

Submission date: January 31, 2020, resubmitted Feb. 11, 2020 per dean's request

Program/s in this review: Journalism & Public Communications, BA

Specialized accrediting agency (if applicable): None

Campuses where the program is delivered: Anchorage

Members of the program review committee:

- Elizabeth Arnold, Associate professor and chair, Anchorage
- Paola Banchemo, Associate professor, Anchorage
- Joy Chavez Mapaye, Associate professor, Anchorage

**1. Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role**

**Relevancy**

"After graduating, I entered my professional career with a diverse and profoundly useful skill set that led to my success as an owner of a strategic communications agency with nine full-time staff including three UAA alumni."

— JPC graduate and owner of strategic communications firm.

The Department of Journalism and Public Communications (JPC) prepares students for one of the most important roles of a global society: free expression and communication. An informed citizenry is critical to a functioning democracy. This is the guiding principle of the program. The program fosters in students a strong resolve to ensure that news and information is accurate, informative, fair and ethical. Through research, writing development, creative activities, and community engagement the program strives to meet Alaska's communication needs. The program has graduated 139 students from fall 2013 to December 2019, the period since our last comprehensive program review. We have graduated well over 900 students since our founding.

The Bachelor of Arts in JPC prepares students for a range of opportunities, evidenced in this recent pool of graduates. Many have gone on to work in local and statewide journalism organizations such as Alaska Public Media, Anchorage Daily News, Juneau Empire, Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, Peninsula Clarion, KTUU Channel 2 and KTVA Channel 11. Other graduates have moved directly into strategic communications roles for Doyon, the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Fish and Game, First Alaskans Institute, Alaska Native Heritage Institute, and Thompson and Co., and for the Anchorage Mayor's office and U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski's office. Several graduates were hired immediately by the UAA's own development and communication offices, unequivocal testimony to the program's relevance and workforce development.

**Support**

While the majority of JPC students are majors, the department's course offerings increasingly attract students from other Departments and Colleges simply -- and importantly -- because communications skills are essential across disciplines. For example, a Biology or Computer Science major needs to learn to effectively communicate research goals, or a Health Sciences major needs the skills to design a dissemination strategy for a communicable disease alert.

The program also offers a general education requirement in the social sciences, JPC A204 Media Literacy. This class was developed to address the urgent need for students to navigate the exponentially complex media and technology ecosystem.

### **Partnerships**

“My JPC internship at Alaska Public Media led to a full-time position as web editor/education reporter and my current position here in rural Alaska.”

- JPC graduate who is now a news director at a radio station in rural Alaska

The department is routinely contacted by prospective employers in media and communication fields in Alaska. A robust internship program channels JPC students into television, radio, online, print and strategic communications jobs. Currently, three JPC students who interned at Alaska Public Media now hold full-time on-air positions. The department has similar partnerships with other news and strategic communications organizations.

### **Extramural Funding**

At a ceremony this past year, Rasmuson Foundation Chair Ed Rasmuson awarded Chancellor Cathy Sandeen the final payment of a 2.5 million dollar endowment for the Atwood Chair of Journalism. The endowment pays for a full-time faculty position within the department. Atwood Chairs from international, national and statewide media organizations have provided students with a range of perspectives and experiences. Professionals such as Mark Trahant, the nation's foremost Native American journalist, and Larry Persily, a highly respected journalist and public policy expert have recently occupied the post.

### **High-Demand Designation**

*“The JPC program fully prepared me for a career in public relations and managing crisis communications. It opened the door to job opportunities I would have never thought possible.”*

- JPC graduate, GCI public relations team

Public relations and strategic communication programs are high-growth areas for university. High demand jobs in Alaska tend to be clustered in health and natural resource industries. While a JPC major may not be the first degree that comes to mind in preparing to work in these sectors, the ability to craft, communicate and disseminate a message, campaign or create a comprehensive strategic communications strategy is of essential importance in both. Health care providers and workers in engineering and tech industries are increasingly aware of the communication skills they need to build an audience with digital media.

## **2. Program Demand (including service to other programs), Efficiency, and Productivity (7 year trend; 1400 words or less)**

JPC is a professional program within CAS, and as such, demand for the program has remained strong. In addition, it has historically offered services to other departments informally, along with offering a way for students to meet a social science general-education requirement. Students from a variety of degree programs within CAS and outside the college have sought out JPC courses to augment their communication competencies.

JPC is a nimble academic unit. It has the endowed Atwood Chair position, which allows for a lot of flexibility and variety in course offerings. The department also has three tenured faculty members with tripartite workloads, one tenured faculty member with a bipartite workload with a joint appointment in JPC and AKNS, and adjunct faculty members who are subject-matter specialists in their area.

From fall 2013 to May 2019, JPC faculty secured more than \$800,000 in extramural support and funding outside the Atwood Foundation support. JPC faculty have served prominent roles in establishing the Atwood Foundation initiative for the new Alaska Center for Excellence in Journalism and leading a UA system-wide smoke- and tobacco-free policy campaign. Faculty routinely present research at Harvard University, Williams College, and at national and international journalism and public health conferences.

In January 2020 meetings with personnel from core programs for UAA in the College of Health, College of Engineering and College of Business and Public Policy, associate deans of those schools expressed support for JPC program offerings, which include media literacy, infographics/data visualization and strategy, strategic communications and video production. The areas of health communications, science communications and business journalism provide opportunities for collaboration on curriculum and projects.

Data from IR reports show that the JPC program's internal demand includes service to other programs such as Art, English, Psychology, Justice, Legal Studies, Management, Marketing and more. While most of the student credit hours skew toward majors, especially for upper-division classes, CAS numbers show lower-division courses are primarily taken by non-majors. That same student credit hour data show opportunities for attracting new JPC majors to grow the program. A bulk of student credit hours generated by non-majors came from those in the undeclared, exploratory major/undeclared, or general program categories.

Data from IR reports also show JPC program external demand has increased, with more JPC graduates enrolled in graduate schools in recent years from 2013 to 2018. Most graduate degrees awarded to JPC graduates were from graduate programs at UAA.

IR data show JPC degrees awarded from 2013 to 2019 increased while the number of CAS degrees awarded declined overall. Program enrollment trends show a decline that is reflected in both JPC and CAS. Course pass-rate numbers show the grade-passing rate by course level is higher in JPC than in CAS and that grade D, F and withdrawal rate by course level is lower in JPC when compared to CAS as a whole.

Data on instructional productivity will show smaller JPC class sizes compared to CAS. Other metrics related to cost, tuition revenue, student credit hours, and FTEF also appear to indicate less productivity. However, given the tripartite workloads of the three JPC faculty members, which include course releases for co-curricular activities, research and approved research leaves, the data require more explanation. Many JPC courses are skills-based, with specialized equipment and software, which require smaller classes. A current hands-on videography class, for example, has exceeded its cap, but cannot be successfully taught as a lecture to a hundred students. JPC also has one primary classroom/lab, with an

occupancy of 25. For non-majors, JPC courses are optional and not required. Many CAS programs have required courses for majors and non-majors alike, which translate into higher instructional productivity metrics. Changes in the JPC curriculum, along with increased collaboration with core UAA programs, will help boost numbers in this area.

### **3. Program Quality, Improvement and Student Success (1500 words or less)**

The B.A. in JPC is the journalism and mass communications program of choice in Alaska. Our graduates work in journalism and communications across the state and country, holding high-profile positions in top private and public sector employers such as ConocoPhillips Alaska, KTUU, GCI, MSI Communications, and Special Olympics.

The B.A. was externally accredited by the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications from 1990 to 2018. The program was fully re-accredited in 2016. However, the program voluntarily withdrew from the accreditation process in 2018. The reasons the faculty decided to voluntarily give up accreditation are 1. A lack of financial support for the university meant keeping up accreditation standards and costs was increasingly difficult, 2. A trend among journalism and mass communications programs to reconsider or withdraw from external accreditation because of the rigidity of accreditation standards at a time that industry demands are changing rapidly. Prestigious programs such as Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications and the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley, have recently given up their accreditator.

The curriculum is undergoing a revision this academic year. A new course, JPC A210 Infographics, Data Visualization, and Strategy, addresses an industry demand for data-knowledgeable workers who can analyze and visualize information graphically.

The B.A. has scaled back from half a dozen concentrations in the mid-'00s to four concentrations in 2005-2006 to two concentrations beginning in 2015-16. At that time, we reduced the number of credits needed to graduate from 126 to 120 to conform to other B.A./B.S. degrees. This latest revision that goes into effect in fall 2020 eliminates specific concentrations — a benefit to students. For example, strategic communications students should be versed in video production. Similarly, students destined for careers in journalism should understand the audience-driven methods that undergird strategic communications.

Core classes JPC 201, JPC 202, JPC 203, JPC 204 have all been offered online or as hybrid courses. Upper-division courses including JPC 362, JPC 463, JPC 314, and JPC 403 have been offered regularly online. The faculty members teaching online have gone through Quality Matters training and continue to invest in professional development.

From 2005-2006 on our Program Student Learning Outcomes have been as follows. Students graduating with a B.A. in Journalism and Public Communications will be able to:

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.
- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world.

Academic assessment has employed an array of tools to determine how well students exit the program with these outcomes. Pre- and post-tests measure the first two outcomes. We use internship workplace evaluations and feedback from a panel of professionals in the community to determine how students perform in other outcomes with the exception of the application of basic numerical and statistical concepts. We are introducing a course (explained above) that students may take to help them understand data and statistical basics. We also offer a research-oriented capstone and a professionally oriented capstone. This has made assessing the numerical and statistical outcome more complex. However, senior exit surveys have asked students to assess their own abilities in these areas and they have responded positively, as have internship supervisors. Sixty-six percent in the most recent senior exit survey said they agreed that the courses in the program prepared them in this regard. We also conduct periodic alumni surveys to learn how alumni regard their degree with the hindsight of years in the field. (Results below).

### **Student success**

Faculty in the program have worked diligently to identify and remove barriers to students. This has led to an uptick in graduation success rates and retention rates.

Part of this effort included the curriculum revision that scaled back concentrations from four to two in 2015-2016. It also involved personal contacts with students to help them resolve financial or academic issues to get them graduated. Sometimes the effort involved explaining to students what steps were needed to help them finish. The faculty in the department used degree completion information to focus efforts on students who had completed 75 percent of the degree requirements or more. One student who returned to college after a health scare said, "Being a student in the Department of Journalism and Public Communications meant the world to me. My professors and fellow students gave me the strength to keep going after a bout with cancer, and each day I'm in the field I think of my time at UAA with fondness and gratitude." She is now a reporter in Las Cruces, New Mexico, who has had front-page stories in USA Today. The result of the focus on degree completion is that the program graduated 17 students in 2013, 19 students in 2014, 19 students in 2014, 22 students in 2015, 19 students in 2016, 19 students in 2017, 26 students in 2018 and 27 students in 2019. These graduation rates have occurred while the overall number of majors in JPC has decreased. Our graduation rate for the 2013 cohort was 50 percent after seven years, much better than the university's rate for baccalaureate degrees for the 2013 cohort, which stood at 34.7% after seven years. Other student success initiatives we've undertaken include reducing the number of textbooks we require of students or to finding affordable alternatives.

We conducted an alumni survey of post-2000 graduates of our program. We sent the survey via email to addresses provided by the UAA Office of Alumni Relations to 425 graduates and received 67 responses, an almost 16% response rate. We were pleased with this rate of return considering many emails bounced back as undeliverable. Of the 67 respondents, 55 were employed full time. Three were employed part time by choice. Only three were unemployed. The majority (40) were employed in Alaska and 46 were employed in a position related to mass communications or media. The majority (39) made more than \$55,000 per year, while 13 made between \$35,000 and \$54,999 per year. 58 of the 67 respondents, or 86.5%, said they were moderately or extremely satisfied with the education they received in the program.

### **Advising students**

JPC faculty have reached out to students to ensure they have the correct information to navigate the degree. Since 2013, students have also had assistance from CAS academic advisors and now by first-year advisors. But we still recommend students meet with us every semester when they become JPC majors. It is a student-centered process shared among the faculty. We discuss courses, but also advise on internships, graduate school applications, job searches and other post-undergraduate experiences.

### **High-impact practices**

Many courses offer service learning, community-based learning experiences. JPC A362 Principles of Strategic Communications students have worked with the Alaska Commission on Post-Secondary Education to reimagine a social media campaign. Students in JPC A366 Planning and Writing for Strategic

Communications rebranded local small businesses and nonprofits in collaboration with local public relations/marketing firms. JPC A465 Strategic Communications Campaigns produced a winning student ballot initiative that banned tobacco and e-cigarette use at UAA and later, the entire UA system. Approximately 45 percent of our students complete internships during their undergraduate years. The program requires students complete either a research-oriented or professionally oriented capstone project. Professional projects have evolved into real-world entrepreneurial ventures, such as the hyperlocal magazine *The Spenardian*. Research projects, for example a media literacy education study in Alaska public high schools, have been recognized for their impact in undergraduate research symposiums and beyond.

#### 4. Program Duplication / Distinctiveness

JPC is one of two programs in the University of Alaska system that awards a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism/Mass Communications. The second program is at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Our program dates from 1979 when CAS Dean Saradell Ard introduced journalism courses at UAA. Ard was responsible for hiring Dr. Sylvia Broady as the first chair of the Department of Public Communications. When Robert B. and Evangeline Atwood established the Atwood Professor of Journalism, the department changed its name to Journalism and Public Communications. Our program, in the media and economic center of the state, teaches courses in journalism, digital media, and strategic communications (blending advertising, marketing, and public relations). This multifaceted program prepares students for a range of careers. Comparatively, UAF's B.A. in journalism graduates a fraction of the students UAA does each year. In 2019, JPC awarded 27 degrees compared to UAF's three degrees awarded. While the B.A. at UAF offers courses in photojournalism and investigative reporting, the majority of students in the Department of Communication and Journalism (COJO) are in human communication (interpersonal communication, public speaking, small group communication). However, we seek to build on existing collaboration with UAF. JPC exchanges the Atwood Chair of Journalism with the Snedden Chair of Journalism at UAF for a few days every year.

We are also focused on instructing with an eye on global diversity. This perspective is essential for our profession. This means journalists and strategic communications practitioners have to think globally, beginning with the simplest of steps: understanding that practice varies with borders, cultures, and languages. Our faculty have reported and worked abroad or with organizations that are engaged in global business. This helps us connect to our students, who often have diverse backgrounds and indeed, deserve this kind of instruction.

#### 5. Summary Analysis

*"I am the first generation of my family to attend university, not unusual for people of the Alaska Native Community. The communications skill set I gained from JPC has enabled me to effectively influence policy, create organizational change and work with professionals from all industry sectors. I can't say enough how crucial my undergrad degree has been from where I sit today."*

- JPC graduate who credits the program for her communications positions at Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Alaska Federation of Natives, CIRI, Shell and others.

The Department of Journalism and Public Communications takes seriously the responsibility to prepare ethical, globally aware communications practitioners. We offer a professional program deeply rooted in the liberal arts, with the flexibility to complete a minor in a complementary field.

We are exceptionally proud of our students, who are devoted to UAA, serving as leaders in student media, in student government, and in a variety of clubs and organizations. They continue to support the institution as graduates, returning to give career talks and to serve as advisory board members and mentors. What unites our diverse student body is a passion and commitment to contributing to the public square. Most of our students remain in Alaska and give back to the communities they are from. For example, one student distinguished herself as the fall 2018 commencement speaker, the first deaf person to do so. She had also conducted much-needed research into the overall effectiveness of Disability Support Services. A recent graduate produced a comprehensive multimedia website to preserve and protect Alaska native languages as her capstone project that was lauded by several Native Corporations. Another student produced a critically important public service magazine about Alaska's food security issues, while another explored the marketing effectiveness of the Anchorage Museum. JPC students are key members of community programs and Alaska institutions. They shape and contextualize public policy and private sector messages. Our graduates are not only members of the Alaska workforce, they are *highly visible* members of their communities as writers, broadcasters, videographers, speechwriters, and nonprofit and industry spokespersons. In short, they are the people Alaskans trust and depend on for reliable news and information across media platforms and industries.

We accomplish our mission with a lean, but highly experienced and diverse faculty. As current and former practitioners and researchers, we are able to teach a wide variety of courses, media ethics, and media literacy, science communication, health communications, political reporting, crisis communications, podcasting, and videography. We pride ourselves on staying well-versed and skilled in the latest technologies and platforms of a rapidly changing media landscape.

In sum, JPC is the journalism and mass communications program of choice in Alaska. The faculty and graduates of this department give voice to the reality and aspirations of our state's residents, from those who lack the agency to be heard, to the policymakers and leaders who shape Alaska's future.