

AY20 Expedited Program Review – Optional Program Response to the Dean’s Findings Form

Date: February 28, 2020

To: John Stalvey, Interim Provost

From: Elizabeth Arnold, Associate professor and chair

Cc: John Petraitis, Interim Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Program Review Committee Members:
Elizabeth Arnold, Associate professor and chair
Paola Banchemo, Associate professor
Joy Chavez Mapaye, Associate professor

Re: AY20 Expedited Program Review: Optional Program Response to Dean’s Recommendation

Program/s in this review: Bachelor of Arts, Journalism and Public Communications

Program response to dean’s findings:

In October 2013, the university was beginning a prioritization process that attempted to rank all functions to prioritize spending in an era of dwindling resources. At the time, JPC had six full-time, tenure-track faculty and 150 majors. While the prioritization process failed, the department took a hard look at what is critical and made difficult decisions about the curriculum with the limited powers we have at our disposal.

We have 101 majors and four full-time faculty members today; in short, we downsized as our student numbers declined. We reduced our concentrations from four to two. Next fall, we will have streamlined our program to the point that there are no concentrations or tracks in our unit. Yet the College of Arts and Sciences Dean’s recommendation for our program is that we revise further and eliminate one more faculty position. This would be the fourth loss of a full-time faculty position from our unit in eight years: We lost a term position at the end of Fiscal Year 2013, another at the end of Fiscal Year 2016 when a tenure-track faculty member resigned, and most recently when a tenured professor retired at the end of Fiscal Year 2019 and was not replaced. Additionally, our broadcast/media support technician — previously a full-time staff position — was reduced to a 10-month position in 2013 and eliminated in FY20. This was soon after the department lost a full-time administrator in the CAS administrative reorganization. One could argue that our diminishing student base is due to the loss of essential faculty to teach core classes and the staff to support them. We are now down to four faculty, with three uniquely qualified to teach core classes in multimedia and strategic communications. These reductions have diminished what used to be a vibrant broadcast/telecommunications concentration. Annual senior exit surveys indicate students cannot get the required skills classes when they need them. Critical equipment is not serviced or explained to students as thoroughly as it previously was, leading to avoidable breakages.

The Dean’s finding says, “The Department of Journalism and Public Communication does not contribute significantly to general education: only 30% of its student credit hours are with students outside of the JPC major, a rate that is half of the CAS average. Instead, its focus is on undergraduates who are interested in becoming professional journalists or strategic communication specialists.”

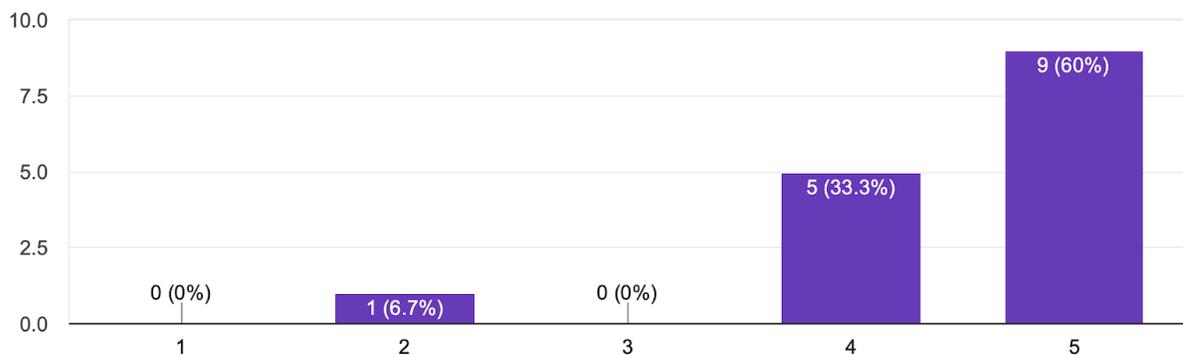
AY20 Expedited Program Review – Optional Program Response to the Dean’s Findings Form

Yes, the Bachelor of Arts in JPC is a professional program. Our students go into journalism and public communications, largely in Alaska. A high percentage of alumni are still working in these fields years after they graduate. Our focus has always been on preparing future journalists and public communicators who understand the state. Increasingly as the voice of unethical, non-professional commentators (citizen journalists) grows louder through social media, our program and our students become even more important.

A survey released this week of 15 Alaska news organizations asked what they sought in entry-level journalists. It found that more than more than 90% of them said having an understanding of legal principles, as well as the importance of credibility, fairness, transparency, tone and the ethical requirements for journalists is important or the most important attribute of new hires.

...have an understanding of libel/defamation legal principles, as well as the importance of credibility, fairness, transparency, tone and the ethical requirements for journalists.

15 responses



The Department of Journalism and Public Communications has historically had one social science general-education requirement and has been discouraged from creating more. The previously mentioned prioritization process required that we discontinue our minor, which saved the university no money but meant that business, justice, art and other majors who previously combined their major with the JPC minor were closed off from that possibility. We don't have a traditional focus on service to other units in the University, the way the Department of History or the Department of Philosophy does. Our service has been and will continue to be that our students are routinely called upon to help make multimedia and create collateral strategic communications material for other units.

We have been in conversation this academic year with other units, such as the College of Business and Public Policy and the College of Health, to explain our offerings and integrate their needs into our course rotations and curriculum development. It makes sense that a climate change GER, currently under discussion, would incorporate such courses as JPC A463 Crisis Communications and JPC A443 Public Service Reporting. Our faculty have been involved in the Chancellor's climate change task force and have been working with the Environment and Society BS program and the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies on much needed curriculum in this critical area.

AY20 Expedited Program Review – Optional Program Response to the Dean’s Findings Form

While we recognize that the Bachelor of Arts in JPC offers a different kind of program demand, efficiency, and productivity than service-oriented units in CAS do, we do provide outreach and service to other units. JPC courses are listed in a number of other program requirements, such as the minor in International Business. As more units learn about JPC A204 Media Literacy, we believe we will attract more interest in listing this course as an out-of-major requirement.

We currently have the following courses listed for fall 2020, but would like to propose consolidating offerings by eliminating JPC A404 Global Media and dividing teaching responsibilities for JPC A210 between Professor Arnold and Professor Banchemo.

Original schedule:

JPC A201 Reporting and Writing News one section
JPC A202 First Amendment and Media Ethics one section
JPC A203 Writing and Producing Media one section
JPC A204 Media Literacy (GER) two sections
JPC A210 Infographics, Data Visualization, and Strategy (one section face to face; adjunct)
JPC A213 Digital Imaging (one section face to face; adjunct)
JPC A312 History of Alaska Media (one section face to face)
JPC A345 Web Design (one section face to face; adjunct)
JPC A362 Principles of Strategic Communications (one section online)
JPC A366 Planning and Writing for Strategic Communications (one section face to face)
JPC A382 Podcasting (one section face to face)
JPC A383 TV Studio Production (one section face to face; adjunct)
JPC A404 Global Media (one section face to face)
JPC A492 JPC Capstone (one section hybrid)
JPC A495 JPC Internships (one section online)
JPC A495 JPC Internships (one section online)

Our colleagues at UAF are going to retain the B.A. in Digital Journalism through the expedited program review process, though it produces very few graduates. This is because the degree is yoked to the Department of Communication and Journalism (COJO), a human communication unit that teaches the Tier I oral communication general-education requirements. However, this means that UAA could offer a mix of online classes to appeal to UAF students and that would help satisfy their degree requirements.

Dean’s comment: 1. Recently the curriculum was revised, but it might need to be revised again with an eye toward more online offerings that could reach students outside of Southcentral Alaska. As part of our curriculum revision we are already in the process of designing science communication and climate change communication courses that would be offered online, along with a digital media skills course that could be offered online and face to face during hours that would accommodate working professionals. One new course, JPC A210 Infographics, Data Visualization, and Strategy, would help not just aspiring media professionals but also other professionals, such as nonprofit spokespersons and even salespeople, who incorporate market data and social media engagement in their work.

Dean’s comment: 2. The number of faculty be limited to three full-time faculty.

Our challenge with this request is that our unit has suffered severe losses in recent years, losing faculty expertise in broadcast journalism/video production. Even with four faculty members, all of whom have professional experience, not all courses can be covered with their knowledge base. The loss of even one faculty member could mean an even more dire situation in which key skills classes

AY20 Expedited Program Review – Optional Program Response to the Dean’s Findings Form

go unscheduled. Like other units, some curricular offerings such as History of Alaska Media, have emerged due to faculty interest. However, this has meant at least three non-skills classes must be offered every semester. This harms our students and does not match curricular requirements, which emphasize skills courses over theory courses.

Dean’s comment: 3. Faculty workloads must be revised so that research time is greatly reduced or eliminated, allowing the remaining faculty to cover more courses while reducing the program’s overall costs. One faculty member is already bipartite with a joint appointment in JPC and AKNS.

Three other faculty members are tripartite and have a range of research and service responsibilities that cannot easily be reduced or eliminated. Doing so would be a detriment to the unit, the College and the University.

Dean’s comment: 4. A tuition surcharge should be proposed for upper-division courses in JPC, thereby having students contribute more to the cost of this low-enrollment, high-impact program.

The JPC faculty resist the notion that JPC students be charged a tuition surcharge. Entry-level positions in both journalism and strategic communications tend to start at around \$40,000 in the state, below the average entry-level start and well below the standard in programs that do impose a tuition surcharge, such as Engineering. Such a surcharge might have the unintended consequence of lower enrollment.

Dean’s comment: 5. Multi-year partnerships with the community and industry should be established to create a stable and significant source of funds for the program. The net result should be a program that eliminates the gap between its costs and its revenue. If these and/or other steps do not eliminate the gap, the program should be reviewed for deletion in 2021.

This year JPC was the founding member of a new fully funded community-based initiative to support and improve the quality of journalism in Alaska. The Alaska Center for Excellence in Journalism is up and running with more than 100,000 dollars available in bi-annual grants with funding for training in partnership with the Alaska Press Club. JPC is a key partner in this new initiative with the Atwood Chair and Department Chair as permanent board members. ACE-J has already received national attention and is attracting even larger grants from organizations such as the Knight Foundation and the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting.

Relationships with the professional journalism community are vital. The good news is that Alaska newsrooms want to hire JPC graduates. However, they want entry-level journalists to be “capable of ‘doing it all’ one-man-band style of reporting, using video, audio, digital elements, on-air presentation, etc.,” according to the above-mentioned survey of newsrooms. And they criticize the fact that the department does not have the capability to train students in daily broadcast/digital story turnaround — a direct result of faculty and staff losses.

Relationships with the professional strategic communications industry are strong. A Public Relations Student Society of America chapter has operated at UAA almost continuously since at least 2003. The Alaska chapter of PRSA is engaged in giving the unit feedback on curriculum, mentoring students, and speaking to classes on a regular basis.

One of the goals of the department is to create a business-to-business student recruitment effort that would function for full-time workers and that could be funded by employers who want professional development for their employees. Skills courses such as podcasting, video production, and digital imaging are applicable and valuable to any organization. Courses in strategic communications and journalistic storytelling also help organizations and brands communicate with key stakeholders.

AY20 Expedited Program Review – Optional Program Response to the Dean’s Findings Form

In conclusion, the Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Public Communications has responded to budget cuts. It has absorbed faculty and staff losses. It has streamlined curriculum repeatedly. It has worked diligently to help students navigate the program and graduate. It has reached out and cooperated with professionals to create opportunities for students and to improve journalism statewide. Its faculty have been engaged scholars and active media creators. However, we cannot continue to be the journalism and mass communications program of choice in the state with fewer and fewer resources and without the support of administrators who understand the needs and challenges of the Department of Journalism and Public Communications.