

August 2, 2017

**PROFESSOR VALERIE HARTOUNI, Chair**  
**Department of Communication**

SUBJECT: Undergraduate Program Review for Communication

Dear Professor Hartouni,

The Undergraduate Council discussed the 2017 Department of Communication Undergraduate Program Review. The Council supports the findings and recommendations of the review subcommittee and appreciates the thoughtful and proactive response from the Department.

The Council would like to highlight the subcommittee's suggestion of publicizing resources, particularly the media lab, available to students for production-related activities. While the media lab is not affiliated with the Department of Communication, it is a valuable resource for students who want hands-on training and is available for all students to use.

The Council will conduct its follow-up review of the Department in Spring Quarter 2018. At that time, our goal is to learn about the Department's progress in implementing the recommendations of the program review subcommittee and the Undergraduate Council. The Council extends its thanks to the Department for their engagement in this process and we look forward to the continued discussion.

Sincerely,

Geoffrey Cook, Chair  
Undergraduate Council

Attachment

(1) Undergraduate Program Review Report and Responses for the Department of Communication

cc: B. Goldfarb  
C. Padden  
J. Rauch  
R. Rodriguez  
K. Roy  
B. Sawrey  
M. Sidney

**Undergraduate Council**  
**Undergraduate Program Review**

**Department of Communication**  
**University of California San Diego**  
**May 1-2, 2017**

**Introduction**

The Undergraduate Council (UGC) appointed an undergraduate (UG) Review Committee for the Department of Communication, which met on May 1-2, 2017. As members of the UG Review Committee, we received a briefing packet in advance, including an UG Program Review Self-Study Report dated December 10, 2016, a resource profile, support funds summary and teaching assistant summary, along with information on (i) majors, courses and enrollments, (ii) degrees granted, time to degree and student profile, (iii) faculty workload and teaching statistics, (iv) student surveys, and (v) the previous UG Program Review, dated April 16-17, 2010, along with the Department's response and a UGC follow-up memorandum, dated October 14, 2011.

On May 1, the UG Review Committee, including a Senate Analyst, met with the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs/Dean of UG Education, the Acting Department Chair and the Director of the UG Program, Senate Faculty, Student Affairs Advisor and Business Officer, UG Majors, and Teaching Assistants. On May 2, the UG Review Committee met with two College Deans of Academic Advising and participated in an Exit Meeting with the Acting Department Chair, the Director of the UG Program, the Dean of Social Sciences, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs/Dean of UG Education, and the Assistant Dean of UG Education. The UG Review Committee was also scheduled to meet with two Non-Senate Teaching Faculty, who did not materialize.

**The Department of Communication**

The Department of Communication is proudly interdisciplinary, combining theories and methods from a variety of disciplines in the social sciences, humanities, and arts, with faculty trained in American studies, anthropology, cinema studies, cognitive science, communications, critical legal

studies, digital media studies, education, feminist studies, film and video production, history, informatics, linguistics, performance studies, political science, science studies, semiotics, sociology, transnational gender studies, urban and regional planning, and visual and cultural studies. The Department as a whole emphasizes analytical and theoretical approaches to communication, blending these approaches in several ways with a practical media-related focus. Unlike Communications Departments at other colleges and universities (including, notably, California community colleges, from which nearly half of its UG majors derive), the Department does not see itself as a vocational gateway to forms of paid employment in the mass media (newspapers, television, film, online platforms), public relations, marketing, event planning, or motivational speaking.

As a way of forging community among scholars with disparate backgrounds and research/creative interests relating to a rapidly changing media landscape, Department Faculty meet regularly to learn from each other and improve the quality of their educational offerings. It is clearly part of the ethos of the Department to rethink and improve the implementation of its pedagogical mission on a regular basis.

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

The Department offers a structured curriculum. The UG major consists of thirteen courses, while the UG minor consists of seven courses. The UG major requirements include COMM 10 (Introduction to Communication), a lower division foundational course that introduces students to the history, theory, and practice of communication, three mid-level upper division courses—COMM 100A (Situated Practices), COMM 100B (Interpretive Strategies), and COMM 100C (Social Formations)—and COMM 190 (Junior Seminar in Communication), a detailed examination of a specific topic pursued in weekly three-hour seminars culminating in a research project with a significant final product (typically a research paper). In addition to these five courses, the major includes eight upper division electives, of which no more than six may be taken at the Intermediate Level (COMM 101-119), and at least two must be taken at the Advanced Level (COMM 120-189). The UG minor requirements include COMM 10, two of the COMM 100A-C courses, and four upper division electives, of which no more than three may be taken at the Intermediate Level, and at least one must be taken at the Advanced Level.

COMM 10 and COMM 190 are offered every quarter. COMM 100A is offered once every academic year in the Fall, COMM 100B once every academic year in the Winter, and COMM 100C once every academic year in the Spring. All five foundational courses are offered in the summer. COMM 10, which satisfies the University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) graduation Requirement, has become more popular over the last four years, with Fall enrollment growing from around 300 students in the years 2011-2015 to more than 400 students in 2015-2016. Overall, the number of Communication majors stands at around 750.

Transfer students who declare Communication as their major before they arrive on campus, typically in the Fall of their junior year, and who represent a significant plurality of all Communication majors, face scheduling challenges that non-transfer students do not face. COMM 10 is a prerequisite for almost every Intermediate Level course and for every Advanced Level course. What this means in practice is that almost all transfer majors would be barred from taking any course other than COMM 10 in the Fall of their first year on campus unless the COMM 10 prerequisite rule were relaxed in some way. Aware of this issue, the Department offers transfer majors the option of enrolling in COMM 10 and COMM 100A concurrently, and offers a similar option of concurrent enrollment in COMM 10 and any Intermediate elective with departmental approval. In principle, transfer majors who arrive on campus in the Fall of their junior year should be able to take COMM 10, COMM 100A, and one or two Intermediate Level COMM electives, as long as they obtain departmental approval for concurrent enrollment.

### **Issues and Concerns**

The Department's UG curriculum is relatively straightforward and easy to understand. Faculty and staff have worked hard to avoid the "bottleneck" problem for transfer majors posed by the status of COMM 10 as a near-universal prerequisite for the Communication major and minor (by reserving seats in COMM 10 for incoming transfer majors). However, issues remain.

1. *Ambiguous Catalog Copy*: The Catalog entry for COMM 10 includes the following sentence: "Effective fall 2015, students with junior or senior standing may take COMM 10 concurrently with COMM 100A, B, or C or an intermediate elective with department approval." It is unclear whether

the phrase “with department approval” applies merely to “intermediate elective” or to “COMM 100A, B, or C or an intermediate elective”. If the former, then the sentence means that students do not need department approval in order to enroll in COMM 10 and one of the COMM 100 A-C courses concurrently. However, the Catalog entry for each of the COMM 100A-C courses lists COMM 10 as a prerequisite, which suggests that COMM 100A-C may not be taken concurrently with COMM 10. To make matters worse, the Registrar does not permit automatic enrollment in both COMM 10 and any one of COMM 100A-C. At the same time, College Deans of Academic Advising, who are interested in helping transfer students integrate quickly and who do not want them to face obstacles in the way of completing their UG degrees in two years, are telling all incoming transfer students that they should be aiming to enroll in three or four courses in their declared major during their first quarter on campus. The result of all this is a certain amount of confusion on the part of incoming transfer Communication majors, some of whom may end up taking no more than COMM 10 (or COMM 10 along with one of the COMM 100A-C courses) in their first quarter on campus.

2. *Course Headings*: The course headings for COMM 100A-C, though accurate, are somewhat jargon-laden and less than lapidary. To its credit, the Department recognizes that this is a potential problem, and has come up with new headings for these courses: “Communication, the Person, and Everyday Life”, instead of “Situated Practices” (for COMM 100A); “Communication and Culture”, instead of “Interpretive Strategies” (for COMM 100B); and “Communication, Institutions, and Power”, instead of “Social Formations” (for COMM 100C).

3. *Course Size and Room Availability*: Fall quarter COMM 10 and COMM 100A have become very large courses (over 400 students each), and there are precious few lecture halls on campus large enough to accommodate courses of this size. Offering two sections of COMM 10 (and possibly COMM 100A) would alleviate this problem, as well as making it easier for transfer majors to fit COMM 10 (and possibly COMM 100A) into their schedules. However, the Department has traditionally assigned COMM 10 to senate faculty, so offering two sections of COMM 10 would put pressure on this tradition inasmuch as it would result in a reduction of Advanced Level electives taught by senate faculty.

In addition, hands-on COMM courses that focus on production need spaces with movable chairs and access to the proper equipment. Currently, these spaces are shared with the Visual Arts Department, which puts significant pressure on scheduling and availability.

4. *Course Scheduling*: UG majors report that course offerings are not equalized across the three quarters of the academic year. The numbers confirm this trend. In the two years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016, setting aside the five UG major requirements (COMM 10, 100A-C, and 190), there were 39 UD courses offered in the Fall, 45 UD courses offered in the Winter, and 48 UD courses offered in the Spring.

5. *English as a Second Language*: For many UG majors, especially international students, English is a second (or third) language. The Department has for many years faced the problem that a number of these students do not have the linguistic skills to produce college-level writing in English of sufficiently high quality. More recently, many international students have found it difficult to communicate orally with their instructors and with other students in English. The instructional staff who bear the brunt of the discrepancy between expectation and reality in the way of English comprehension and exposition are principally teaching assistants, most of whom are graduate students in the Department's Ph.D. program. Department teaching assistants report that they find themselves using two separate grading standards: one for native English speakers, and one for non-native English speakers.

6. *Discrepancy Between Student Expectations and the Department's Pedagogical Mission*: The Department views itself as challenging its majors to think critically, and to produce written work and media-related projects that are informed by critical theory. But many students who choose Communication as their major, especially transfer students, think of it as involving more hands-on mass-media-related experience and as a gateway to jobs that require that sort of experience: jobs in journalism, film, television, advertising, marketing, and event-planning. The reason why transfer students are particularly vulnerable to experiencing a gap between their own expectations and the Department's pedagogical mission is that the community college courses that led them to the Communication major tend to emphasize the practical over the theoretical: rhetoric, public speaking, film and television production, and short-form deadline-driven non-fiction. Reasonably,

many transfer students arrive on campus mistakenly expecting that the Communication major at UC San Diego will be more of the same, perhaps with an additional layer of theory.

Partly in response to this discrepancy, the Department reports that it has been thinking about instituting thematic groupings or “concentrations” in order to help students develop a more integrated and less haphazard plan of study. The initial proposal, which the Department proposes to refine, is based on five groupings: (1) Media, Law, and Society, (2) Spatial and Temporal Geographies, (3) Multimedia Environments, (4) Education, Health, and Community, and (5) Public Discourses and Debates.

7. *Advising*: At the time of the previous review in 2010, the Department had one UG Advisor for more than 700 majors. Recognizing that this leaves the lone UG Advisor with an untenable load, the Department secured sufficient administrative support to hire a second UG Advisor. Unfortunately, the second UG Advisor has recently found another job, and the original UG Advisor with 35 years of experience and a great deal of institutional memory will be retiring in the next few months. Plans are afoot to replace her, but after the replacement the Department will be in a worse situation than it was in seven years ago, with a single UG Advisor lacking both experience and institutional memory.

8. *Junior Seminar*: UG majors reported that the Junior Seminar (COMM 190), scheduled once a week as a three-hour marathon, is exhausting.

9. *Group Projects*: UG majors reported that instructors sometimes assign group projects but do not apply fair and consistent criteria when grading students’ individual performances.

10. *Student Evaluations*: The UC San Diego administration has encouraged departments to develop their own instructor evaluations, to serve as a second method of assessment (apart from CAPE) for purposes of merit review and pedagogical improvement. The Department of Communication has developed its own student surveys, one to assess the performance of teaching assistants in section and another to assess the performance of instructors in lecture. Implementation, collection, and analysis of the data on these evaluation forms appears to be less than systematic. Some senate

faculty report not having seen their evaluations, some report being given access to them only if they ask to see them, and it is unclear what role, if any, in-house student evaluations play in merit reviews. In addition, the evaluation forms themselves could use some serious revision. For example, the first item on the instructor form concerns the handling of sections, which is largely (perhaps exclusively) applicable to teaching assistants. For another example, nowhere on either evaluation form is there space for students to be self-reflective about their own performance in the course.

11. *Practicum Courses*: The Department offers two Practicum Courses (102C and 102D), both of which fulfill the University's DEI Requirement. In the years 2011-2014, these courses were offered every quarter, with relatively small enrollments in each. More recently, these courses have been offered twice a year (102C wasn't offered at all in 2015-2016). Other things being equal, it is better not to offer instantiations of the same course with low enrollment every quarter. Although there are benefits to be derived from small-scale teaching environments, there are also losses deriving from the fact that fewer and less varied upper division courses are offered every year. And this is an issue for a department, such as Communication, that assigns senate faculty to teach courses (namely, COMM 10 and 100A-C) that function as prerequisites for both the major and minor.

12. *Media Lab*: The Media Lab, which offers workshops for students who want hands-on training to work with various types of media-related equipment, is helpfully located in the basement of the main Communication building. Several UG majors mentioned that the Department does not advertise the resources offered by the Media Lab, even though many COMM students who are interested in improving their production-related skills would make good use of the training.

13. *Scattering of the Department*: Offices belonging to the Department's administrative staff, faculty, and teaching assistants are spread over three separate buildings. This is not conducive to building the kind of community that the Department aspires to be.

14. *Size of Department Relative to Number of UG Majors*: The Department has 25 full-time faculty members, with several serving in important university-wide administrative positions (including

the Dean of Social Sciences). The total number of active faculty is small relative to the number of UG majors, and this has a negative impact on the size and the total number of courses that the Department is able to offer at the upper division level. Although UG Communication majors have a time-to-degree that is lower than average for the campus as a whole, there is evidence to suggest that the time-to-degree for transfer majors could be lower than it is.

### **Recommendations**

The UG Review Committee recommends that the following measures be taken in response to the aforementioned concerns.

1. *Ambiguous Catalog Copy*: The ambiguous sentence in the Catalog should be replaced by a sentence that clarifies matters. Here is one suggestion: “Students with junior or senior standing may take COMM 10 concurrently with COMM 100A, B, or C, and may also take COMM 10 concurrently with any Intermediate elective. Either form of concurrent enrollment requires department approval.” In conjunction with this change, the Department should consider adding a clarifying note or asterisk at the head of the *Upper Division/Core Requirements* section, and perhaps also at the head of the *Upper Division/Intermediate Level Courses* section, leading students back to the sentence about concurrent enrollment. These suggestions presuppose that the registrar will not permit any more fine-grained reworking of the “prerequisites” designation for upper division Core Requirements and Intermediate Level Courses that is neither underinclusive nor overinclusive. (We considered the option of designating “COMM 10 or upper division standing” as the “Prerequisite” for each Core Requirement and Intermediate Level Course, but the Department is understandably opposed to permitting majors with junior or senior standing to take a significant number of Intermediate Level courses without having taken COMM 10.)

2. *Course Headings*: The Department should be commended for its proposed renaming of COMM 100A-C. We encourage the Department to pursue this option at the earliest convenience.

3. *Course Size and Room Availability*: We encourage the Department to split very large lecture courses (notably COMM 10 and COMM 100A) into two sections. If senate faculty are shifted from Advanced Level upper division electives to teach additional sections of COMM 10 and

COMM 100A, this will have an adverse effect on Advanced Level course availability for majors, especially in the Fall. But there is a way to solve this problem without shifting senate faculty from Advanced Level upper division electives, by hiring a L(P)SOE to teach additional sections of COMM 10 and COMM 100A, along with some Intermediate Level courses usually taught by senate faculty. Note that the *function* of the L(P)SOE series is to (a) introduce innovative and engaging teaching professors into lower division and Intermediate Level courses, thereby improving the quality of education at these levels, and (b) keep senate faculty teaching courses in their areas of research and expertise, thereby increasing the availability of challenging courses at the Advanced Level and improving the quality of education for majors and minors. At the exit meeting, the Dean of Social Sciences expressed support for this suggestion, and we encourage the Department to implement it.

We would ask the UC San Diego administration to consider increasing the number and availability of spaces with movable chairs and production equipment for hands-on courses that focus on production.

4. *Course Scheduling*: The Department should implement a course scheduling policy that equalizes Intermediate and Advanced Level course offerings across the three quarters of the academic year. The formula is not complicated: courses need to be shifted from Spring quarter to Fall quarter.

5. *English as a Second Language*: Much as it is important to recognize the manifold contributions of international UG students to the UC San Diego community, it is also critical that the University admit only those international students who are really and truly capable of fluent written and oral communication in English. Evidence gathered during this review strongly suggests that the UC San Diego admissions committee could do a better job of identifying those international students whose English meets UC requirements.

At the same time, there will always be students on campus who struggle with oral or written communication in English. In the past, the UG Review Committee recommended that the Department consider offering an upper division course on writing for Communication courses. This strikes us as a good idea in itself, but also as insufficient to meet the needs of students for

whom English is a second language. We therefore recommend that the Department strongly encourage struggling international students to use the now more extensive university-wide resources available to them, particularly the Teaching and Learning Commons and the Writing Center. We also encourage the Department to send its Teaching Assistants to training workshops at the Academic Integrity office (to find ways of minimizing instances of cheating and plagiarism) and at the International Center (to increase cultural understanding and sensitivity).

6. *Discrepancy Between Student Expectations and the Department's Pedagogical Mission:* We would like to commend the Department for its effort to develop “concentrations” for its majors, and we encourage the Department to come to agreement on these concentrations in the very near future. But we also recommend that the Department take more significant steps to *communicate* its pedagogical mission and correlative expectations to new majors, particularly to transfer majors. Currently the Department schedules regular presentations during Triton Day, Transfer Triton Day, and community college outreach events. This is a good start, but these events, on their own, do not always reach the students who need to hear more about the Department's pedagogical mission. We therefore recommend a more targeted approach. One possibility would be to schedule a party (with refreshments!) for new majors, including transfer majors, early in Fall quarter. Such a party both helps to build community and offers the faculty the opportunity to clarify the Department's educational mission and address the potential mismatch between student expectations and reality.

7. *Advising:* Given that the number of COMM majors exceeds 700, we think it of the utmost importance for there to be at least two UG Advisors (perhaps with one functioning as a full-time assistant to the other) in the Department. With only a single UG Advisor, many majors may flounder or fall between the cracks, and this will negatively affect their time-to-degree. Thus we strongly recommend that funds be made available to the Department to hire a second full-time UG Advisor.

8. *Junior Seminar:* We recommend that the Department consider splitting the three-hour Junior Seminar (COMM 190) into two shorter weekly meetings.

9. *Group Projects*: We recommend that the Department develop and implement a clear and coherent policy governing the grading of student performance in group projects.

10. *Student Evaluations*: We recommend that the Department redesign its in-house instructor and teaching assistant student evaluation forms, both in the way of encouraging more self-reflection on the part of students and in the way of gathering data that will serve to check the inaccuracies of CAPE evaluations and that will be useful for merit and promotion reviews.

11. *Practicum Courses*: We recommend that the Department continue to offer its two practicum courses (COMM 102C and 102D) less often than once every quarter during the academic year. We understand that there are administrative reasons for maintaining a close relationship between the Department and the community organizations where practicum students are placed. But current evidence suggests that these close relationships can be maintained even when practicum courses are offered once or twice a year. Alternatively, a L(P)SOE (see Recommendation #3) could be assigned to cover part of the practicum course load.

12. *Media Lab*: We recommend that the Department find better and regular ways of communicating the availability of Media Lab workshops and events to majors and minors, particularly to those students who are interested in production.

13. *Scattering of the Department*: We recommend that the Dean of Social Sciences consider (and, if possible, implement) some way of bringing all the faculty, staff, and graduate students in the Department together in one building.

14. *Size of Department Relative to Number of UG Majors*: Although the hiring of a L(P)SOE teaching professor (see Recommendation #3 above) will increase the number of Advanced Level courses taught by senate faculty, thereby reducing time-to-degree and improving the learning experience for UG majors, it remains important that the Department be given the opportunity to hire more senate faculty in the coming years. This is all the more important given that the rate at which the media landscape is changing is rapidly increasing, and innovative new faculty are likely

to help hone the tools that students need to understand and navigate this landscape after they graduate.

Respectfully submitted,

Professor Jennifer Terry, UC Irvine (Gender and Sexuality Studies)

Professor Isaac Martin, UC San Diego (Sociology)

Professor and Program Review Chair Samuel Rickless, UC San Diego (Philosophy)