



Office of the Acting Vice President
For Academic Affairs

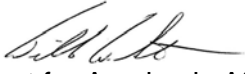
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Kristin Froemling
Acting Chair, Department of Communication

FROM: Wilbur W. Stanton 
Acting Vice President for Academic Affairs

SUBJECT: Corporate and Professional Communication Program Review

DATE: 21 August 05

COPY: Dr. Paul Sale, Chair of the Academic Program Review Committee
Academic Program Review Committee Members
Penelope W. Kyle, President
Dr. Ivan Liss, Dean, College Arts and Sciences
Dr. Carole Seyfrit, Dean, College of Graduate and Extended Education

Introduction

Academic program review is designed to assure regular examination of the University's curricula and academic structure and guide recommendations for improving academic quality. In addition, the process guides the effective allocation of resources, encourages continuous faculty and program development, and provides a rationale for making decisions about maintaining, enhancing, reconfiguring, or phasing out programs as required by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia and/or as indicated through other analyses and by other criteria. Further, the Program Review process provides a tool for working with departments and academic programs to implement the University's Strategic Plan. For the process to be fully effective, departments and programs must commit themselves to following through after the initial self-study and analysis by responding to the recommendations and/or required actions of the Academic Program Review Committee (APRC), the appropriate dean, and the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

During the 2004-2005 academic year, the APRC and the academic programs under review worked with program review criteria that were approved in April 2003. I commend the Academic Program Review Committee for the diligent, thoughtful review of academic programs and for the

report detailing its study and recommendations. Moreover, I commend each of the academic programs that undertook the self-study required to develop and present reports that allowed the APRC to complete its work.

This memorandum completes the first stage of the Academic Program Review process. Included in this memorandum are the APRC's specific program recommendations for the Corporate and Professional Communication Program. Also included are the APRC's overall recommendations.

Observations Pertaining to All Programs in General

I have several general observations that come from the reading of all the program review materials:

1. While graduate programs need not make specific references to the QEP (since implementation of the QEP has an undergraduate focus), graduate programs should discuss responses to recommendations for programmatic changes and improvements, giving special attention to those program modifications designed to enhance student engagement.
2. We need to continue efforts to collect alumni data. For example, helpful information may include alumni employment data, satisfaction with the program, and recommendations for improvement. This information is burdensome for individual programs to collect and maintain. Therefore, I am working with the Division of Institutional Research to enhance University coordination with programs and thus facilitate centralization of the data for program use during review processes. The APRC committee recommended that this information be gathered in possibly 1, 3, and 5 year intervals. While this would be robust and useful for program enhancement, the ability for the university to implement this will be dependent upon faculty workloads and the capacity for Institutional Research to design, gather, analyze, and disseminate resulting data. At a minimum, however, this must be part of every program review cycle meaning that alumni data must be collected once every five years as part of the self-study.
3. Finally, programs continue to make good cases for faculty and staff needs. It will remain increasingly important in a continuing environment of constrained resources that Radford University use the academic program review process to contribute to the determination of how to most effectively deploy available resources. We will continue to use the state's rubric (Schedule M) as a major determinant of workload expectations, but this metric alone cannot fully capture the uniqueness of a program and its centrality or contribution to the mission of the University. During the next academic year, I will work with the Council of Deans to explore a more inclusive set of workload criteria while retaining the state's workload principles.

Observations for the Corporate and Professional Communication Program

The following observations, recommendations, and conclusions are based on my review of APRC's analysis and Program Review Report, the self-study of the Corporate and Professional Communication Program submitted by the Department of Communication and the comments and recommendations submitted by Deans Liss and Seyfrit.

The Committee and Deans Liss and Seyfrit noted several strengths of the Graduate Corporate and Professional Communication program. I concur with these.

1. Unique program: The applied nature and the specific focus of the program in Corporate and Professional Communication is unusual in the region. Differentiating the focus and value of this program compared with others in the region and nation offers an excellent recruiting opportunity for Radford University.
2. Curricular revisions in response to previous program review and development of an accelerated program: The Department of Communication was among the very first to develop an accelerated bachelor's/master's program allowing excellent RU undergraduate majors to complete both degrees in five years.
3. Emphasis on students' professional development in QEP: The program has emphasized student engagement and professional development by providing opportunities that encourage increased student participation in professional organizations through presentations, membership, and conference attendance.
4. Recruiting plan and alumni connections: The department has developed and begun to implement more proactive recruiting strategies including nationwide mailing of brochures and advertising in professional organization newsletters. Efforts are underway to connect to alumni through a departmental newsletter and the formation of a board of advisors.
5. Emphasis on student professional development: A number of graduate students in this program have been accessing the Student Presentation Travel Fund. Students receive encouragement from faculty to present papers and seek funding for their travel. Eleven graduate students have received travel funds in the past four years.
6. A potential strength is that prospects for growth appear to be good. However, the popularity of the undergraduate program combined with resource constraints have kept this opportunity from being realized.
7. Twelve grants have been funded in recent years.
8. Faculty members are in the process of developing an active recruitment plan to reinvigorate the program.
9. Given relatively heavy teaching loads, the faculty's scholarly output is impressive.

The Corporate and Professional Communication Program has made a positive contribution to the Graduate College, the College of Arts and Sciences, and to Radford University as a whole.

As noted by the Committee, there are five areas that raised some concern, and I concur with these.

1. The growth in and size of the undergraduate program is constraining and reducing the department's capacity to deliver the graduate program. Given the current number of full-time faculty members, the department is overextended. In particular, the department is under pressure to meet increased enrollments in the undergraduate program not only for undergraduate majors but also for other undergraduate students in the university who need

communications courses to fulfill degree requirements in other majors or general education requirements. As a consequence, the graduate program has suffered.

2. Program learning outcomes are not stated in ways that are: in active voice, measurable, and at appropriate levels.
3. There are indications of programmatic changes to improve the program. However, the changes and assessments have not yet been fully implemented.
4. Program enrollments have declined even though a provision from the last program review is that the program was required to be grown.
5. The thesis option may no longer be advisable.

Recommendations and Conclusions for the Corporate and Professional Communication Program

The APRC made four recommendations, and I concur.

1. There is a need, as expressed by Dean Liss, to develop a long-term staffing plan that shows how an increase in faculty size would be used to meet the needs of undergraduate majors, general education students, and graduate students. Such a plan should incorporate "Schedule M" data analyses. For example, it appears that the department can justify two more FT faculty positions. However, if undergraduate enrollments continue to rise, then current problems will not be solved unless a comprehensive plan is used to reconcile the department's resource capabilities with various enrollment demands for courses at the undergraduate level for communications majors and non-communications majors and courses at the graduate level for graduate students in communications.

The department must work with the deans of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate College to establish a long-term strategic plan during AY 05-06 with particular emphasis on the graduate program. The plan should address the recommendations in item #2 below and be completed no later than February 1, 2006.

2. In its long-term staffing analysis and plan, the department must come to grips with whether the graduate program is going to be sustainable since the current trend is ominous. In order to continue the program, the committee recommends that the staffing plan include a clear direction on growth in enrollments and whether the program will be reestablished in Roanoke (the commercial center for this region). This recommendation is connected with a serious issue—the directive from the last program review for graduate enrollments to be increased and if not, the implication is that the University might very well discontinue it.
3. Over time, assessments should lead to identification of possible problems, corrective actions, reassessment, and evidence of improvement.
4. Examine the value of continuing the thesis option and make this decision with the students' career development needs in mind.

I commend the APRC for making recommendations whose intentions are clearly to strengthen the Corporate and Professional Communication Program.

It is essential that that faculty in the Corporate and Professional Communication Program immediately undertake the work required to secure these improvements. In doing so, the Department Chairperson and the faculty members in the Corporate and Professional Communication Program should work collaboratively and persistently with the Dean of the College of Business and Economics to make the changes and improvements that are recommended.

Following the Program Review Guidelines, “the Department Chair or Program Coordinator will submit a report to the Vice President for Academic Affairs and appropriate Dean(s) on or before April 1 [2006], indicating how the program has addressed recommendations of the Academic Program Review Committee and any recommendations from the Dean(s) or Vice President for Academic Affairs.”

In conclusion, the Graduate Corporate and Professional Communication Program should be maintained for the next two years and reviewed again by the APRC following established program review guidelines in AY 07-08 to determine whether the program should be continued in the context of the University’s institution-wide long-term programming and budgeting priorities.