

Communications Program Review

College of Arts

Dean's Summary

Submitted by:

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Communications Program Review

Deans Summary, May 2016

The Communications Department offers a Communications Minor, a Professional Communications Essentials Certificate, and Introduction to Journalism Certificate and a Portfolio Essentials Certificate. The department offers a series of Critical Analysis and Study Methodology (CSM) courses at the first- and second-year university levels and it plays a large service role at UFV through their course offerings. CMNS 125: Introduction to Workplace Communication, CMNS 155: Introduction to Workplace and Academic Communication, and/or CMNS 251: Professional Report Writing are required courses in most UFV programs.

Program content is currently delivered by twelve full-time faculty members and a range of sessional instructors. 65 sections are taught by regular faculty and 25 sections by sessional instructors.

In May 2015, External Program Review Committee (PRC) members conducted a two-day site visit. The PRC met with faculty, staff, current students, alumni, the Director of Advising and one advisor, the Director of Teaching and Learning, the Director of Research, Engagement and Graduate Studies, the Senior Advisor of Indigenous Affairs, the Dean, the two Associate Deans of the College of Arts, the AVP Institutional Research & Planning, the AVP Institutional Research & Planning and the Vice Provost and Associate Vice-President. The PRC also toured facilities on campus, and relevant areas of the UFV Library.

The PRC noted that “[t]he curriculum of the current program reflects professional expectations and appropriate standards for university-level programs as defined by DQAB” (p3).

The panel described the UFV Communications Department as a “high functioning team” that “possesses and enacts a culture of review, analysis, critical reflection, processes and systems.” (p8) It noted students were “positive and enthusiastic about course content and course instructors.” (p14) The panel commented on the “excellent facilities and culture of the institution” noting too that “[t]he values of UFV were articulated and enacted across all groups from management, administration and faculty to students and graduates.” (p17)

In addition to this overall positive assessment, a wide range of recommendations were made as a means of strengthening both the unit and program content. What follows is a list of recommendations and related planned or accomplished actions to date.

Recommendations related to Program Curriculum, Standards and Delivery

1. The department should establish a clearer identity for itself. A clearer identity will help the department focus on specific industry avenues, partnerships, and employers.

Action: The department is committed to its current vision to broaden its focus beyond “business communication.” Instead, most courses include the term “workplace” to cater for the diversity of programs at UFV and to reference applied communication skills in all industries. This shift is supported in the Conference Board of Canada’s Employability Skills 2000+ report. The Dean is in support of the department’s vision and believes that it echoes the PRC’s recommendation to deliver courses that are of use to “ground to middle level management communication or administrative positions across a range of public and private sector organizations.” (p9)

2. A narrower focus will help in defining the core of the proposed degree. The department has assembled the degree using existing offerings (such as the elective courses they currently offer) and by enhancing what they already do i.e. industry connections. Currently, however, because of this history and these constraints, there is little coherence or cohesion across course offerings.

Action: The reviewers overlooked the fact that many existing courses were designed intentionally for the degree in anticipation of degree proposal approval. The dean will review the degree proposal along with the Program Development Coordinator to identify if the proposal might be strengthened. However the PRC overlooked the fact the degree was informed by research into employer needs and other communications degrees across Canada and that courses were developed specifically to address gaps in the planned degree offerings.

3. There is insufficient expertise to deliver the breadth of courses on the books.

Action: Vetting criteria exist for teaching all courses and faculty wishing to teach a course must follow an application process through a standing SAC. Faculty postings specify at least three years of professional experience in addition to appropriate educational qualifications. Currently, at least two faculty members are vetted for each upper level course to ensure regular rotation of the offerings, with the exception of our two Journalism courses. With regard to the latter, the department has been successful in recruiting sessional faculty with strong practical experience and credentials. The dean will explore the viability of a cross appointment with Media Arts that focuses on journalism.

4. The department should develop a more consolidated and cohesive suite of courses reflecting a specific business communication focus. This will also allow more focussed hiring and will allow for extending current offerings within the business communications area: writing, marketing communications, public relations, social media, and design.

Action: The department already offers many courses in writing and public relations but only one in social media. Communications courses are included in the marketing option in the BBA, and there is a proposed two-plus-two laddering option with the GDD diploma into the proposed Professional Communications degree. The department will highlight learning outcomes of courses that focus on persuasive communication strategies and marketing campaigns (e.g., CMNS 316, 375, and to some extent 251).

5. The current Portfolio Essential Skills certificate is successful; exit surveys/ interviews should be conducted to determine reasons for its success with a view to structure the program more strategically.

Action: The department agrees and will conduct these.

Recommendations related to Certificates and Short Programs

6. Integrate certificates as laddering opportunities within CMNS and other programs.

Action: The department agrees. The Professional Communication Essentials Certificate currently ladders into the minor and designed to be laddered into the degree.

7. Developing a journalism certificate is beyond the scope of the current faculty team's expertise.

Action: Wording in the PRC report suggests that this has not yet been developed but the certificate was developed in 2009 and it has run for the past six years. In the past four years, 16 students have obtained the certificate. In 2014-2015 the number of students taking the program doubled. (Communications Fact Book, 2014-2015) The continuation of this program will be examined, also contingent on interest from Kwantlen Polytechnic University in possible laddering of this certificate into its journalism program.

8. Eliminate the Portfolio Certificate due to low enrolment.

Action: The department agrees; this will be done.

Recommendations related to Skills Courses

9. There is a need for greater degree of curriculum mapping to ensure flow and cohesion between courses, content and instructional design.

Action: The department produced two curriculum maps as part of its degree programming: a map of the CMNS minor program outcomes to the ILOs, and a map of the program outcomes to the specific courses that match these outcomes. The Director of Teaching and Learning has commented that these curriculum maps are well done; however, the department will continue to review the maps and the course outcomes annually. Possible areas for further investigation include i) the program structure of the minor related to similar minor programs across Canada and ii) the expansion of department policies related to instructional design in its courses to ensure consistency between classes taught by B faculty and sessional instructors.

Recommendations related to Courses in General

10. The department should address concerns with lower level courses, ensuring textbooks are not too broad or too constrained and address overlapping content.

Action: The common textbook was determined by the department to be a positive and respectful use of student resources however the department will consider the question of overlap and the possibility of distinct texts this spring. No specific examples of course content overlap were given, but the comment probably refers to CMNS 125 and CMNS 155. The department has consulted widely across the institution and is consequently designing one course that is flexible enough to meet the needs of all program areas in place of these two.

11. The department should address course sequencing and make program credit requirements more explicit; it should consider renaming service courses 'Foundational Courses' to shift perception from 'service' to emphasize foundational degree courses.

Action: The sequence in which students take courses relates to where they are in their educational journey and in this regard advising is more the issue than course sequencing. The department does not feel that changing the prerequisites for CMNS 251 to include only CMNS 125 and not ENGL 105 (as is the case) is warranted and believes it would cause inconvenience to students in program planning and a drop in CMNS 251 numbers. All CMNS courses are worth credit as is indicated on course outlines. The department does not use the term "service" other than internally, to distinguish which courses are required in other programs. The department is consciously adjusting its language in institutional reporting to use the term "foundation courses."

12. Address students' frustration with waitlists

Action: Communications is successful in managing wait lists and keeps fill rates over 90% every term, but institutional change is needed for these processes. The department is represented on the Scheduling and Registration Task Force currently working on possible improvements.

Courses in General

13. Streamline course offerings to focus on courses with solid enrolment histories

Action: Planning courses in accordance with historical fill rates will be done in conjunction with the dean's office. In addition, the department has embarked on course revisions to those with low enrolment histories to make them more relevant and attractive to students. The revisions are being

undertaken by small committees of the faculty members who are vetted to teach these courses to ensure a common understanding of the instructional design and course outcomes.

14. Provide a dedicated digital communications lab for digital communications and design courses and offer a laddered certificate in 'digital communication, media and design'

Action: While the Bachelor of Media Arts will address this need, this does not rule out the option of exploring the viability of this suggestion. The institutional plan for a Digital Hub is eagerly anticipated by the department.

Recommendations related to Grading

15. Review the assessment framework and align marking practices by developing rubrics to help moderate the many high grades in upper level courses; these need to be shared with sessionals as well.

Action: B faculty regularly review grading standards; since most sessionals choose not to attend the meetings and budget does not extend to inviting them to the retreats, sessionals miss out on the full discussion and understanding of marking approaches and departmental standards. However, the department head will continue to review all sessional grades each term and invite explanations for any aberrations. The department sees grade inflation as an institutional problem because sessionals are evaluated only by students, and as such, may see giving higher grades as a way of ensuring strong evaluations and being rehired. The dean will raise this issue at Dean's Council.

16. Avoid variations in content and grading of multiple section courses, consider a common exit exam for all multiple section courses.

Action: The department is considering some form of a common final assignment or exam. In addition, grading systems will be reviewed along with competence building models.

Recommendations related to Pedagogical Innovation

17. UFV and CMNS will benefit from a renewed and appropriately-resourced infrastructure to support successful pedagogical innovation.

Action: UFV is in the process of developing criteria attached to a fund for pedagogical innovation.

18. The CMNS department should demonstrate leadership and pilot and model faculty and program delivery development. The department could expand the policy manual to include assignment structure and assessment templates, pedagogical principles, online learning elements and principles.

Action: The department will expand its policy manual. It is already working on a group and team evaluation policy. There is the possibility of applying for special funding with T&L to support faculty with training, design and technical support. As an initial step, one faculty member has obtained a course release to design curriculum manuals for Teaching and Learning in Summer 2016. Two faculty members also regularly facilitate Instructional Skills Workshops for T & L.

Recommendations related to Work-Integrated and Experiential Learning

19. A dedicated co-op coordinator and work-integrated learning office would be valuable for implementing a more formal approach to experiential learning opportunities and coordinating necessary legal and organizational frameworks.

Action: This request has been submitted by the dean to the executive budget committee. Such person would have to work closely with the department which prides itself on overseeing its own practicum placements and connections with industry afforded by these placements.

20. Consider providing a capstone course to allow students to integrate and apply skills and theories acquired from the program.

Action: The Communications minor used to include a capstone course requirement. Students were required to complete one of CMNS 412 (the practicum) or CMNS 490 (the directed study) as part of their upper-level requirements. After analyzing other minor programs across Canada, the department removed this requirement. There was concern that some students, after completing only the requirements for a minor, were not yet equipped to be successful in either of these two options. However, the department will reconsider capstone options at its annual retreat this year; it has experienced high demand from the community for practicum students and recognizes the institutional direction towards capstone courses.

Recommendations related to Class Size

21. The PRC reported that the department was happy to consider an increase in class size for classes that were not writing and grading-intensive classes. By implication it suggested that these and digital communications classes restricted by hardware or lab capacity should remain small class sizes

Action: Class size is written into the CA and changes in contravention of this language need to be collectively negotiated. The dean has approached the department to consider increasing the size of classes that are not writing-intensive. The department has reluctantly agreed to identify some courses that could be increased but is concerned that ongoing budget deficits will result in continued pressure to raise class sizes in lower level courses, resulting in changes in pedagogical approaches, outcomes and possibly transfer agreements.

Recommendation relayed to the Summer Term

22. Planning for summer programming needs further development and coordination, coincident with planning of food and cultural services

Action: Classes will be provided where demand exists. The dean will discuss the possibility of a more coordinated Arts set of offerings with all department heads.

Recommendations related to Teaching Faculty and Resources

23. The department should integrate and overlap as much as possible with other units and transform challenges into action research projects e.g. their experience with the NVIT cohort and their experience with internationalization.

Action: The Associate Dean of Faculty will work with faculty to encourage submissions to both the Research and Scholarly release funds. It should be noted, nonetheless, that the department is actively involved in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, in the Scholarly Sharing Initiative events at UFV, in bringing in guest speakers (e.g. Terry O'Reilly in March 2016), and in posting a departmental blog (blogs.ufv.ca/cmns).

24. The university needs a budget model that facilitate the department offering courses for programs in other faculties. The model should discourage departmental silo cultures while rewarding cross-disciplinary program development and interdisciplinary teaching

Action: UFV operates with a shared revenue model, approved through Senate. Responsibility does not sit entirely at the department level. The Arts-wide budget allows for some flexibility and Arts profits or deficits are shared with central administration. Further discussion regarding budget transfer between Deans and/or central funding for cross-faculty initiatives could take place. Within Arts, interdisciplinary and team taught courses are delivered as initiatives arise. We could do more to encourage and support such courses. The plan is to encourage such endeavours through the fund for innovative pedagogy.

25. The idea of adding adaptability to the service courses according to specific streams/areas has been put on hold pending the development of a reading/writing across the curriculum course. The department could meet with other service areas about 'service' course offerings. UFV and CMNS would benefit from university wide program head meetings designed as a forum for departmental collaboration and sharing best practices.

Action: The dean is meeting with the College of Arts Curriculum Committee in February to discuss the role of the College of Arts Curriculum Committee and will include these suggestions. In the meantime, the department recommends all faculty include examples and assignment topics from various different disciplines for the benefit of students in its foundation courses.

26. The important and valued work done by sessional instructors should be supported by a more active partnership with Teaching and Learning; include engaging sessional instructors in planning and development meetings and create an online feedback forum or regular check in points during course delivery.

Action: Support for sessionals needs to be addressed at an institutional level but the dean will work with the head on ensuring inclusion of sessionals in accordance with these recommendations.

27. More strategic hiring is encouraged to ensure sufficient academic expertise and professional experience is held across the faculty team.

Action: The department would like to see their 6/7 positions topped up and a subsequent hire in Media and PR.

Recommendations related to Alumni Relations

28. CMNS should consider some interim, low-cost strategies using social media such as LinkedIn and Facebook to build alumni relations.

Action: The departmental marketing team is currently looking at ways to increase the department's exposure through Twitter (@UFVCMNS) and Facebook.

Recommendations related to Internationalization

29. Faculty and staff expressed a need for training in how best to approach the difficulties associated with teaching English as an Additional Language. Faculty members need pedagogical training for the unique needs and learning styles of the international student in terms of language development and assessment practices.

Action: The dean will facilitate a discussion regarding these challenges with the department head, the director of Teaching and Learning, the director of International and the VP Academic, with a view to developing a plan of action in accordance with available resources. The department head has joined the Internationalization Committee to represent the department's concerns and contribute to establishing UFV's strategic directions for International education.

30. Develop bridge programming and language supports for International students. The panel suggests that these courses be offered by the international office in collaboration with the department and run in parallel or support of programming, rather than as part of existing programs.

Action: See above. The development of the QS admission path and related programming will help address some of these concerns.

31. Consider the need for a long term institutional planning process engaging faculty and staff in a visioning and values process that identifies why internationalization is good for UFV and what internationalization needs to look like at UFV.

Action: An institution-wide committee has been struck to this effect. As mentioned above, the department head is a member.

Recommendations related to the ESL Department

32. The CMNS program can benefit from closer integration between the International and ESL Offices supporting international placements for domestic students, coordinating and supporting international events, providing international speakers or panels, symposia or conferences, as well as offering support to international students needing enculturation, information, or tutoring.

Action: The Dean of Arts will approach the Dean of Faculty of Access and Continuing Education to co-facilitate this discussion. In the past, the department has consulted with ESL often about the links between courses and assessment at the pre-university and university levels.

Recommendations related to Client/Service Areas

33. Client areas and students reported an interest in customized courses that aligned with their program content e.g. business relations, report writing for justice system, report writing for environmental studies. A campus-wide consultation process would be useful to map out the service needs of partner programs more clearly.

Action: Contingent on a creative budgeting that encourages customized courses, the department is willing to explore these possibilities and recognizes the benefits for students in program-specific communications courses. The dean will discuss with the department the possibilities of developing these types of courses and seek input on how consultation should occur. The department recently designed a third-year special topics course shell that may be a vehicle for some such courses in the future.

Recommendations related to Alignment with Community and Industry Needs

34. CMNS should highlight the role of alumni in influencing the community by integrating activities into the curriculum i.e. public speaking gala, public presentations, storytelling, and public forum: 'speak out!' Publicise graduate success.

Action: The department regularly features alumni in its blog, *Practically Speaking*. The activities mentioned above are ones that are currently incorporated into the course work. The department will develop a plan for publicising graduate success at these events and others when it formulates its one-year plan at this year's retreat.

Recommendations related to Advisory Council

35. The department should make greater use of its Communications Advisory Committee such as reporting to the department on labour and industry trends and research, and employer needs. However, the PRC notes that there exists little Institutional support in the form of terms of reference, process, virtual meeting space, travel budget, for such a relationship.

Action: The department agrees that it could make better use of its Community Advisory Committee and will continue to develop a strategic plan for advisory input into its programs. The policy on Community Advisory Committees has been revised and sent to PEM, under whose authority it sits. The Program Development Coordinator plans to draft a TOR template in the spring. The dean will look into the need for additional funding but each department does have operational funding that should allow for servicing such meetings.

Recommendations related to Professional Associations

36. The department should attend to promoting scholarship amongst its members and consider creating stronger links with the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS), the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), the Editors Association of Canada (EAC) and the Professional Writers Association. The department should consider creating stronger links with these relevant professional associations to highlight the program's alignment with professional areas, and to leverage the resources, opportunities, training and networks these organizations possess.

Action: Faculty members have a wide range of industry experience and are already involved in a variety of relevant professional associations, such as Toastmasters; Professional Writers Association; Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research; and others. Department members point to resource constraints but will formulate a departmental plan for better representation with these various organizations. This plan will be developed at this year's retreat.

Recommendations related to Enrolment, Retention and Student Success

37. Students would welcome more specific and relevant information about communication careers and entry-level opportunities in such careers, particularly in the Fraser Valley region.

Action: The department plans to become more involved in UFV's annual career fair. Minor students often don't see Communications as their main career option, but the department will develop materials (perhaps an infographic) for those who would like to know more. Once the degree is approved, the department will also hold career information sessions for CMNS students.

38. Address students concerns regarding seemingly unnecessary overlap in course learning objectives and assignments.

Action: Plans are in place to replace CMNS 125 and CMNS 155 with one course that meets writing requirements and that provides students with workplace writing and speaking and basic research skills. Department policies are in place to ensure no overlap in assignments in other courses.

39. Investigate students' concerns about unexplained deviations from assignment and the substitution of presentations for tests and other forms of assessment.

Action: The department is committed to updating and maintaining its policy manual, which outlines guidelines for assignment types and formats for its foundation courses. In addition, the department regularly discusses requirements for upper-level courses. The department head reviews syllabi for all sessional faculty before the term begins. Presentations are often used as a form of assessment in courses because speaking skills are specific outcomes of the courses. The department is open to other mechanisms for ensuring consistency across all sections, but it also recognizes that tests often do not accurately assess the applied skills taught in Communications courses.

40. UFV should use a website to indicate when upper level courses are planned.

Action: The department has determined a set rotation of offering upper level courses based on predicted enrolments. The rotation was implemented two years ago and was not reflected in the survey data. Since that time, the planned schedule for the upcoming two years has been posted for students on our website. Any increase in frequency will be based on student demand and budget.

Recommendations related to International Students

41. Currently, the department includes 600 international students but the department needs access to data analysis on their international and EAL students to consider the creation of custom programs and courses. Since students need time to develop cultural and language skills, faculty advocated for developing extra pre-program language and cultural training opportunities, adapting or extending

existing programs to allow for the slower pace required to understand and process a new language, and providing extra EAL tutoring and support during their programs to set international students up for greater success.

Action: This issue will be raised with the newly established Internationalization committee.

Recommendations related to Financial Support for Students

42. Scholarships for aboriginal students are needed.

Action: This recommendation will be communicated to Advancement.

43. Industry partnerships offer a productive opportunity for increased student support in terms of paid internships, scholarships and bursaries.

Action: The department is hopeful that renewed focus on the program advisory committee and a new position to support internships and co-op placements will allow industry partnerships to be explored.

General Recommendations

44. In view of the proposed organizational reorganization, the PRC suggests that the university's management team identify a process to ensure that they are solving the correct problems to insure that the problems and challenges to be addressed by reorganization will build on the institution's current successful teams and systems approach of the departmental model.

Action: Proposals for reorganization are being explored by a committee elected by the College of Arts Council.

45. The institution needs to ensure that financial investment is clearly aligned with the university's core values and its focus of teaching and learning: it heard that learning and educational technology appear to be underfunded; support for both faculty and curricular development online and on campus needs additional resources; the international office seems under-resourced for faculty development, curricular internationalization and development, transitional and bridging programs for international students.

Action: These observations will be shared with the VP Academic and Provost and Senior Management team.

46. The panel encourages the faculty to more widely capture, share and promote their projects and successes as a team in order to enable other university units and the organization as a whole to better appreciate what they have accomplished, as well as learning from best practices.

Action: The department will discuss this recommendation at its annual retreat in April to remind faculty members of the possibilities for research option and scholarly activity releases available for this type of work. Possible partnerships or work with/for the Centre for Teaching and Learning will also be discussed at that time.