough for each course to hold class in there. This would allow students from the different areas to work with each other, learn from each other, use the same equipment and software, and for there to be collaboration between the outlets. It should also be noted that the classroom 1052 Salazar was assigned to COMS as a dedicated lab space more than 15 years ago. However, with increased enrollment and a shortage of space on campus, more departments are now being allowed to use the classroom, which limits its effectiveness as a lab.

In terms of office spaces, recently the main department office was moved to the other side of Nichols Hall. Previously, our administrative coordinator and the department office was housed right next to the faculty offices, which allowed for easier collaboration and communication. Though across the building does not seem like far, there are times when one faculty member is in her office and students come to faculty offices and see that our door is closed and then leave (even though we're across the building). Additionally, though our department has the largest number of majors in Arts and Humanities, our department office is the smallest in terms of square footage. Our department office is housed in a space that was currently used mostly for storage. We are hoping to get a new tenure-track faculty hire in the next few years and there are no office spaces

near the other faculty offices to fit that person. In the most ideal situation, the four media outlets would have their own media center and the faculty and department offices would also be moved to that new location.

## **Summary Conclusion**

### Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities

During this process, the Department of Communication and Media Studies has had the opportunity to reflect on its program requirements, curriculum, pedagogy, faculty, and students. This has allowed us to start identifying program strengths and areas for growth while also thinking about the future direction of the department with our current tenure-track faculty and regular lecturers.

One of the biggest strengths of the department is giving students practical and hands-on experience in their media areas of interest. The current coursework and internship requirement gives students a plethora of experiential learning opportunities while they are still students. Another strength that we have as a department is our advising and graduation rates, which are related to each other. Though our advising load is incredibly high, we do a lot of outreach with our students in order to help them graduate in a timely manner. Additionally, with the department teaching an additional 12 course each summer and winter session, it allows students to get ahead in the major or take courses that they cannot get into during the academic year. This improves graduation rates as well. Another major strength of the department is achieving our PLOs and making sure that students graduate with proficiency in the PLOs outlined in this document. However, there are other PLOs that we would like to include and cannot because of workload issues regarding assessment, advising, service, and research commitments.

One of the biggest weaknesses in the department is the lack of tenure-track faculty. Ideally, students would have the vast majority of their courses with tenure-track faculty. Course sizes have increased over the past ten years which has changed the learning environment quite dramatically. If we had more tenure-track faculty, it would also decrease our advising ratios which would allow for more outreach and better access to advisors, and would increase the number of courses we could teach. Both of these things would increase graduation rates and perhaps allow us to let more people into the major. Another area that is a weakness of ours is the lack of diversity of students and faculty. We should do more outreach in order to address this problem.

Another area that the department could improve on is assessment. Though we are hoping to do more of this in the immediate future, the fact is that assessment tends to be a low priority in comparison to teaching, service, creative activities, research, and advising. On a related note, the department has always wanted to do more outreach with alumni, but again, finding the time to do this has been a problem.

### Plans for the Future

As illustrated above, we have some areas that we would like to improve as a department. As such, the Communication and Media Studies Department has come up with a plan for the future of the department. That plan includes the following: a new tenure-track position, recruiting more diverse faculty and staff, creating more assessment, more alumni outreach and networking, a

program revision, and revising our mission statement and RTP policy. Below, there are more details about each of these initiatives and how each would drastically improve our department.

#### *New Tenure-track Position*

Since the last program review in 2008, SFR has increased 54%, the number of majors has increased by 13%, the advising load in the department has gone up 25%, the number of students in courses has increased, the amount of GE seats has increased from zero to approximately 300 per year, however, the FTEF in the department has not increased (and has even fact decreased slightly). Furthermore, as indicated above, the FTEF does not tell the entire story as we have had more part-time lecturers and two faculty participating in FERP. As such, the department feels like we need a new full-time tenure-track hire. In accordance with the changing media and new media environment as well as the request from students to have more access to faculty advisors, more classes in media production skills, and better access to high-end technologies, we feel that a hire in digital media and technology would be the best fit for the department. This faculty member would have a primary specialty in digital media with a secondary specialty in digital storytelling, podcasting, social media and mobile communication, or writing for digital and social media.

#### *More Diverse Faculty and Students*

In accordance with the current administration's focus on diversity and Sonoma State University's new status as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), the department will continue to try to recruit more diverse faculty and students. As more resources and grants are used to develop the university's status as a HSI, the population at the university will become more diverse which will allow the department to recruit from a more diverse pool of students. The department could also do more outreach with EOP students and the first-generation living-learning community. Additionally, as the department is given the opportunity to hire more tenure-track faculty and when we recruit for our lecturer pool, the department will continue to actively seek out candidates who are from diverse backgrounds.

#### *Create More Assessment*

One area that the department would like to improve is assessment. Though the faculty in the department rely on SETEs and generally have high SETEs, the department knows that it needs to do more in terms of assessment. The department will continue to do freshman and senior surveys of majors in order to capture their experiences and expectations, however, it should do more during their entire college careers. The department will continue to examine the best way to do this within courses and at all grade levels. The students are of the utmost importance to us and the department wants to make sure that we are meeting their needs and expectations. Currently, Emily Acosta Lewis and Ed Beebout are developing an alumni survey that will serve multiple purposes. One, is to find out how the department prepared students for careers and graduate schools. Second, is to determine what the faculty can do differently to better prepare students including which courses were most useful, which courses could use improvement, and which ones were least useful. Additionally, in the survey, we ask alumni about the types of jobs and industries

that they are working in, their job titles, salaries, etc. This will allow us to compile more data about where our alumni are going and how to best maintain relationships with them.

#### *Alumni Outreach, Networking, and Guest Speaking*

One finding of the assessment data is that students want more access to industry professionals as guest speakers and for networking opportunities. The department has received two grants over the past two years to fund bringing outside speakers in. One was the CSU Entertainment Alliance Grant (\$4,975) and the other was the Arts and Humanities Innovation and Strategic Priorities Funding Award (\$6,000). Both awards have allowed the department to bring in industry guest speakers from out of the area that it normally would not be able to afford. The department will continue to look for internal and external funding for such speakers. However, the department plans to also start doing more outreach with alumni via LinkedIn. The department is in the process of creating a Communication and Media Studies alumni group which will allow all of our alumni and current students access to each other. This will allow current students to reach out to alumni for informational interviews, internship opportunities, and networking. It will also allow the department to gain access to alumni for guest speaking opportunities. Additionally, as part of the alumni survey, we ask if alumni are interested in guest speaking, teaching, or networking with current students.

#### *Program Revision*

This process has allowed the department to reflect on the needs, wants, and future of the department both from a faculty and student perspective. As such, ideally during the next 1-2 years, we will do another overhaul of our courses and program in order to incorporate new faculty's specialties and keep up with the ever-changing media environment. By the time we finish the next program review, it will have been approximately 10 years since our last program revision. With the additional GE teaching in the department, the upcoming addition of A1 teaching, and more assessment on coursework from alumni, we feel that it would be worthwhile to re-evaluate each of our courses and make sure that we are best serving the needs of our students by preparing them for careers in the media and to be critical consumers of media messages.

#### *Update Mission Statement, Four-year Plan, and Reappointment, Tenure, and Promotion Criteria*

During the process of writing the program review, it was clear that the Mission Statement needed a major overhaul. Rather than rush trying to get it done as part of this review, the department has decided to work on that in the coming months. Also while working on this program review, it was determined that our four-year plan that is currently published could be revised to be more useful for students. It may even be worthwhile to publish different versions of the plan depending on students' area of interest.

Additionally, there was a misinterpretation of the department's RTP criteria at the School level. This has led the department to believe that we need to revise and make clearer the expectations related to RTP. The goal is to modify this document within the next year and well-before our new tenure-track hire is up for promotion.

## Appendix

### External Reviewer Report

Susan Wiesinger, Ph.D. Chair / professor  
Department of Journalism & Public Relations  
California State University, Chico

#### Introduction

This report is based on the following:

- COMS self study, 2018
- Site visit April 2 & 3, 2018
- Review of COMS website and curriculum

During my site visit I met with four tenured / tenure-track faculty members (Ed Beebout, chair, Liz Burch, Emily Acosta Lewis and Talena Sanders), two lecturers (Hillary Homzie and Kerry Rego), COMS AC Shelly Stephens, student leaders from all four media outlets, School of Arts & Humanities Dean Thaine Stearns and Sonoma State AVP of Academic Resources Elias Lopez.

The COMS self-study report provides an overview of a remarkably effective, efficient department, despite significant resource-related issues. The COMS faculty clearly have a strong grasp on their strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.

I was particularly impressed with the collegiality of the faculty and the respect their students hold for them. This is a small, engaged faculty that prides itself on student success. I enjoyed my time at Sonoma State and have learned a great deal about the strengths and weaknesses of my own program through study of theirs. Thank you for this opportunity.

Please note: All observations herein come from the perspective of a professor in the skills- based Department of Journalism and Public Relations at Chico State, which has eight full- time faculty members and 275 majors and minors. We also teach 9 to 12 sections of the GE A2 foundation course, along with four other GE classes each semester. Our program is separate from Communication Studies, which teaches all A1 foundation courses, and Media Arts, Design & Technology, which houses broadcasting, media criticism and graphic design.

Rather than summarizing parts of the well-structured and comprehensive COMS self-study report, I will focus my recommendations across seven areas:

- I. Resources and the Addition of GE A1**
- II. Faculty Professional Development & Program Representation**
- III. Curriculum Review & Student Perspectives**
- IV. Diversity & Inclusion**
- V. Internship Supervision & Academic Advising**
- VI. Support of and Dedicated Space for Media Outlets**
- VII. Directions for the Future**

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## I. Resources and the Addition of GE A1

Participating in GE A1 is mentioned as a *possibility* in the COMS self-study report, including the addition of two oral communication sections – 50 seats – in the 2019-2020 academic year. At this point COMS has submitted a course proposal to teach one major- centric section of the A1 course. The COMS report points to the A1 participation as a choice that the department will make, based on “a sufficient commitment of support and funding from the university that protects both the media-based focus of COMS and the education experience of students within the major.”

My conversations with Dean Stearns and AVP Lopez, however, indicate the *probability* that COMS will be teaching 8 to 10 sections of the course *per semester* beginning in fall 2019, to meet the A1 needs of the entire university and bring Sonoma State into compliance with [CSU EO 1100](#).

From an FTE perspective, this would be a boon to the department and school. COMS FTES was roughly 190 during the 2016-2017 academic year. Adding 8 to 10 sections of an A1 speech course in the 2019-2020 academic year would likely push COMS toward 300 FTES per academic year.

That said, the increase would only be possible if the program could mount the A1 courses in addition to its current offerings. If existing courses must be cut to staff the university- wide need for A1 courses, then COMS FTES would stagnate and degree progress would inevitably be slowed for COMS majors. As one of the largest majors at the university, the impact could be significant.

From a funding perspective, COMS absorbing A1 instruction would be a burden to both the department and school, as 25-student lower-division GE courses are expensive to teach – particularly if tenured / tenure-track faculty must be placed in the A1 classroom. With current staffing and barring a resource commitment from the university, that outcome is likely and would significantly burden and reshape the department.

COMS currently has five tenured / tenure-track faculty members and one FERP participant, which is minimal, at best, for a university program with 380 majors. Student- faculty ratio alone indicates a strong need for at least one new faculty member to deliver instruction in the major. That addition would maintain the status quo, not allow this large, successful program to progress and innovate.

It’s also important to note that COMS is not a traditional communication studies program with an integrated speech com component; it effectively is a journalism and PR program with communications in its name. Faculty members are largely focused on teaching applied skills for Web and print journalism, public relations, and radio, audio and video production, with related theory components in media criticism, ethics, and law. Between teaching and advising – both academic advising and advising four media outlets – the present faculty is spread very thin.



In a perfect world, COMS would be allocated two hires: One to focus exclusively on teaching in the major and one to plan, coordinate, staff, and teach sections of the A1 foundation course. Both represent immediate needs. A tenure-track hire that is not focused on A1 will handicap the program as it attempts to meet the needs of the entire university; a hire that brings primarily speech communication expertise to COMS will add little to the department's skills-focused base.

There's an additional ripple here, which is the immediate need for COMS to hire a new adviser to the Sonoma State Star newspaper. Paul Gullixson has advised the Star for the past five years as a side gig to his job as editorial director for The Press Democrat in Santa Rosa. He now has left the newspaper and started a new job at Sonoma State, which precludes his participation with the student publication.

Given the pressing need to add both a news adviser and someone to coordinate the GE A1 course, I suggest that COMS be provided the resources to make a full-time hire in the fall of 2018. Someone who is more of a professional-in-residence than a tenure-track faculty member might best serve the program's present needs. Ideally this person would have extensive, current newsroom experience, as well as a master's degree from a speech com-focused program. This is a realistic expectation, as current media turmoil has pushed many journalists toward academia. This person's explicit assignment could be teaching at least one of the initial A1 sections that will be offered in the 2018-2019 academic year, advising the Star, staffing and coordinating the new A1 program, and academic advising.

A professional-in-residence hire does not preclude a tenure-track hire, search for which could be held in 2018-2019 and the successful candidate could start in fall 2019. COMS clearly has significant need for a hire to start in fall 2018 and the above plan supports that. I do recommend that a solid, contemporary media skills background be included as a job requirement with both hires for reasons explained in the following section.

## **II. Faculty Professional Development & Program Representation**

One of the primary challenges of a media studies program is the rapid and continuous change in media industries. Much of this is driven by technological innovation and corporate ownership, which have effectively eroded the traditional media business model. As a result, it is critical that students leaving COMS are well prepared for the industries they will enter. Students must have a strong enough foundational skill set to allow them to be creative, flexible, adaptable, and resilient in the face of rapid technological and social change.

The information under the COMS mission statement online points to faculty professional development as a priority:

The COMS Department strives to improve faculty teaching and training by:

- Supporting faculty who adopt and learn new technologies.
- Encouraging faculty to teach new classes and to keep pace with changes in the communications media field.
- Sending faculty members to conferences, festivals and workshops.
- Hiring faculty members who work in the communications industries.
- Rewarding research, scholarship and creative projects.

The faculty I met with pointed to the program's greatest need as more faculty to teach and advise, but excessive class sizes for skills classes and lagging technology skills also were clear themes.

Students echoed the latter theme, noting that most faculty are not up-to-date with industry standards or emerging technologies. For example, the Star remains a print-centric, broadsheet, weekly publication in a world that long ago embraced smaller page sizes and the daily digital. The editor-in-chief said she viewed the online edition as a burden, as she is the only person who posts to it. Star staffers do not use social media to promote stories and breaking news. The Star, while a quality publication that showcases strong work, seems a bit stuck in 2008.

Students said they did not feel prepared for industry demands because they have not been focused on foundational industry skills, such as social media management, basic coding, copyediting, visual presentation, photography, strategic communication, and entrepreneurship. The students are not required to learn foundational media skills, such as adhering to Associated Press Style. Recent alumni have shared with students that their core skill sets were lacking when they went on the job market.

In short, faculty professional development does not appear to have been responsive to industry trends and needs. Part of the problem returns to resource allocation: Faculty frequently teach year-round because they must – the cost of living in the area renders academic year pay inadequate. This need for 12-month teaching means that faculty cannot use traditional academic “down time” – winter and summer breaks – to refresh their skills and engage in research regarding contemporary industry practices.

Despite this clear catch-22, I strongly recommend that COMS faculty pursue skills-based training when ever and how ever it may be possible. There are many nationally recognized training programs that would be of clear benefit, including:

- [Educator Fellowship Program](#) from The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations
- BorderZine / [Dow Jones News Fund Multimedia Training Academy](#) at the University of Texas at El Paso
- The Poynter Institute, [Teachapalooza: Front-Edge Teaching Tools for College Educators](#)
- [The Social Shake Up](#)

Each of the preceding requires either a substantial commitment of time or professional development funding, but a faculty skills refresh also could be as simple as:

- Signing up for Poynter's [Digital Tools Newsletter](#),
- Taking online courses and webinars through [Poynter. News University](#), and/or
- Engaging with the rich range of skills modules available through [Lynda.com](#).

I also recommend that COMS begin to model professional social media engagement as a program, including posting student announcements and job, internship, and scholarship opportunities online through Facebook, Twitter, and/or LinkedIn, rather than on a bulletin board outside faculty offices.

To be relevant, the program must reach its students where they are, using the technology used by both students and professionals in the industries where students hope to land jobs. The COMS website also could use review, regardless of the status of Sonoma State's content management system. While the latter is completely out of the department's control, COMS can and should model clean, professional content for prospective and current students.

At present there are numerous typos and grammatical errors on the site, as well as the off-putting notification that "THE COMS MAJOR IS Currently CLOSED" under "Change of Major." Surely it's possible to offer a more welcoming explanation of impactation.

That said, the overall information provided on the website is solid, with the Top 10 Tips and alumni jobs section being notable strengths.

### **III. Curriculum Review & Student Perspectives**

Students are required to take only one skills course in preparation for 12 units of experiential learning in journalism, broadcasting, and public relations. A communication-centric core underpins this hands-on work, requiring an introductory communication course (COMS 200), a communication theory-centered media criticism course (COMS 202), and a traditional social science communication theory and research course (COMS 301). A combined media ethics and law class (COMS 302), also is required, as is a senior seminar (COMS 402), which appears to be project-based media analysis. Students must take an additional two elective courses, which may be another internship, more time on media outlets, or any course in or out of the program.

The concern here is that students may graduate with neither a rigorous communication studies education, nor a deep bench of media skills built up through foundational skills classes. For example, a research course that focuses on social science research methods does not teach students how to measure media reach or effectiveness, nor does it channel student knowledge toward social media analytics and core concepts, such as SWOT analysis and the PESO model.

Students appear to be picking up most of their applied skills during the required two courses working for any of the COMS four media outlets, rather than practicing them in classes and applying them in the experiential learning labs. This somewhat contradicts the program's aim of eliminating industry-focused silos and mirroring industry needs. Students tend to gravitate toward particular outlets and stay there, as the outlets today functionally act as applied skills classrooms.

This means that the advisers are not advising student-run outlets, but teaching foundational skills in settings that have an excessive number of students for skills-intensive teaching.

Significantly, the program's dedicated skills classes are capped at 25 students each, while the media outlets may have 30 to 50 students enrolled each semester. For example, students reported that faculty routinely attempt to teach video production to 35 students using the one fully functional computer<sup>1</sup> in Studio Blue, and photos of the student staff of Primitivo PR showed 30-40 students enrolled per semester. In order to be maximally effective, skills classes need to have hands-on student access to appropriate technology *and* a lower student-teacher ratio.

As the self-study report indicates, there is a need for curriculum revision based on the department's mission, goals, and strategic plan. The program has a broad range of theory and skills classes, but depth in either area appears to be lacking. Given the strength and success of the four student media outlets, it seems prudent to recommend that the program enhance its skills and technology offerings to ensure majors have the tools they need in a competitive job market.

Program direction is, of course, up to the COMS faculty and should be informed by alumni success in industry and student needs for the job market.

At Chico State the growth trends have all pointed toward more technology and a stronger skill set. The two applied skills programs in the School of Communication cover journalism, public relations, broadcasting, media technology, and graphic design, with a combined enrollment of more than 650 majors and minors.

The theory-focused communication studies program, which mounts all A1 courses for the Chico State GE, has 350 majors and minors. Journalism and Public Relations has seen slight a slight increase in enrollment of majors over the past five years; Media Arts, Design & Technology has experienced slight decline; and Communication Studies has seen a slight increase, notably from students who want to major in journalism but are concerned about or discouraged from having a journalism degree. Many of those students minor in journalism.

I must confess some envy that Sonoma State's program has the attractive title of Communication & Media Studies, which allows students to gain the valuable skill set of interviewing, information gathering, writing, editing, and presentation without the stigma of being attached to a declining industry. As we like to point out, it's the in-demand skill set that gets our grads jobs, regardless of industry.

#### **IV. Diversity & Inclusion**

The self-study report points to a lack of diversity among students, but there appear to be some systemic issues that prevent the program from becoming more diverse. Chief among them is impaction, with COMS being one of 13 programs at Sonoma State listed as impacted.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Note: There are five iMacs in Studio Blue. One is a 27-inch dinosaur that would not be able to meet the demands of contemporary video editing. The students indicated that others are very slow and that only one really is reliable for their work.

<sup>2</sup> <https://web.sonoma.edu/advising/impacted>

COMS has been designated with program-level impactation for more than 20 years and the faculty accept that status as a given. The general perception seemed to be that impactation is a good thing, as it allows the program to be selective in accepting transfer students and those changing majors within Sonoma State. Impactation thus provides an air of exclusivity to the major.

A genuine desire to diversify a program must take into account the needs of first- generation, lower-income, under-represented minority students, many of whom are starting at community colleges to mitigate the cost of a four-year degree. I would argue that the exclusive nature of impactation runs counter to Sonoma State’s Strategic Plan, which includes diversity and *inclusion*. COMS has one of the highest GPA requirements for transfer students, which range from 2.0 to 3.0 for impacted programs at Sonoma State.

According to the COMS self-study, more than half of the program’s students are transfers (55.2%), with 35.7% transferring from another major and 19.5% transferring from outside the university. The high number of transfers from within the university is somewhat indicative of a “found” major, while the lower external transfer rate may reflect the effects of impactation and the selectivity it affords. Correspondingly, the self- study indicates that the program’s average GPA has risen by .22 points in the past nine years. It would be interesting to dig into the data to discover which demographics are seeing the greatest increase.

The COMS self-study points to a significant growth in URM students – particularly Hispanic students (from 14.37% in 2008 to 24.62% in 2017) – in the program since its last review. While this is undoubtedly true, data available on the GI 2025 Student Success Dashboard shows a bit of stagnation / decline in that trend.

Year	Hispanic %	URM % <sup>3</sup>
2017	22	25
2016	21	24
2015	24	27
2014	22	25
2013	24	27
2012	22	26
2011	23	26

<sup>3</sup>Source: California State University Student Success Dashboard, GI 2025

Beyond the observation that impaction may exclude transfer students from disadvantaged backgrounds, there's a notable achievement gap between URM and non-URM students in COMS 160A and 160B, the two-semester Humanities Learning Community required of all first-year students. In fact, the achievement gap is significantly higher in those two courses than in any other course in the major. These two courses have both the largest achievement gaps and largest enrollments of the program.<sup>4</sup>

Course Name   Code	Achievement Gaps
Humanities Learning Community COMS160A	0.45 Course GPA Gap 197 Students
Humanities Learning Community COMS160B	0.36 Course GPA Gap 185 Students
Public Relations COMS240	0.23 Course GPA Gap 181 Students
Newspaper Wrtnng and Edtng(Star) COMS368	0.16 Course GPA Gap 378 Students

The achievement gap in COMS 160A & B would be a logical place for the program to focus immediate assessment efforts, as baseline data exists. I suggest that the faculty review current course structure and implement high-impact practices that might close the gap. It's a great opportunity to increase student success.

The four-year graduation rate for COMS also has declined since the last review, from 47% for the 2008 cohort to 43% with the 2013 cohort.<sup>5</sup>

I don't pretend to have solutions to these issues or even to declare them confidently as issues; I share the data points only to draw attention to them so they may be helpful to COMS faculty and Sonoma State administration as they pursue increased diversity and inclusion.

## V. Internship Supervision & Academic Advising

COMS requires that each student in the major complete an external, supervised, applied skills internship. Hillary Homzie, a part-time lecturer, supervises 80-plus students per semester who are completing internships for the School of Arts & Humanities. She offers student orientation, an initial workshop and meets individually with students enrolled in COMS 499, which is the department's internship class.

Homzie appears to be an enthusiastic, engaged internship supervisor, but she has a substantial internship supervision load for a *one-course* assignment. Homzie seems dedicated to placing students in internships that have a strong learning / training component.

<sup>4</sup> Source: California State University Student Success Dashboard, GI 2025 – Course GPA Achievement Gaps for All Freshman, Transfer, and Graduate Students

<sup>5</sup> Source: California State University Student Success Dashboard, GI 2025 – What are their academic outcomes?

This requires substantial effort at vetting supervisors and internship locations. That said, the sheer number of students makes it unlikely that the school's internship supervisor is able to meet the requirements of [CSU EO 1064](#), which establishes guidelines for internship programs.

While it seems efficient to have one person supervising internships across the School of Arts & Humanities, the present workload is excessive for a single person. I recommend that sections of internship advising be capped at no more than 45 students to allow ample internship program planning, site assessment, orientation, and annual review.

Academic advising is a program strength, one the students said they greatly appreciate. The students I met clearly like and trust their faculty advisers. Currently four tenured / tenure-track faculty members advise all COMS students, with an advising load of approximately 91 students per person. That number will dip to the low 70s when the department's most recent hire begins advising in fall 2018. Should the department get a professional-in-residence, the advising load would dip to a still-high, but more manageable, 60 students per adviser.

Coming from a program that has mandatory advising for every student, every semester, I have strong appreciation for the importance and burden of major advising. The upside is a strong four-year graduation rate; the downside is intensive advising on top of teaching, student media supervision, research, professional development, and service obligations. To be clear, it is not advising that overwhelms this faculty – it is the wide-ranging obligations that must be met by a small faculty with a large number of majors.

COMS does not require advising, but strongly recommends that students see a major adviser each semester prior to registering for classes. There is clear tension for COMS faculty with the school and university over the department's emphasis on major advising, which necessarily includes some GE advising. The School of Arts & Humanities has a GE adviser to work with students from all programs, but if all students went to that person for GE advising, the staff member would be quickly overwhelmed.

AVP Lopez said that Sonoma State is in the process of creating a dedicated academic advising center to cover the entire campus. This is a commendable move; general advisers often are responsible for helping students choose not only classes, but choose majors. This does not take away the need for major advisers, however. Faculty advisers are a hallmark of a high-touch, high-impact major and should be encouraged as work that contributes to student success.

## **VI. Support of and Dedicated Space for Media Outlets**

The four student media outlets – Studio Blue, the Sonoma State Star, Primitivo PR, and KSUN – are a great strength of COMS. They are points of pride for the program, the university's face to students and prospective students, and an anchor for alumni outreach. Studio Blue, the Star and KSUN each have been active parts of campus life for 30 to 40 years. Primitivo PR is a relative newcomer, but has tremendous potential and is one of only about 30 student-managed PR agencies across the nation.

COMS Chair Ed Beebout provided me the proposal for a campus media center he submitted to AVP Lopez and Dean Stearns in March. I recommend that the proposal be an addendum to the self-study report, as it makes important recommendations for the future of the program.

Despite the number of COMS majors and success of its studio outlets, they clearly lack stability in either funding or space allocation. Primitivo has been moved in the past year and there seems some uncertainty as to the future of the Star in Salazar Hall. The students I met with expressed concern that the media outlets do not have strong administrative support for the future, despite their relatively high visibility and campus impact.

The Star's current space in Salazar Hall appears to be in some jeopardy because it is not staffed throughout the workday. The nature of student newsrooms is that the students work off-hours on a rolling schedule, particularly when the focus is a weekly newspaper. The cycle tends to be one of feast – everyone working on deadline to get the paper out – or famine – no one in the newsroom. If the Star shifted from a dated, print-centric model to a more industry-reflective daily digital schedule, the space undoubtedly would have more consistent use.

Primitivo PR's current space in the library is a tight fit for the spacious workstations, nearly new iMacs, and conference table. An ideal setting would allow some separation between the workspace and where client meetings are held. When I visited Primitivo PR on a late Monday afternoon the space was completely empty and the student had some trouble finding someone to give us access. That indicates to me that the students are not being encouraged to take ownership of the new space; it simply feels temporary.

Studio Blue is the most interesting mix of state-of-the-industry and anachronistic TV newsroom from the '80s. While a handful of iMacs were visible, the students told me that only one is fully functional. The workspaces are crowded with old equipment, surrounding the new LED lighting system and blue screen. Studio Blue clearly will be moving in the near future to make way for the renovation of Stevenson Hall. This is unfortunate, as the space has many interesting possibilities. It might make sense, for example, for KSUN to share the studio.

COMS has requested that Sonoma State allocate space for a single media center to work as a hub for all four outlets. A model to consider might be the consolidation of all media outlets at Oregon State University into the [Orange Media Network](#), which brought the student newspaper, radio and TV stations, lifestyle and fashion magazines, and literary and arts journal together in one space. The media hub is not focused only on communications majors, but is a multidisciplinary network.

COMS could do something similar, which would allow the program to pursue one set of state-of-the-industry equipment, rather than a mishmash of technology and resources spread across four media outlets.



I strongly recommend that students be allowed to participate in the planning process for whatever lies ahead. The students I met with noted that at one point there was a board that included students from Studio Blue, the Star, Primitivo PR, and KSUN. This allowed them to support each other's efforts and find common points for collaboration. They said it was enthusiastically supported *in concept* by the faculty, who praised the students empowering themselves. The students felt they needed more faculty support, however.

## **VII. Directions for the Future**

A review of key take-aways from the preceding sections:

### **I. Resources and the Addition of GE A1**

It appears inevitable that COMS will be taking on all sections of Sonoma State's GE A1 course. This isn't in itself a bad thing. In fact, it presents many interesting opportunities for the program, given adequate support and resources. Without thought and planning, however, the A1 implementation could be disastrous for both COMS and Sonoma State. I recommend that the university support an immediate hire to guide A1 course development, including methods of assessment. If this person can also teach and advise the Sonoma State Star, it would be a win-win for university and department.

### **II. Faculty Professional Development & Program Representation**

Support, encourage, and reward faculty for professional skills development and curriculum innovation. Update the department website and model professional social media engagement.

### **III. Curriculum Review & Student Perspectives**

Review the COMS curriculum, particularly how and where foundational media skills are taught. Find out what alumni are doing with their degrees, what current students want to do with their degrees, and what skills industry professionals find vital. Revise the curriculum accordingly.

### **IV. Diversity & Inclusion**

Remove barriers to diversity and inclusion. This might include finding ways to end the program's long-standing impaction.

### **V. Internship Supervision & Academic Advising**

Reduce the supervision load for the school's internship coordinator. Supervising 80 students a semester as a one-class assignment sidesteps the intent of EO 1064 and puts student interns at risk.

### **VI. Support of and Dedicated Space for Media Outlets**

Bring the media outlets together. This does not preclude the outlets from having their individual identities, but it's worth finding out what student leaders can do when they're provided a stable space to explore multimedia convergence.

Finally, many of the pieces are in place for COMS to seek accreditation by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, which holds its programs to nine standards of excellence. ACEJMC values faculty professional development, curriculum

innovation, diversity and inclusion, and assessment – all things the COMS self-study points to as areas for growth and improvement.

With Sonoma State's most recent WASC accrediting cycle completed, the university undoubtedly is looking toward improvements for the next review. ACEJMC accreditation of COMS is certainly an idea worth exploring.

Respectfully submitted,  
Susan Wiesinger, April  
2018

### Four-year Plan for Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies

Freshman must take the COMS Learning Community (COMS 160 A/B, A3 and C3 or COMS 162 A/B, A3 and C3). Change of majors or transfers must enroll for COMS 200 and COMS 202 (or equivalent transfer credit). COMS 160 A/B satisfies the COMS 200 and COMS 162 A/B satisfies the COMS 202 requirement (FLC alternates every other year), and yields 4 COMS Elective units.

#### **Freshman Year (30 units)**

##### *Fall Semester (14 units)*

COMS 160A or 162A (A3/C3) (4)

GE Area B4 (3)

GE Area A2 (4)

GE Area D1 (3)

##### *Spring Semester (16 units)*

COMS 160B or 162B (A3/C3) (4)

GE Area B1 (3)

University elective (2)

GE Area D2 (3)

GE Area C1 (4)

#### **Sophomore Year (30 units)**

##### *Fall Semester (16 units)*

GE Area B2 (3)

GE Area D3 (3)

GE Area C2 (4)

University elective (2)

COMS 200 or COMS 202 (4)

##### *Spring Semester (14 units)*

GE Area D4 (4)

GE Area B3 (4)

University elective (3)

COMS skill course (4)

#### **Junior Year (30 units)**

##### *Fall Semester (15 units)*

Upper-Division GE Area D5 (4)

Upper-Division GE Area E (4)

Upper-Division University Elective (4)

COMS 302 (4)

##### *Spring Semester (15 units)*

Upper-Division GE (4)

GE Elective (3)

COMS 301 (4)

COMS Outlet Course (4)

#### **Senior Year (30 units)**

##### *Fall Semester (15 units)*

Upper-Division University Elective (3)

Upper-Division University Elective (4)

COMS 499 (4)

COMS Outlet Course (4)

##### *Spring Semester (15 units)*

Upper-Division University Elective (3)

COMS 402 (4)

COMS Elective (4)

COMS Outlet Course (4)

**Total Units: 120 (44 in Major, 50 GE, 26 University Electives)**

### Full Course List

#### COMS 160A HUMANITIES LEARNING COMMUNITY (4)

COMS 160 A/B is a year long course, which features weekly lectures and small seminars. It constitutes a Humanities Learning Community (HLC) for any first-year student. The learning objectives of the HLC will satisfy A3 (Critical Thinking) and C3 (Comparative Perspectives and/or Foreign Languages) GE Areas.

#### COMS 160B HUMANITIES LEARNING COMMUNITY (4)

COMS 160 A/B is a year long course, which features weekly lectures and small seminars. It constitutes a Humanities Learning Community (HLC) for any first-year student. The learning objectives of the HLC will satisfy A3 (Critical Thinking) and C3 (Comparative Perspectives and/or Foreign Languages) GE Areas.

#### COMS 162A HUMANITIES LEARNING COMMUNITY MEDIA LITERACY (4)

COMS 162 A/B is a year long course, which, features weekly lectures and small seminars. It constitutes a Humanities Learning Community (HLC) for any first-year student. The learning objectives of the HLC will satisfy A3 (Critical Thinking) and C3 (Comparative Perspectives and/or Foreign Languages) GE categories.

#### COMS 162B HUMANITIES LEARNING COMMUNITY MEDIA LITERACY (4)

COMS 162 A/B is a year long course, which, features weekly lectures and small seminars. It constitutes a Humanities Learning Community (HLC) for any first-year student. The learning objectives of the HLC will satisfy A3 (Critical Thinking) and C3 (Comparative Perspectives and/or Foreign Languages) GE categories.

COMS 200 PRINCIPLES OF MEDIA COMMUNICATION (4) An introduction to the history of mass communication, the mechanics of the mass communication industries, and theories of mass communication as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon.

COMS 201 VIDEO PRODUCTION (4) A course for beginning video students. Assignments include: creation of skits and music videos; and conducting interviews using DV camcorders. Students also do a final creative project of their own.

COMS 202 METHODS OF MEDIA CRITICISM (4) A survey of ways to analyze mediated texts, with a focus on film, television, magazines, music, news, and advertising. Methods and

concepts include semiotics, structuralism, ideology, psychoanalysis, feminism, and postmodernism.

COMS 210 WEB AND PRINT JOURNALISM (4) Introduction to a wide range of writing styles and formats, from hard news to features. Students learn to write for newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the internet.

COMS 240 PUBLIC RELATIONS (4) An overview of the history, structure, and organization of public relations. Students also learn the basic public relations tactics of writing, presentation, event organization, and web communication.

COMS 265 RADIO AND AUDIO PRODUCTION (4) History of broadcasting; evolution of broadcast technology; introduction to basic theories and techniques of radio broadcasting. Overview of radio station organization, programming, and operation. Experience in radio program development and production techniques.

COMS 273 SYRCE: TOPICS IN COMS (4) This course examines seminal moments in history that shaped the future of news reporting by identifying key tropes in the encoding and decoding of content. The course critiques traditional values, ethics and philosophies in order to portray the truth of the times as viewed through the lens of mediated communications. Satisfies GE Area C2. Only one course numbered 273 in the Arts & Humanities will be considered for credit. Prerequisite: completion of GE Category A2 (Engl 101 or ENGL 100B) required.

COMS 275 21ST CENTURY TELEVISION AS ART (4) This course explores the “New Golden Age” of TV that arguably began with *The Sopranos* and which may, perhaps, be considered “art.” Students will weigh relevant social and technological changes, study debates over subjectivity, taste, and cultural hierarchies, and assess what might distinguish these new shows from TV of old. Non-Majors Need Dept. Approval. Satisfies GE Area C1 (Fine Arts, Theatre, Dance, Music, and Film).

COMS 301 MEDIA THEORY AND RESEARCH (4) Intermediate-level study of the key research events that contributed to the development of communication theories, government policy, and the emergence of communication as an academic discipline. Prerequisites: COMS 200, 202, and COMS majors with junior-level standing.

COMS 302 MEDIA ETHICS AND LAW (4) The course will examine controversial ethical issues related to the media including sensationalism, bias, and deception. It will also cover how the media is regulated, as well as legal issues related to the First Amendment, libel, privacy, copyright, confidentiality, obscenity, the right to a fair trial, advertising law the Freedom of

Information and Open Meetings Acts. Prerequisites: COMS 200, 202, and COMS majors with junior-level standing.

COMS 321 INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION (4) Course develops a basic understanding of current issues related to the field of international communication. Surveys readings and videos on global media (MTV, CNN, ESPN, theme parks, video games, advertising, media campaigns for social change, computer hackers, Sesame Street, etc.). Overseas job and volunteer opportunities discussed.

COMS 322 BROADCAST JOURNALISM (4) Introductory class on the art and craft of Journalism, print, video, and radio, by career professionals. Designed to give students a taste of real world media experience.

COMS 324 SCRIPTWRITING FOR TV (4) Course focuses on fundamentals of writing professional-level scripts for video, television, and film productions. Assignments include lab work and homework producing scripts and storyboards for Public Service Announcements (PSAs), commercials, news packages, documentaries, corporate and educational training programs, and dramatic screenplays.

COMS 325 NEW MEDIA (4) This course introduces students to new communication technology, its influence on society, and how to write for the new media environment. This course will focus on examining new communication technologies including the different ways in which these technologies are used, the theoretical models that are relevant to new communication technology as well as the practical applications and implications of new communication technology on communication.

COMS 326 ADVANCED PRESENTATION TECHNIQUES (4) Course involves intensive self-evaluation of both verbal and non-verbal elements of presentation. Interviews, group communications, and presenting with multimedia are covered. Theories of communication are discussed as they relate to presentation styles. Junior-level standing required.

COMS 328 AMERICA AT THE MOVIES (4) An examination of the sociopolitical meanings and significance of American film from the silent era to the present. To better understand how films can potentially reflect and affect society, students read about American history and analyze dozens of films in their particular historical contexts.

COMS 340 PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRM (4) This is a hands-on class for students who are planning to work in the field of public relations. The class is run as a public relations firm with students working as consultants with clients to develop plans and projects for public relations

campaigns. Prerequisite: Consent of Instructor Required. Open to Juniors, Seniors and Graduates only. Non major needs Dept. approval.

COMS 368 NEWSPAPER WRITING/EDITING (STAR) (4) The faculty advisor offers a comprehensive evaluation -- oral and written -- of the most recent edition of the campus newspaper, the STAR. Instruction is provided on a wide variety of journalism topics, from editing and reporting to ethics and law. Students are required to read the STAR and the written evaluation by the advisor. May be repeated for up to 12 units.

COMS 369 STUDIO BLUE (4) This is an essential class for students who will work in the Broadcasting Industry. Students will learn about the history, structure, and operations of local broadcasting. Students will be expected to work in a specific department of Studio Blue during the semester. May be repeated for credit up to 12 units.

COMS 385 MEDIA LAB: RADIO (KSUN) (4) A media lab to develop a range of skills in the production of radio programs. Work focuses on the production of live and prerecorded pieces for KSUN, SSU's internet radio station ([www.sonoma.edu/ksun](http://www.sonoma.edu/ksun)). The lab also serves as the staff meeting of the radio station. May be repeated for up to 12 units.

COMS 402 SENIOR SEMINAR (4) Students will share at least one critical analysis of a specific media message and complete a senior-level project/portfolio/study, which is the culmination of their major experience. Prerequisites: COMS 301 and 302; seniors only. Cannot be repeated for credit.

COMS 499 MEDIA INTERNSHIP (1-4) This class provides students with an opportunity to discover how to make an effective transition from the classroom to the workplace. For a semester, individuals work in a media firm, business, newspaper, radio, or TV station. On the job, students learn networking and negotiating skills. Assignments for class include: a resume, workplace lingo, self-evaluation, profile of supervisor, and album with photos and text that describe the experience. There is also an interview for a job. Seniors only. Consent of instructor, internship agreement form, and department contracts required. Can be taken for up to 12 units only.