

January 30, 2008

To: Suzanne T. Ortega, Vice Provost and Dean, The Graduate School

Ronald S. Irving, Interim Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Judith A. Howard, Divisional Dean, Social Sciences,
College of Arts and Sciences

John Sahr, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Academic Affairs

From: Gerald J. Baldasty

Professor and Chair, Department of Communication

Re: Response to the Department of Communication Program Review Committee

On behalf of the faculty, staff, and students of the Department of Communication, I want to express our gratitude to the review committee members for their detailed study of our program, and for their thoughtful report. We know that program reviews require a good deal of time, and we appreciate the willingness of our UW, WSU and Northwestern University colleagues to help us in this process.

Our response derives from a series of conversations in the Department, including both the Executive Committee, and two open discussions during faculty meetings. The first part of the response focuses on some of the commendations, and the second part on the recommendations.

Commendations

Merger

We consider our greatest achievement of the past 6 years to be the creation of a UW Department of Communication that is a true merger of its two parent departments (the Department of Speech Communication, and the School of Communications). The successes detailed in the Program Review Committee Report – in university service, diversity, undergraduate and graduate education, research, climate, and alumni outreach and development -- all build upon the success of the merger. We could not have accomplished all of this without the sustained collegial engagement of faculty, staff, and

students across the Department. The accomplishment is two fold: a collegial merger has permitted further decision making and initiatives (in areas such as diversity for example); and the merger has also made possible synergies in areas of research and teaching. Not only have we completed the merger, but we are the better for it.

Diversity

Diversity is central to the mission we identified at the time of the merger nearly 6 years ago, and we are grateful that our efforts are noted in the report. We have benefited from the leadership and support of many on campus in this work, including staff and faculty from the Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity, the Curriculum Transformation Project, the Graduate Opportunities and Minority Achievement Program, the College of Arts and Sciences, the Washington Institute for the Study of Ethnicity, Race, and Sexuality (WISER), the Diversity Research Institute, and through curriculum partnerships with American Ethnic Studies, Women, Studies. We have completed the faculty search that the review committee noted, and have successfully hired a new faculty member in the area of race/ethnicity. Dr. Leilani Nishime will join the UW faculty in autumn 2008.

While we have made progress in the area of diversity, much work remains to be done – and we need the continued support of UW partners in sustaining current progress and in moving ahead. We have benefited enormously from GO-MAP funding for a research assistantship in recent years; this has helped us in recruiting. To be truly competitive in recruitment of graduate students of color, however, we also need to create several fellowships – and here we need help from the College and the Graduate School.

Faculty strength

The Review Committee reported, “We were impressed by the faculty at every rank,” and “Particularly noteworthy is the strength of all of the junior hires, including some of the best hires in the nation in digital media.” We, too, celebrate the quality of our faculty, but each year reminds us how fragile our accomplishments are. The University of Washington continues to lag far behind its peers in so many fields, and productive UW Communication scholars routinely are sought by other institutions. With the generous support of the College, we have had substantial success in retaining faculty when they have outside offers; in the past 3 years, we’ve successfully retained 3 faculty and lost only one. But the recurring challenge of having an underfunded faculty is demoralizing both in the Department and the College. Although Communication lags significantly behind peers, it does not lag as egregiously as many other departments on campus, so we have not been eligible for unit adjustment funds.

The creation of counter offers impacts the College primarily, given its role in salary support. But the need to provide additional funds as part of counter offers -- for research and travel – also impacts the Department very substantially as well, and thus require the allocation of sparse discretionary funds for retention. This is exacerbated, of course, by the fact that the Department has a very small operations budget (which means that many key departmental functions – such as faculty travel – are funded by private funds) and by

the fact that a substantial majority of revenue from the department's self sustaining programs is retained by the College.

Recommendations

Decreasing the Size of the Major

We welcome the Review Committee's endorsement for our plan to decrease the size of the undergraduate major. The sheer number of students in the Department has an impact on all we do, and particularly in precluding the creation of meaningful curricular tracks. The size of the undergraduate major also affects faculty research productivity.

Graduate program recommendations

We welcome the committee's recommendations on the graduate program. We have begun to address some of the recommendations, and have charged our graduate committee with the longer-term task of undertaking a more substantive review of our graduate program's performance.

1. Identifying strengths

The Department continues to offer a range of graduate seminars that reflect the various areas of research. However, it has begun to look at multiple-year cycles of seminars to meet student demand and ensure that students can progress through the program in a timely fashion.

2. Strengthening the Research culture

- a. **Two-stage admissions process.** The Graduate Admissions Committee has met to discuss the current admissions process (which involves admitting both MA and PhD students) to a joint MA/PhD program. Our preliminary thinking is as follows: Students without an MA would write a thesis, after which the supervisory committee will determine whether s/he is qualified to proceed to studying at the doctoral level. Operationally, this involves the same procedures as are used currently, except that MA students will not need to formally apply to the PhD program, a hurdle that has turned away many top recruits. The Committee will be considering this as it reviews the pool of 2008 applicants; if brought before and approved by the full faculty, the MA/PhD program will be in place for the 2009-10 academic year.
- b. **Disjuncture between formal goals of the MA program and its current function.** The Review Committee recommended that we do more to meet the stated goal of our MA program as a degree to prepare people to proceed to the doctorate. This remains the single largest task before us, and one that has already drawn substantial faculty comment. We are considering a series of steps in this area, including a review of admissions in general, closer calibration of admissions with *individual* faculty research interests, greater emphasis on research/scholarship at all stages

(marketing, recruitment, admissions, socialization, mentorship). We are also considering a survey of our graduate students to get a broader representation of views (the Department met with slightly less than half of the graduate students). We will continue our already successful efforts to create endowments for graduate student research (we are awarding about \$4,000 this year for research work) and for presentation of scholarly work at academic conferences (we annually allocate about \$20,000 for graduate student presentations).

- c. MC program. Both the Graduate Admissions Committee and the full faculty have discussed the department's various MC programs, and notably the under-utilized MC for media professionals. Although enrollment in this program has not been consistent, it attracts local professionals who often have ties to local media organizations, thereby helping us maintain and strengthen our institutional presence in these rapidly changing times. The committee and the faculty believe that the program needs to either be revitalized or removed.
- d. Emphasis on pedagogy and undergraduate education. The Review Committee noted its concern that the Department might be, unintentionally, signaling to graduate students that "undergraduate teaching is the best or highest aspiration the Department holds for them." If this is true, it may derive from the fact that the vast majority of support for our graduate students comes from teaching assistantships – which then creates a need for substantive efforts to giving these TAs the skills and knowledge they will need for their classroom work. In response, we are pursuing two key initiatives. The first is to increase the Department's grants activity greatly, with an aim to increase RA opportunities. We have reclassified one departmental staff member, and will allocate about half of her time to grants activity. The second initiative is a proposal to create at least one RA position for the Department (through shared funds between the Department and the College). Faculty/graduate student pairs would compete for these funds, submitting a proposal for a research project to be undertaken during a quarter. We would allocate 3 RA quarters each year (to as many as a total of 3 graduate students). In addition, it is important to note that we have very explicitly emphasized research in a number of areas – including our professional development seminar. Three of the four topics in that seminar rotation deal substantively with research: submitting manuscripts for publication, ethics in research and teaching, and technology for research and teaching.
- e. Emphasis on "public scholarship." The Department's emphasis on public scholarship has indeed appealed to many applicants. However, the Department has consistently emphasized "scholarship" over "public," its latest initiative being the implementation of a method sequence. This new sequence of methods courses not only strengthens students' training in the field, but also offers sustained exposure and work with a variety of research tools, which undergirds our interdisciplinarity.

Internationalizing the Student Body

The Review Committee recommended that we should do more to attract international students, and that we “explore strategies to increase the visibility of its research program through web-based promotional materials and more traditional mechanisms, as well as through partnering with University-level outreach initiatives.”

Our entering class has included two international students each of the past two years. As with the larger applicant pool, the number of international applicants who accept depends on several factors, primarily the financial package offered by the University. This is one front on which the Department of Communication does not compare well to other institutions. While the unit continues to seek funds from the Graduate School and Graduate Opportunities and Minority Achievement Program, individual faculty members are working on securing external grants that often provide valuable research opportunities for students.

Recalibrating Service Efforts

The Review Committee recommended that faculty consider cutting back “somewhat” on service. To aid in this effort, the Executive Committee will formulate a broader service plan, which helps us develop a strategy on service.

Future hires

We are very pleased with the Review Committee’s statement that “The University can make sound strategic investments in the Department,” and recommended considering a third hire in race/ethnicity and a hire in Science/Health Communication. We would welcome the chance to make additional hires; the current economic environment in the University makes this difficult, however. We were able to hire this year in race/ethnicity only because we were willing to finance the position for one year through our own self sustaining Evening Degree program. The College will assume this faculty line only in 2009-10 (and if history is a good predictor, the College will be unlikely to give us another position starting in that year). The paucity of faculty lines has meant that we have made no headway yet on our 2005 hiring strategic plan (which includes a position in science and communication).

Potential collaborations

The Review Committee recommended further attention to collaborations in three areas: Political Communication, Communication Technology, and Intercultural and International Communication. We have continued to work on UW collaborations through autumn and early winter 2008. These efforts include:

- Continued conversations with the Evans School of Public Affairs on collaborations in research and curriculum. We anticipate a broader meeting of the faculty of each program in spring 2008. We are also collaborating with the Evans School on a potential hire (financed through private funds) in journalism and civic engagement, and on a Danz lecturer nomination.
- Continued engagement with the Information School. We have added one I School faculty to our roster of adjunct faculty, and will add two others this winter or early

spring. We are working closely with the I School in an effort to bring noted network scholar Yochai Benkler to campus as a Danz lecturer.

- Engagement with the Department of Technical Communication (College of Engineering). We held a meeting of about 15 faculty from the two units in early autumn, and are developing a broader document detailing common and related research interests.
- Our new staff fiscal analyst will provide support for faculty as they seek broader grant activity (such as the NSF major initiatives mentioned in the Review Committee report).

Evaluating the Rank of Lecturers

We concur with the Review Committee's recommendation for a review of rank for lecturers holding the PhD. We attempted to promote one of these colleagues a year ago, but University rules and custom require more extensive teaching experience prior to promotion to senior lecturer. But we anticipate being able to revisit this issue in autumn 2009. We have also endorsed the efforts by a group of UW senior lecturers to focus University attention on the rank of principal lecturer. We would like to promote one of our colleagues to this rank, and have delayed only because the University and the College have been reticent to make this a fully functioning academic rank for more than a very small number of faculty.

Other recommendations, from students and alumni

We have created a Department Diversity Committee, which will oversee the creation of a Diversity Student Group. We are also working to create substantive mentorship ties between journalism students of color and local media organizations (such as the Seattle Association of Black Journalists, the Latino Media Association, and the Asian American Journalists Association). We have created a Visiting Media Professional Program to bring journalists of color to campus. This program is now in its third year, but we've increased frequency of visits (from one formal visit a year to three a year).

We recognize the continued interest by some students in broadcast journalism, and we have offered a course annually in this area the past two years. After extensive consultation with local broadcast executives and managers, and after a review of our own goals, we will continue to put our effort in *digital* journalism (rather than in adding a greater emphasis in broadcasting). Virtually all area broadcasters emphasize that their companies are now multimedia companies, so our efforts in multimedia education (both in our journalism program, in our technology area, and in the MC in Digital Media) focus well on the future of journalism.