2010 College of Mass Communications Graduate Program Review

College Actions to be taken by the Dean in Response to Program Review

• Submitted May 4, 2011

• The College of Mass Communications is pleased with the review committee's report regarding the college’s graduate program. We agree with the assessments in the written report and the oral comments made by the provost in our review committee meeting on April 18th.

• Based on the comments provided by the review committee, the College of Mass Communications is providing some feedback regarding the statements of concern included in the review committee’s report. While some of the statements of concern seem to reflect comments made by some faculty members during the interview process, the college will consider the comments and concerns as it moves forward in developing its goals and objectives for the master’s and doctoral programs. Yet, the comments about increased enrollment, work over-load and space for graduate students might be universal concerns of all graduate programs within the university and at peer institutions. However, we will work to address these concerns. (Review committee comments are numbered. College responses are in italics.)

• Because the college’s graduate programs have grown so rapidly and beyond our expectations, the college administration and faculty have engaged in numerous meetings each semester to address the issues of growth, while maintaining its commitment to the quality of education we provide to our 1,500 undergraduate majors. Many of the concerns stated in the report have been reviewed by the college administration and faculty with corresponding changes that might resolve some of the issues listed below.

• The unprecedented growth of the graduate program must be viewed in terms of the already “stretched” resources the college has experienced for the past 20 years. We are proud of the additional responsibilities our junior faculty and staff have absorbed during the past three years; however, we cannot continue to ask them to take on more responsibilities without impacting the quality of their work and “stealing” time and energy to achieve professional goals for tenure and promotion. It is quite logical to assume that with growth in any area means the need for more resources to accommodate the growth.
1. A review of faculty survey results considered in the context of the documentation suggests that the program is in need of clearer goals, especially for the master’s program.

   In the fall of 2010, the COMC graduate faculty began to reconsider the goals of the graduate program. The graduate faculty identified three degree areas in MCOM: the doctoral program, the thesis-track MA program, and the professional-track MA program. While the doctoral program is distinguished readily from the MA tracks, the two MA tracks were more difficult to distinguish from one another. As a result, the MCOM graduate faculty focused its spring 2011 efforts on clearly outlining the future direction of each so as to better meet student needs. The Associate Dean for Graduate Faculty in the college will form faculty thoughts into a mission statement and set of goals for each program during the 2011 summer terms. The mission for each degree program will clearly delineated and will reflect the respective benefits and objectives.

2. Faculty members expressed concern about how to assess their productivity in external funding.

   These concerns among junior faculty have resulted from rumors, comments and “hall-chatter” responding to efforts by the university to become a Tier One institution. The university has attempted to communicate more clearly the expectations of faculty participation in external funding. A new university tenure statement will be forthcoming from the university and the faculty senate.

   COMC administration has attempted to make clear that external funding will be rewarded but that is it not a mandatory requirement in any attempts to earn tenure. The tenured faculty in April 2011 adopted a revised promotion and tenure policy that does not state any requirements in regards to external funding. While the college recognizes the value of external funding and has put into place a support system for faculty members seeking external research funding, the dean, associate deans and department chairs have been of one voice in outlining the college’s expectations.

3. Survey results identified concern for assistant professors taking on the demands of chairing dissertation committees.

   The COMC has successfully replaced departing and retiring non-research faculty with new faculty more research focused but untenured. When the college initiated its doctoral program, in 2005, it was obvious to many faculty that they college was pursuing a new and improved mission toward research. Therefore, new faculty members were expected to be successful researchers and teachers. Eighty percent of the college faculty members have been hired since 2004. In most cases, the strength of the college faculty lies in the hands of
new junior faculty members who are outstanding researchers and classroom teachers. Current junior faculty workload must be considered in light of the fact that during the year of the COMC grad program review two tenured, senior faculty members departed the program for jobs elsewhere, and the review came at a time when the COMC was experiencing a new low in the number of tenured or senior faculty on assignment.

Additionally, a sub-committee of the COMC graduate faculty is currently investigating creating tiers in the graduate faculty that will help protect junior faculty. Currently all members of the graduate faculty can serve in any and all capacities—serving on and chairing projects, theses, and dissertations. A tiered system would provide for a means of sheltering junior faculty from chairing dissertations in abundance. However, because of the large number of junior faculty members, the college will continue to have an unusually large number of junior faculty members serving on theses and dissertations. We will attempt to make the appointments as infrequently as possible.

4. The graduate faculty could be overwhelmed with advising and teaching, along with research, should there be too many graduate students—especially in the MA professional track.

The professional MA track has been re-configured and will take new form in the fall of 2011. We don’t see the number of professional master’s students as being an issue. These students will increase the number of students in a course; however, there will not be any additional work regarding theses or comprehensive exams. The number of hours to complete the degree has been cut from 37 to 30, and the comprehensive exam requirement has been replaced with a project course. This reduction in course load for students should also lead to a reduction in load for graduate faculty as students will matriculate through the program more quickly.

Likewise, the coursework in the professional MA program has been standardized, which should result in a reduction in advising needed.

5. Care should be taken that a large graduate student body at least in comparison to the size of the graduate faculty does not diminish the quality of classes.

The addition of a professional MA student-only MA research methods course should alleviate some of the concerns surrounding large classes in the graduate program. Currently only two courses are mandatory across all three graduate degree programs (Ph.D., MA thesis, MA professional). These two courses are Research Methods and Mass Communication Theories. Beginning in the fall of 2011, Research Methods will be offered in two sections: one for Ph.D. and MA thesis students; the other for MA professional students.
6. The continued success of the graduate program may depend on the ability of the program to address the education of Masters professional students alongside MA and PhD students that are more research-driven.

As mentioned above, a sub-committee of the COMC graduate faculty is currently investigating creating tiers in the graduate faculty that will help protect junior faculty. Currently all members of the graduate faculty can serve in any and all capacities—serving on and chairing projects, theses, and dissertations. A tiered system could provide for the COMC to add faculty members to the graduate faculty with these members specifically focusing on teaching in the professional MA track.

We must not view the professional master’s program as a less academic degree. The courses student take (with the exception of the research methods course and an internship) should require the same quality of work as other courses aimed at thesis and Ph.D. students.

7. More facilities are need especially for those labs especially that are generating valuable research and that both faculty and graduate students use often.

The COMC has allocated more space to research facilities in the building it will occupy beginning in the fall of 2012. The college has designated space for specific research facilities and graduate student use.

8. Efforts need to be in place to reduce the number of graduate students sharing office space.

The COMC has allocated more office space to funded graduate student in the building it will occupy beginning in the fall of 2012. While this space will be designated as graduate student occupancy, students will most likely continue to share office space. There will be space allocated specifically for graduate student computer needs.

9. The graduate advisor is overworked and, as a result, stretched thin in his duties, causing a few to express frustration with the speed or availability of advising.

The streamlined MA professional curriculum that is now in place should ease some advising duties. Additionally, the COMC is investigating a program that will appoint graduate faculty members as advisors to graduate students. Finally, a full-time assistant will be assigned to the Associate Dean for Graduate studies in the fall of 2012.