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FROM: Department of Communication Program Review Committee

Sandra Silberstein, Professor, Department of English (Committee Chair)
John Findlay, Professor, Department of History
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RE: DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION TEN-YEAR REVIEW

THE REVIEW PROCESS

In preparation for the site visit, Committee Chair Silberstein held preliminary meetings with Department Chair Jerry Baldasty and Augustine McCaffery (Senior Academic Program Specialist for The Graduate School). As a result of those discussions, interviews were arranged over the course of the two weeks preceding the site visit with University of Washington administrators and others outside the Department whose calendars would not allow easy scheduling during the visit. Based on schedule availability, Silberstein interviewed Sheila Edwards Lang (Vice President for Minority Affairs, Vice Provost for Diversity), Juan Guerra (Associate Dean and Director of the Graduate

Opportunities and Minority Achievement Program in The Graduate School), Janice DeCosmo (Associate Dean, Undergraduate Academic Affairs), Cathy Beyer (Office of Educational Assessment), and Jessica Albano (Communication Studies Librarian), circulating detailed notes of those meetings within the Committee. Findlay and Silberstein met with Ed Taylor (Vice Provost and Dean, Undergraduate Academic Affairs), and Professors Mimi Kahn and Michael Brown, authors of the March 2007 Department of Communication Chair Search Report.

The external members joined the Committee for the site visit on the evening of October 28. The following two days comprised group meetings with faculty by rank, staff, graduate students, undergraduates, alumni, and program directors. We met individually with the Department Chair, one program director, two Communication faculty members, and one adjunct.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Communication is a relatively new department, the result of a 2002 merger between the Department of Speech Communication and the School of Communications. By all accounts the merger has been remarkably smooth; so much so that faculty have elected to move beyond a discourse of merger. One-third of the current faculty have served only in the merged department.

This is a department that distinguishes itself in service to the larger institution; curriculum transformation and teaching initiatives, particularly at the undergraduate level; and strong research faculty. Because there is much to praise this report is structured around those elements, then moves to the areas on which we recommend the Department focus next as it enters its next chapter.

TO BE COMMENDED

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE INSTITUTION

To a person, UW administrators were virtually lyrical about faculty contributions beyond the boundaries of the Department. They specifically praised contributions to undergraduate education and enhanced diversity. The following testimonial from a UW administrator is typical:

The Department is aware that they're part of a whole. They have a stake in what happens at the University, and they enjoy working within it. Faculty members cross boundaries easily. They are good citizens with respect to the general academic life of the institution. They have a different culture from many departments; they see both disciplinary rigor and the bigger picture.

Particularly praised were efforts to share departmental innovations with others, through efforts such as the Teaching Academy.

DIVERSITY

The Department's core principles highlight the recruitment and retention of minority and underrepresented students. Administrators who spoke to this issue uniformly praised the Department for modeling best practices with respect to having a shared vision and commitment to curricular, student, and faculty diversity.

With respect to undergraduates, The Department partners with the administration, identifies minority and low-income high school students who might be interested in a career in Communication, and brings them to campus. Many choose to come because they see that they will be able to have a relationship with the faculty. Once here, the Department does a good job of educating students in terms of what they can do with a Communication degree, connecting students to internship opportunities that match their career aspirations. The Department is reported to have a strong reputation among EOP students for important and interesting activities and a supportive faculty. The faculty is engaged and cares. In terms of metrics, the Department has consistently been in the top 10 on campus for underrepresented minority undergraduates

Communication has been one of the most aggressive on campus in curriculum transformation. Chair Jerry Baldasty has created a culture of expectation for addressing diversity in the curriculum; he participated in the first curriculum transformation seminar on campus in 1992, developing a course on Race and Gender in the Media. Other members of the faculty have participated in seminars over the years, and the curriculum on these issues has expanded considerably. In the past few years, six new classes at the graduate and undergraduate level have been created. Two new courses are under construction.

We were told that the Department does a good job of producing underrepresented PhDs. The Department's partnership with the Native Voices project has both addressed curriculum change and provided opportunities for American Indian students in the Department. The journalism program has a diversity plan that includes scholarships for students of color in journalism; the program maintains ongoing relationships with minority community media.

With respect to faculty diversity, the Department is currently in the midst of a faculty search for a position in race and ethnicity. The search committee met early on with Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Diversity Luis Fraga to develop strategies for faculty recruitment and has been aggressive in identifying candidates.

UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

UW administrators working in undergraduate education consistently reported that Communication faculty are leaders and innovators, modeling best practices around teaching and learning goals and the assessment of teaching. The self-study reports, "We have a strong teaching-oriented culture in the Department." This is evident in the many teaching awards earned by faculty over the years, including six Distinguished Teaching Awards. The self-study documents commitment to and initiatives in discover/inquiry-based learning, mentorship and independent study, encouragement for undergraduate research, emphasis on research methods, emphasis on global/transnational curriculum, and on internships and service learning. Junior

faculty are mentored with respect to teaching, and teaching assistants enroll in a mandatory year-long pedagogy course.

In the group session, we met with approximately 13 undergraduate students. Though a small sample, we were impressed by the students overall (many were double majors), especially their understanding of curricular goals. Students were articulate in their appreciation of a curriculum that underscores broad skills in contrast to narrow training for specific career paths. One student reported that majors learn how to think rather than what to do.

FACULTY/GRADUATE PROGRAM STRENGTH

Because the strength of graduate programs rests so heavily on its faculty, we have combined these two categories. We were impressed by the faculty at every rank. Particularly noteworthy is the strength of all of the junior hires, including some of the best hires in the nation in digital media. We were particularly impressed by the visionary initiatives of the senior faculty that led to hiring an interdisciplinary junior cohort whose scholarship can look quite different from its own. Overall, this is clearly a strong research faculty. Of the Department's eight research areas, four are ranked in the top 13. In 2004 the National Communication Association ranked three of the Department's areas in the top 10: Political Communication (#5), Intercultural and International Communication (#7), and Communication Technology (#10). Additionally, the Interpersonal-Small Groups area was ranked #13. This diverse faculty cohort supports a heterogeneous approach to Communication that they see as a program strength. We sympathize with this goal; however, we suggest under Recommendations that the Department simultaneously consider how to focus limited resources on particular strengths.

This strong faculty also supports a Ph.D. program and four Master's degrees: The Master of Arts (M.A.) in Communication (a two-year academic research degree); the Master of Communication (M.C.) for Communication Professionals (a two-year academic degree for mid-career communication professionals; we understand that this degree is not currently being used); the M.C. in Digital Media (an evening degree program for working professionals seeking to improve their marketability in digital media); and the M.C. Native Voices M.C. (focusing solely on documentary filmmaking in the Native American community). The Digital Media Program has made a strong new hire and is well poised to leverage the deep talent pool of expertise both among the faculty within the Department as well as in the high-tech industry in the Seattle area. The Native Voices M.C. brings valuable alternative theoretical perspectives into the overall program.

Through proseminars and mentoring memos, among other things, we appreciated developing efforts at mentoring graduate students.

While there are clear strengths in the graduate program, it also faces challenges. Under Recommendations, below, we ask the Department to clarify the goals of the M.A. and M.C. degrees and to explore how to strengthen the graduate research culture overall.

CLIMATE

The Department has developed an enviable climate of mutual respect and participation. The full faculty evidences enthusiasm for a shared enterprise. Given the trend toward convergence of mass communication and human communication in everyday life, the ability of the Department of Communication to pursue a vision that creates synergy between the two paradigms positions it well as a potential leader for the field of Communication as it continues to evolve in response to technological innovation.

Unlike the situation in many departments, the full-time lecturers report feeling fully enfranchised and valued, which generates their participation in the full range of departmental work. The staff were equally engaged, referring not to staff issues, but to issues of the Department.

Many of the climate and other successes were credited to Department Chair Jerry Baldasty. An initial concern of the Review Committee was whether Baldasty's initiatives had been sufficiently institutionalized. We became convinced that they had.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF DEPARTMENT INITIATIVES

The Department seems to have taken effective steps to assure that its successful initiatives are shared and institutionalized. Multiple faculty have been involved in each of the curricular and diversity initiatives. The Executive Committee has taken on strategic and long-range planning. The Department appears to have struck a useful balance between leader- and faculty-driven initiatives. Use of the leadership team for refinement of initiatives seems to be working effectively.

ALUMNI AND FRIEND OUTREACH

The Department has been successful in engaging alumni in particular. In our meeting with alums we saw ample evidence of their loyalty, and some expressed a willingness to be called upon more. One effective initiative has been the Saturday seminars ("Real Life 101"), taught by mid-life professionals and attended by both alums and students. One result of the energetic outreach to alumni and friends is the doubling of the Department endowment over the past five years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This is a strong cohort; the past five years has manifested successful planning and transformation. We see no reason why the Department should not enter a typical 10-year review cycle. As the unit enters the next decade, we urge it use the same collaborative emphasis that has served it well thus far to engage the following issues.

SUGGESTION FOR THE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM

DECREASING THE SIZE OF THE MAJOR

Although the major is selective (turning away approximately half of all applicants each year), it remains very large, with 850-900 students (approximately one-quarter of those are in the recently re-accredited Journalism program). With this large cohort, sequencing of courses and the maintaining of tracks is impossible. Class size is also quite large, with 100 students in 300-level classes. We vigorously support the Department's efforts to decrease the size of the major over time.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE GRADUATE PROGRAM

IDENTIFYING STRENGTHS

In a well-attended meeting of approximately 30 Communication Department graduate students, we heard consistent reports that they perceived difficulty getting all of the courses they need for their specializations in a timely fashion. As a result, the Committee recommends that the Department develop a rotation strategy for graduate coursework that will ensure a consistent mix of courses perceived as useful for students in the various concentrations. The Committee notes that this may be especially difficult to accomplish given the large number of concentrations available in the Department. As a result, we suggest that the Department prioritize its course offerings by providing a higher concentration of courses in two or three areas of emphasis/excellence and growing demand. Political communication and communication technologies, for example, clearly represent two of the Department's greatest strengths and presumably would be emphasized in the course rotations.

STRENGTHENING THE RESEARCH CULTURE

At this point in the history of the academy, we certainly appreciate the fact that the Department endeavors to make students aware of a range of career options. And the Department is rightly proud of its emphasis on Public Scholarship—its commitment to public leadership, commentary, and contribution. However, among the few warning signs we observed was a comparatively low level of research aspiration among the 30+ graduate students (virtually all doctoral students) who came to meet with the Committee. Very few of the group (five or six) expressed any interest in academic placement at a Research I institution. This result is consistent with concerns voiced by some faculty concerning a lack of a "research culture" among the graduate students and the fact that there have been very few doctoral placements in the recent past at peer institutions. We find this somewhat puzzling. The departmental faculty certainly demonstrate tremendous scholarly engagement and publication, so there does not appear to be a problem of example.

We identify four possible contributors to this lack of aspiration and research culture and make related suggestions.

- Two-stage admissions process.* The department requires most of its entering graduate students to come in as Masters students and formally reapply for doctoral admission during their second year, during which time they are also encouraged to apply elsewhere, if for no other reason than to hedge their bets. This has proved discouraging for faculty and students. We understand that the multiple Masters programs attract students who are primarily interested in a terminal Masters. But students whose goal is a doctoral degree should be admitted only once to a joint M.A./Ph.D. program. The Department could maintain a progress-evaluation component, of course, but the “normal” expectation would be that students admitted once, and making reasonable progress, stay in the program. This change, we believe, would stop the loss of some of the Department’s most promising students to competing Ph.D. programs, reduce the time to degree for the program, and make clear that the admissions process is into a research degree program.
- A disjuncture between the formal goals of the Master’s program and its current function.* The self-study materials emphasize that the M.A. program is “mainly intended to be a preparatory degree for doctoral study.” However, fewer than one-third of those who receive the M.A. enter Ph.D. programs. (There are different sets of data for this figure. The self-study states that 28 of the 95 individuals who received the M.A. in the last ten years went on to doctoral programs. Perhaps more timely data [because they do not include the years before the merger] come from Appendices A and E, which indicate that the Department knows of only 7 people among the 55 who earned an M.A. in 2004-5 and 2005-6 who went on to a Ph.D. program.) Compared to other UW programs with which the review committee is familiar, Communication has significantly greater attrition between its M.A. and Ph.D. programs. Its M.A. program is not succeeding at its stated goal of turning out people prepared to go on for the doctorate. We therefore should not be surprised if a strong research culture does not exist among the majority of students in the M.A. program. This is not to say that students are getting little out of the program, but they do not appear to be getting what the Department professes to expect them to get. The Review Committee recommends that the Department explore steps to ensure that the M.A. program does what it says it wants it to do—train students to go on for the Ph.D. And because the Ph.D. is a research-oriented degree, those steps would entail strengthening the research culture at the Masters level. (While discussing the general M.A. program, the Department may also consider whether it would be wise either to discontinue altogether, or to rejuvenate, the Masters in Communication for Communication Professionals, opening it to aspiring professionals. Such a terminal program could serve some of those now in the academic M.A. program who are not really aiming toward doctoral work, but who would benefit from graduate coursework in the field. And having students apply to two different Master’s programs (an M.A. vs. an M.C.) could make it simpler to identify, admit, fund, and retain the best candidates for doctoral work, including not requiring them to apply twice for admission.)
- Emphasis on pedagogy and undergraduate education.* From the moment of our arrival, it was clear that the Department prides itself—justifiably—on the level of energy, concern, and vitality in its undergraduate program. We did not observe the same level of energy with regard to the curriculum and structure of the graduate program. Indeed, in several meetings, our efforts to discuss the graduate curriculum were overwhelmed by an interest

in discussing the undergraduate programs. Moreover, there is considerable emphasis on pedagogy for the graduate students themselves, reinforcing a focus on undergraduates. An unintended result might be a departmental climate which communicates to the graduate students that undergraduate teaching is the best or highest aspiration the Department holds for them.

- *Emphasis on “public scholarship.”* Again, the Department is rightly proud of this focus of its graduate programs, but this may prove to be a case where one’s strength can simultaneously be a vulnerability. The attraction of public engagement can be irresistible, potentially undermining the research options of young scholars. The goals of professional development and intellectual presence within a research community can be a tougher sell, but one to which the Department should focus additional effort.

The latter two items suggest examining how to balance messages that simultaneously value teaching and public service along with engaged research. It is worth noting that our sense of the graduate student population is that it is sufficiently strong to respond to these changes of socialization and message. Though some faculty felt that some of the best recruits were being lost, the entering cohorts do not seem weak by any critical measure. The issue, in the view of the Committee, is the message being sent by the formal strictures of the program and the discourse of the Department.

INTERNATIONALIZING THE STUDENT BODY

The Department has not received, and therefore not accepted, many applications from international graduate students. This situation is anomalous; most Communication departments are attracting large numbers of international students. These applicants, many of whom are highly competitive in terms of their academic credentials, are especially interested in pursuing research in the areas of strength within the Department: Political Communication, Communication Technologies and International and Intercultural Communication. Given Department strengths and its Pacific Rim location, it should 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.

RECALIBRATING SERVICE EFFORTS

The Department of Communication has a highly commendable record of service—indeed so strong that it can afford to consider cutting back somewhat. Faculty members at all ranks contribute substantially to university-wide initiatives. Almost all members of the faculty are equally engaged with effective governance processes within the Department, and many hold positions of responsibility with professional organizations off campus. Numerous members of the Department—again, at all ranks—commented on how extraordinarily busy they are. The situation appears to be particularly noteworthy for advanced assistant professors and new associate professors as they leave the relative protection of pretenure. In fact, one faculty member seemed disinclined to apply for additional external funding for a research project because of service responsibilities.

The problem of faculty workload was noted several times during the site visit. The Review Committee proposes that the Department consider reducing its very high level of extra-departmental service commitments as a way to deal with the faculty workload issue. Faculty members could probably reduce by half their contributions at the University-wide level and still deserve recognition as among UW's better academic citizens. It may be that, a dozen or more years ago, people outside of Communication felt that the Department needed the greater visibility around the campus that extensive University-wide service provides. Such is no longer the case. Especially to the extent that the extraordinary level of service takes away from research and graduate training, it deserves reconsideration.

FUTURE HIRES

The University can make sound strategic investments in the Department. We were pleased to find Communication in the midst of a second faculty hire in race and ethnicity. We note that a strategic third hire in the area would establish a supportive cohort and create the critical mass needed for a departmental concentration in race/ethnicity. Thinking further ahead, and considering UW strengths and possible partnerships, we recommend the Department consider planning to move into the area of Science/Health Communication.

POTENTIAL COLLABORATIONS

As noted previously, the Department is ranked in the Top 10 in three sub-disciplines of communication: Political Communication, Communication Technology, and Intercultural and International Communication. These represent three high-growth areas in terms of societal interest, external funding, job opportunities in academia and industry, and publishing opportunities. It is therefore in the Department's strategic interest to continue investing in these areas of core competencies.

A major factor driving public interest in these three areas is that they are perceived, by opinion makers and funding agencies, as being an important component of efforts to address grand societal challenges. For instance, the role of advancing scholarship in the areas of communicating and organizing are key elements of the National Science Foundation's major initiatives on Cyberinfrastructure and Cyber-Discovery & Innovation, as well as the National Institutes of Health's Road Map initiatives in the area of Translational Research. In response, Communication departments at many peer institutions are developing interdisciplinary research initiatives in partnership with other disciplines such as Political Science, Information Science, Computer Science, Engineering and the Health Sciences to address these grand societal challenges.

As a result, in the coming decade, the Department should expect increased competition from these Communication departments for recruitment of faculty and graduate students as well as external funding. Fortunately, the Department is exceptionally well-poised to head-off this competition. We recommend that one relatively low-cost but high-payoff opportunity is for the Department to assume the role of an intellectual hub on campus in response to some of these grand challenge initiatives. We encourage Department members to forge intellectual partnerships with collaborators who bring complementary expertise to address these grand challenges. In

particular, we recommend that the Department build better research collaborations with faculty in Technical Communication, the Information School, Computer Science, the School of Public Health and Community Medicine, and the School of Medicine. These are all highly regarded units, and it would be beneficial for the University, as it pursues major interdisciplinary funding initiatives, to leverage these potential partnerships. We are encouraged by the Department members' efforts to lay the foundation for these partnerships by cross-training students in many of these disciplines and serving on their dissertation committees. We encourage them to take the next step and develop joint research programs with faculty in these areas.

EVALUATING THE RANK OF LECTURERS

We noted that lecturers ranged from working professionals teaching part-time to bring their field experience into the classroom to productive, publishing scholars with doctoral degrees. We encourage the Department and the College to be certain that the latter group are properly classified, considering whether any of the lecturers should be reviewed for principal lecturer status or might even become part of the ladder faculty.

SUGGESTIONS FROM STUDENTS AND ALUMNI

We endorse addressing the following concerns, which emerged from our group interviews.

Diversity Student Group

Some undergraduates urged the formation of a minority student club, which seemed quite reasonable to us.

Enhanced Connections with The Daily

Both students and alumni emphasized how productive and formative they found the experience of working at *The Daily*. There was some concern that the value of this training was not fully appreciated.

Enhanced Access to Broadcast Journalism

The undergraduate students we spoke to understood that broadcast journalism is not a major focus of the Department. Nonetheless, they wanted their theoretical and disciplinary training to include some (more) access to the area.

OVERALL

We found the Department of Communication to be an energetic unit, a faculty center of research excellence, and an institutional leader in teaching and learning. We have no doubt that Department members can engage the issues raised in the previous section with the same commitment and skill that they brought to the merger and subsequent efforts. We recommend continuing the Ph.D. degree program as well as the M.A., the M.C. in Native Voices, and the M.C. in Digital Media. The Department should decide whether to close the M.C. for Communication Professionals program or to rejuvenate it beyond its role for mid-level professionals. We recommend reviewing the Department again in ten years.