



Office of the Acting Vice President  
For Academic Affairs

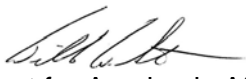
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## MEMORANDUM

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

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

**SUBJECT:** Undergraduate 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 of Arts and Sciences

### 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 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. Programs were encouraged to work with the QEP implementation team in the preparation of this year's reports. Those that did so had superior documentation compared to those that did not work with the team. We need to work together to ensure that programs clearly report results of the implementation of the program's Quality Enhancement Plan. Outcomes should be reported in measurable terms and changes made based upon those outcomes should be noted in the program review reports (see Quality Enhancement Plan Template column "Evidence of Improvements"). To that end, I have asked Ms. Bethany Bodo, in her role as Director of Academic Assessment, to provide, in the form of a fictitious department report, how outcomes can be reported and utilized to enhance programs. When this document has been created, I will make it available to all programs.
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 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 Undergraduate Communication Program submitted by the Department of Communication, and the comments and recommendations submitted by Dean Liss.

The Undergraduate Communication Program has made both a significant and positive contribution to the College of Arts and Sciences and to the University as a whole. The Program is strong as evidenced by the doubling in the number of majors in the past few years. Beyond majors, the department serves a large number of students in general education and service classes. Dean Liss reported in his memorandum that "the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), following an on-site campus visit in Spring 2004, accredited the department's public relations concentration." This is quite an honor. Being one of only a few programs nationally being so honored should prove an advantage in recruiting students and faculty.

I appreciated the extent to which the Communication Program addressed the recommendations resulting from the previous program review, which was done in 1997-98. The department took a number of actions including:

- The three concentrations in the undergraduate major were reduced to two by dropping Public Communication and Organizational Communication and adding Communication Studies. The Public Relations concentration was not changed.
- Sequencing of courses, requirements for the major, and prerequisites were examined and updated.
- Several out-of-date courses were dropped and the curriculum was revised to best reflect current concentrations and emphases.
- Teaching resources have been distributed to best support the major.
- Interactive media instruction (IMI) as a part of the Oral Communication Across the Curriculum program was dropped because of outmoded equipment and a lack of faculty resources to support it. These resources were redirected toward the major.

The department has chosen the Quality Enhancement Plan objective to "Increase student interaction with communication professionals" as its primary goal for improvement. Students who concentrate in public relations are now required to take at least one three-hour credit internship. A related strength as reported by the APRC was the faculty use of insights derived "from NSSE data and student journal entries to target areas of need – to help interns develop a more realistic understanding of the work place and to see greater relevance in their coursework." During the next decade there will be an increased emphasis on practical applications of academic theories to "real world" problem-oriented environments; added emphasis on "people skills" in all aspects of education; and the movement from passive to active learning. I commend the Program for developing these initiatives.

I was also impressed by the degree to which the faculty have been active professionally while maintaining a teaching and learning emphasis.

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

1. The department reduced its support of the general education needs of non-communications majors in order to meet the needs of communications majors. Also, the department gives preferential scheduling to its majors causing problems for students in other majors who cannot get into communications courses they need.
2. Program learning outcomes are not stated in a way that is active, 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. A 20% return on the survey may have produced biased results-- yet this was used to report a high level of satisfaction and engagement by program majors.

### **Recommendations and Conclusions for the Undergraduate Communication Program**

The APRC made several recommendations.

1. The Undergraduate Communication Program is encouraged to develop a long-term staffing plan based on "Schedule M" credit hour production data. Enrollment demands have stretched faculty resources, therefore current and projected enrollment and staffing issues must be addressed. I encourage you to monitor enrollment trends carefully, and to work with your dean to proactively address faculty and related staffing needs. Additional faculty lines as indicated via "Schedule M" analyses should also be connected with providing opportunities for non-communication majors to fulfill their general education requirements or requirements for other majors.
2. The Committee recommends that "your department work with other departments to develop a better understanding of their students' needs for communications courses and work with them on course options, at varying levels." I concur.
3. Accountability, the battle cry of state governments and accreditation agencies requires the University to demonstrate that we are meeting expected learning outcomes. As with many educational governing boards, SCHEV has begun establishing performance indicators and "institutional agreements" focused on standards of learning, student outcomes, and guaranteed student competencies. While it is still early in the process of using assessment data such as NSSE data, the Committee recommends that "the Communication Program continue its efforts to measure learning outcomes on a few important learning goals, identify goals on which improvements could be made, make changes, and reassess outcomes." As the Committee suggests, you might consider using more than one measure on a learning goal in order to triangulate data over time. NSSE data should be used to help document strengths and achievements as well as help you gain insights on issues or variables that have not been identified for further analysis. I concur with the Committee's recommendation that the program continue the process of developing pedagogically sound learning objectives and linking assessment to the learning objectives.

I commend the APRC for making recommendations whose intentions are clearly to strengthen the Undergraduate Communication Program in the Communication Department.

It is essential that that faculty in the Undergraduate Communication Program immediately undertake the work required to secure these improvements. In doing so, the Department Chairperson and the faculty members in the Undergraduate Communication Program should work collaboratively and persistently with the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences 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.”

This document should include findings and results from the initial implementation of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) and an updated QEP table (see page 3 of the Program Review Guidelines) that includes a completed “evidence of improvement” column. Programs are expected to discuss methodologies utilized and any challenges encountered during the process. They should also elaborate on ways in which they utilized the findings for program improvement and note programmatic decisions that have been made as a result of the implementation. All programs should document the QEP implementation process and keep this information, including any pertinent data, on file and accessible.

In conclusion, the Undergraduate Communication program is a viable program that meets SCHEV productivity standards and should be maintained.