Memorandum

To: Clifford Fedler, Associate Dean, The Graduate School
    Texas Tech University

From: Todd Chambers, College of Mass Communications
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CC: David Cheshier, Georgia State University

Date: 4/13/2010

RE: Department of Communications Studies, Graduate Program Review

Executive Report
The on-site review of the Department of Communication Studies graduate program at Texas Tech University was conducted spring 2010. The review team included faculty members from the Department of Psychology in the College of Arts and Sciences, the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education, the Department of Electronic Media and Communications in the College of Mass Communications and an external reviewer from the Department of Communication at Georgia State University. The team reviewed the self-report that was submitted by the Department of Communication Studies and met with the interim department chair, the interim associate chair, members of the faculty, and graduate students. In addition, the team toured the facilities available in the department. After the review and meetings, the team met to discuss the information provided in the report and the interviews. Using criteria and guidelines from the Graduate School at Texas Tech University, this report provides a summary of the graduate program review, as well as assessments of the program overview and vision, faculty productivity, quality and quantity of graduate students and graduates, curriculum and programs of study and facilities and resources. The review includes a summary statement from the team, as well as a separate statement from the external reviewer. The grade assessments for each area could range from Unsatisfactory to Excellent. Overall, there were no major disagreements about the assessments and there was a general consensus among the members from Texas Tech about the outside evaluation from the external reviewer.

The Department of Communication Studies has one graduate program that provides students the opportunity to earn a Master of Arts in Communication Studies. By design, the graduate program is generalist in nature and allows students to choose one of three tracks. As compared to the peer institutions included in the self-study, the program appears to fit within the norm and provides a common core curriculum with flexibility for students to specialize in interpersonal communication, organizational communication or rhetoric. The review team agreed that the
administrators and faculty members are dedicated to the mission of the program and genuinely want to see graduate students succeed. That being said, the review team also believed that the program would benefit from revisiting their strategic plan as it is related to their graduate program, especially as Texas Tech begins executing strategies related to the shift towards a national research university. Specifically, there appears to be a disconnect in terms of how the department can fit within the new research goals of the university. One suggestion is to examine the interim nature of the current administrators. This program appears to provide department administrators with excellent opportunities to develop administrative skills. Of the nine tenured or tenure-track members listed as members of the graduate faculty, three have administrative assignments elsewhere in the university. Because that leaves six full time faculty members (and two of those are currently department administrators), there appears to be issues related to the graduate program that deserve college and university attention.

Specifically, the unit needs stability in leadership and budget. This might be an opportunity for the department and college to make decisions that will not only benefit the graduate program in communication studies but help the university achieve its broader strategic vision. By providing at least one or two faculty lines, the department could seek out senior level faculty members with external funding experience to help guide them during this important time. In the faculty interviews and faculty survey data, there were concerns raised about the direction of the program and how faculty will be able to better fit within the university’s strategic plan. Apart from a small amount of external grant funding, the unit would benefit from expertise in the area of grant writing and funding. From a budget perspective, the department’s graduate program needs assistance in recruiting graduate students. Based on the trends in the data provided in the self-study, there has been a decline in the number of students admitted and enrolled in the program. At the same time, there has also been a decrease in the average GRE score for students admitted into the program. Because this unit provides service to the university in helping undergraduate students obtain oral communication skills, there is a definite need for the department’s faculty and graduate students to enrich the educational experience at Texas Tech University. Like other departments with general education requirements, communication studies’ graduate program has been uniquely linked to the undergraduate program because of the support from graduate students who assist faculty with large sections of public speaking classes. As in the external reviewer’s evaluation, the university should consider making a modest investment in the program to provide stability in department leadership and budget resources.

Although there have been recent decreases in enrollment in the graduate program, the department provides a unique service to the university at the graduate level. By re-evaluating their mission in terms of research and receiving modest investments from the college and/or university, the unit should be able to help the university achieve its strategic goals.

The review team agrees with the following assessments:

- Program Overview and Vision: Satisfactory
- Faculty Productivity: Good
- Quality and Quantity of Graduate Students and Graduates: Satisfactory
- Curriculum and Programs of Study: Good
- Facilities and Resources: Poor
After reviewing the external reviewer’s statement, the following is a summary from the internal team at Texas Tech University. The committee is comfortable with all assessments and recommendations.

Program Overview and Vision
In its mission statement, the department outlines its vision as investigating theoretical and applied dimensions to the study of communication using intensive and integrated research to generate knowledge about communication. Based on the review of the department’s self study and conversations with administrators, faculty and students, the review team believes that the communication studies graduate program exhibits a satisfactory standard in its program overview and vision.

The major strengths for the department include updated goals that are related to the university’s strategic plan to achieve national research university status. The department also boasts a small, but productive faculty and a graduate curriculum that provides students with three tracks — interpersonal communication, corporate/organizational communication or rhetoric/public address. In discussions with graduate students, about one-half acknowledged they were attracted to the rhetoric program because of the success of the debate team. The remainder of the students appeared to be split between the interpersonal and corporate/organizational tracks. Many of the faculty members appear to be exceeding expectations in research productivity in their areas of expertise. The department’s self-study reported an average of almost four poster presentations per year for master’s students and three refereed publications per year (some were co-authored with faculty). Of the 27 students listed as graduates of the program, eight were enrolled in Ph.D. or other graduate programs at institutions such as the University of Texas, University of Denver and the University of North Texas.

From a weaknesses perspective, one of the concerns raised by the committee about the program’s vision was the interim nature of the administrators in the department chair and associate department chair positions. During discussions with the interim chair and interim associate chair, there wasn’t a clear vision for the graduate program other than it was a generalist type of program. In the faculty meeting, some of the faculty members mentioned no clear direction in terms of the direction of the program and a lack of effective communication about what strategies were in place to develop the graduate program.

Some of the students discussed difficulty in receiving direction in terms of their program planning. Part of the problem may be related to the loss of senior level faculty members to university administrative duties and/or retirement. Of the nine tenured or tenure-track faculty in the department, three have administrative duties elsewhere on campus. Because of the types of roles that these senior level faculty members are in, there is no question that the department is well-respected in the development of administrators. However, the demands of the unit at the undergraduate level, combined with the absence of three senior level full-time faculty members, may be factors in the decrease in enrollment and graduate student credit hours generated and an increase in the amount of time it takes for a student to graduate. The recent reductions in enrollment coincide with a decrease in the average GRE score for enrolled graduate students, a potential area for concern.
Since the last graduate program review, there has been a dramatic cut in the operating budget for the department, a decline in graduate program enrollment and decreases in the number of students taking courses in the program. There was reduction of almost 25% of the operating budget during the review period. In addition, the number of students enrolled in COMS graduate courses dropped by 63% between 2007-8 and 2008-9.

Feedback from Chair(s), Faculty and Students

Chair(s)
During discussions with the interim chair and interim associate chair, questions were asked about their perceptions of the program's quality and the department's mission. The primary concerns raised by the administrative team included the need for additional faculty lines and increases in the operating budget. The concern about the need for additional faculty lines and resources.

Faculty
In the meeting with faculty members, the external review team heard from almost all of the tenured or tenure-track faculty members. In general, the faculty members acknowledged the need for more resources and more teaching. Additionally, the majority of faculty members discussed workload issues and the need for additional faculty to assist with the graduate program.

The survey data included concerns about faculty and course rotation schedules and the need for effective communication about the direction of the program. The survey also suggested some faculty concern about the availability and access to courses for students to take outside of the department.

Students
When meeting with the students about the vision and quality of the program, most of the students agreed that the program and its faculty were excellent. Some of the students expressed concern about the lack of direction they were receiving about their progress toward completion of the degree. Many of the students were not sure about what they were going to do once they completed the program.

In general, the comments from the student survey were very positive about the program.

Assessment and Recommendations
Because of the reductions in enrollment and the number of graduate student credit hours, as well as the lack of a clear strategy to address these concerns, the committee rates the program overview and vision as *satisfactory*, with the ability to quickly achieve a good or excellent rating.

To address the concerns, the committee recommends the following:

- The faculty should develop a strategic plan for the graduate program. Like all departments at Texas Tech, Communication Studies has provided a strategic plan
for the unit. If the department could use a similar process to clearly identify its graduate program identity, it might help the department be successful in providing leadership for the faculty and better guidance for the students. Most important, there is a desire among faculty and students that the department’s graduate program develop an identity.

- The interim nature of the administrative team appears to be influencing the planning and vision of the program. The empty department chair office suggests more than just a need to address the interim nature of a senior-level faculty member; rather, there appears to be a clear need to evaluate the gap left by the three senior-level faculty members who now have administrative duties elsewhere in the university. By providing an additional faculty line(s), the department and college would be allowed to possibly seek out senior-level faculty members with expertise in the area of external grant funding that would help the university, college and department.

- There is an immediate need for assistance in the area of graduate student recruitment. By providing funding for a graduate teaching assistant or other type of funding, the department can use this type of resource to immediately focus on increasing enrollment.

Quality and Quantity of Graduate Students
The committee rates this area overall as satisfactory. It appears that there has been a rapid reduction in the size of the graduate program across all measures related to graduate education including, applications to the program, the number of students admitted, and new graduate students enrolled. The one somewhat stable indicator is the number of students graduated. Of the graduate students that are enrolled in the COMS program, it appears that the overall quality is good when considering indicators such as placement into solid doctoral programs (for those that wish to pursue a doctoral degree) and the success of the debate teams. However, when considering the average GRE scores for the enrolled graduate students they seem low. During the 6 years reported in the Graduate Program Review, combined verbal and quantitative scores are below 1000 during 5 of the 6 years (with the exception of 2003 where average combined scores are 1008).

Feedback from Chair(s), Faculty and Students
Chair(s)
During discussions with the chair(s) about the quality and quantity of graduate students, the primary area of concern was related to recruitment. The interim chair in charge of the graduate program acknowledged a clear need for assistance in this area.

Faculty
The faculty agreed that one of the strengths of the program included the type of students that were coming into the program. Faculty members discussed the need to provide more information about the process toward graduation in the program.

Students
During the student discussions, some of the students mentioned the difficulty in obtaining
information related to their degree plan. There was also some concerns raised about the availability of some faculty members due to their commitments elsewhere.

Assessment and Recommendations
In general, the students appeared to be equally distributed across the three tracks. The students interested in rhetoric could clearly identify their professional goals while the other groups weren’t as clear in the direction they would like to go after earning their degree. There has been a clear decrease in enrollment and GRE scores among the graduate students. Part of this might be related to the lack of a recruiting budget for the department or some type of recruiting assistance. Therefore, the review committee rates this area as satisfactory.

The committee recommends:

- It seems that with a more concentrated effort on recruiting, the number and quality of graduate students will increase. The college and/or university should consider providing assistance in the form of an additional funding for a graduate student's primary task would be to assist the graduate director with the development of recruiting materials and providing feedback for those interested in the program.

Curriculum and Programs of Study
The committee rates the curriculum and programs of study as good. The graduate program in the department provides students with the opportunity to earn a Master of Arts degree in Communication Studies. Students are required to take a minimum of 30 hours of coursework and six hours of thesis credits. Those who choose this graduate program may select one of three tracks – interpersonal communication, corporate/organizational communication or rhetoric/public address. Or, a student may choose a generalist track. Students complete the M.A. program by successfully defending a thesis.

Core Courses

Of the 21 graduate courses offered in the department’s curriculum, students are required to complete five core courses including Qualitative Research Methods, Quantitative Research Methods, Historical-Critical Research Methods, Communication Theory and Theories of Rhetoric. Students may select from one of the remaining 16 courses in the curriculum, with an option to take up to two courses from outside the department.

Course Offerings

According to the self-study, the department rotates courses every four years. The department provided charts that outlined course offerings. The two theory courses were regularly rotated in the fall and spring semesters. The methods courses appeared to be offered in a less consistent manner that might cause bottlenecks or prevent procession through the program. During meetings with the department chair and the associate chair, there was concern that faculty members who traditionally teach these types of courses are either required to teach other courses
in the undergraduate program or are in administrative roles at the university level and might not be able to teach on a regular basis.

After examining enrollments for the core courses, there appeared to be a significant decline in enrollment in core courses in the past three academic years. In 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009, the total enrollment for the five courses was 102, 60 and 24 respectively. According to the chairs, these numbers have seen a slight increase in the past year; however, declining enrollment in the core courses suggests a need to evaluate recruiting strategies.

Feedback from Chair(s), Faculty and Students

Chair(s)
Both the interim chair and interim associate chair in charge of the graduate program discussed the strength of the program and its curriculum. These interim administrators acknowledged the strength of the faculty in terms of productivity and curriculum. The chairs both agreed that the recent departures of senior-level faculty and administrators have created some concerns about the offerings of courses in the graduate program. In particular, the quantitative research methods course had to be postponed because of commitments of the administrator and current teaching assignments of courses that had to be covered.

Faculty
There is no question about the strength of the faculty in terms of teaching the graduate curricula. The faculty publishes in areas where they are contributing to the scholarship related to the core curriculum and elective courses. The faculty supported the idea that students need to be exposed to a variety of methods and theoretical frameworks. There was concern about workload in terms of being able to offer and teach courses. In particular, faculty discussed their faculty in terms of being down by three to six full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty members. Faculty members stated that they are trying to be successful in evaluating their curriculum and providing what the students need. However, there was some concern about the inability to offer special topics in a program that does its best to cover its classes.

Students
During discussions with current graduate students, there were both positive and negative comments about the curriculum and the frequency of the offerings. Most of the positive comments focused on the flexibility the program offered and the strength of the faculty. In particular, several students talked about their faculty mentor and how they feel the program provided them a positive graduate experience. Some students noted their desire to pursue teaching as a career and the possibility of them pursuing a Ph.D. in the field. At the same time, many of the graduate students identified problems with taking quantitative methods along with qualitative and a theory class in rhetoric. There appeared to be students who enjoyed rhetoric (debate students) and everyone else (non-debate students). In addition, some students talked about the 1-hour credit courses and how they fit or didn’t fit into their program. Another troubling concern from students was an apparent lack of leadership and guidance in terms of their graduate degree plan. Many of the students discussed receiving guidance from second-year students and a lack of clarity in terms of what and when certain classes would be offered and whether they would graduate on time.
Although there was quantitative data provided in the self-study, there were four students who responded. The lowest rated item was having access to major professor. The vast majority of the items were scored at “4” or above.

Assessment and Recommendations
Based on the action plan from the previous graduate program review, the current self-study and the discussions with administrators, faculty and students, this committee makes the following recommendations as related to the curriculum and program of study:

Assessment of Curriculum: Good

The committee recommends:

- There needs to be better external and internal communication about the program and the graduate degree plan. The three tracks of the curriculum, as well as the option to graduate as a generalist, provides students with flexibility and allows a student to focus her or his studies in a particular area. At the same time, it also requires significant leadership from administrators and faculty to guide students who need assistance in planning and selecting from a wide variety of courses.
- The department needs to evaluate its current core curriculum in terms of determining if there needs to be fewer required core courses. Although there might be a desire among some faculty and administrators to maintain the current number of required core courses, the program needs to objectively examine the needs for these courses.
- The college/university should evaluate its level of commitment to this unit. In the past few years, there have been three faculty members who have been asked to advance into university administration. In addition, another senior-level faculty member resigned. Although there is a current faculty line open to replace the resignation, the three other lines appear to have impacted the curriculum and program by creating more workload commitments among the six remaining faculty members.

Faculty Productivity
The committee rates faculty productivity in the department as good. In its self-report, the department highlighted productivity and workload expectations of its faculty. Compared to three of the four peer institutions, the striking difference for Texas Tech’s communication studies department is the small faculty size. Of the 10 tenured or tenure-track faculty members listed as graduate faculty members in the department, three have administrative appointments elsewhere in the university and one has retired since 2008. For three of the other peer institutions, their departments have at least double, if not triple the size.

As noted in the self-report, the faculty members in the department have been dedicated to research productivity in refereed articles/abstracts, books/book chapters, other types of publications and presentations/posters. Overall, the faculty produces an average of 14 refereed
articles/abstracts per year. In general, the publications appear to fit the department’s three areas of focus in its graduate program.

Because the department is a MA-only graduate program, the faculty primarily provides service as committee chair and committee member for students within the department. However, six of the faculty members have served on master’s committees outside the department and five faculty members have served on dissertation committees outside the department during the review period. When considering the six current faculty members who work full-time within the department, the number of committee chaired decreases by almost one thesis student and the number of committees served on increases by a thesis student. Apparently, the most recent chair of the department chaired 16 thesis committees and was a member of 13 other committees. This transfer might significantly impact the workload redistribution for the next review cycle.

As the university moves toward national research status, there will be greater emphasis on the number of external funding opportunities the faculty in the department seek and receive. This type of research productivity will be important for helping to grow the graduate program. Overall, the department has written 17 proposals to foundations, state agencies, federal agencies and other types of agencies. According to data provided in the self-report, the department was awarded 3.15 awards with amounts for Facilities and Administrative at $4,098 and the total amount funded at $39,533. Comparison data for peer institutions was listed as N/A or $0.

Feedback from Chair(s), Faculty and Students
Chair(s)
During discussions with the interim chair and interim associate chair, the major focus was on the ability of the small faculty to generate scholarship. The chair(s) provided information about the strength of the faculty in terms of the number of articles published. Workload issues were addressed during the interviews as an area of concern, especially for the administrators.

Faculty
In the discussion with the faculty members, working on external committees, workload and resources were introduced as areas of concern. Some of the faculty members mentioned the desire to be able to work on dissertation committees. When asked about the opportunities, one faculty member discussed working on outside committees as a way to assist with the research agenda. Some members of the faculty expressed concern about the stated goals found within the self-report of working on projects that were outside their areas of expertise. That being said, there was a clear willingness to work on other dissertation topic and external funding opportunities. One faculty member talked about the potential of partnering with another department in developing a Ph.D. program. Many of the faculty members expressed concern about workload and compensation.

Students
During the interview with students, the majority of the students were impressed with the faculty within the department. Many of the students talked about their faculty mentor and the ability to work on research projects. The students believed that the faculty was strong and appreciated the research opportunities that they were being provided with.
Assessment and Recommendations
In terms of faculty productivity, the committee rates the department as Good. The faculty in the department has been able to maintain its publication record. Although there has been publication activity, the department is strongly encouraged to engage in strategic planning about the role of faculty in the university’s research plan.

- The faculty and administrators need to clearly identify the research goals of the unit. Through planning, the unit can strengthen its ability to fit within the university’s strategic plan.
- The faculty and administrators need to increase the number of grant proposals submitted for external funding.

Facilities and Resources
The facilities for Communication Studies are poor. Despite the fact that every faculty member in the department has an office, there is no protected departmental research space available to any of the faculty to conduct their research. This is a major problem given that research is a requirement for faculty in this department to be granted tenure and promotion. In fact, during one of our meetings, a faculty member noted that they are ready to begin a number of studies for which they have IRB approval, however, they have no space in which to run these studies.

Space for graduate students in the program is no better. On our tour of the department’s space, we were shown one small workspace area that housed several computers that are available to students, some of which had statistical packages (e.g., SPSS) installed on them. Additionally, it was noted that faculty are very limited in having access to supplies that are necessary to do their job. For example, it was noted during the meeting with the departmental faculty that each faculty member are allotted one ream of paper per semester and when that is used, they must purchase their own. The one area where resources are not viewed as poor by the committee is that it appears that faculty in the department have access to the primary databases in their field via the university library.

Feedback from Chair(s), Faculty and Students

Chair(s)
In the tour of the facilities, the chairs walked the committee through their facilities that directly support the graduate program. The chairs noted that there are studies that have not been able to start because of the lack of facilities. One of the chairs noted that there was a need to have some form of assistance in grantwriting.

Faculty
During the discussion with the faculty members, there were concerns raised about resources related to the copy machine. In addition, other faculty members confirmed concerns about the lack of available space to conduct research projects. Faculty members talked about the need for assistance in grantwriting that goes beyond shortcourses and information sessions.

Students
Students appeared to use the space that is provided to them for their research projects.
Assessment and Recommendations
The review team rates the facilities and resources for the graduate program in communication studies as poor. The college and university should consider providing assistance to help the department with this issue, especially if the department is to help the university achieve its broader goals.

The committee recommends:

- The department should propose increases in funding to specifically assist with research and graduate students.
- The college and/or university should consider providing assistance to help the graduate program. This might include devoting some type of training specifically designed for faculty in the department.