**Department/Program Review Summary**

**2016-17**

**Department:** Communication (COM)

**Date of Review:** March 2, 2017

**Review Team Members and Titles:**

Dave Collins, Provost

Janeil Bernheisel, Manager of Curriculum, Transfer, and Articulation

Donna Chadwick, Professor, Accounting

Bruce Clayton, Research Analyst, Research, Analytics & Reporting

Jared Cutler, Assistant Provost of Accreditation and Assessment

Allante Johnson-Taylor, Athletics/Physical Activity Center Assistant and COM Program Graduate

Gwen Helton, Assistant Professor, Human Services and Behavioral Health

Kyle Jones, Chair/Associate Professor, Computer Information Systems

Scott Markland, Vice President Enrollment Management & Student Affairs

Kevin McNeeley, Professor, Computer Aided Manufacturing

Mary Rospert, Program Specialist, Out of School Youth Fast Forward Center

Rena Shuchat, Dean, Health Sciences

Jill Williams, Academic Advisor, Academic Advising

**Department Members Present:**

Shari Rethman, Dean, Liberal Arts, Communication, and Social Sciences

Heidi McGrew, Chair/Professor, Communication

Faculty and Staff:

Heidi Arnold

David Bodary

Myra Bozeman

Kara Burnett

Nadine Cichy

Rob Leonard

Jessica McKinley

Richard Morales

Avainte Saunders

Kelly Smith

Kent Zimmerman

**COMMENDATIONS:**

* This is a department of “pioneers.” If there are cutting-edge methods to enhance student learning being piloted, if there are new approaches to assessing student outcomes being explored, if there are attempts to improve structure and curriculum of courses in ways that increase student success, faculty from this department are very likely to be involved. This department established common exams and assignments long before other departments. The groundbreaking attempts at direct assessment of General Education outcomes are first being made in this department. As the RESPECT project has been making strides in promoting diversity at Sinclair, COM faculty have been at the forefront. Faculty in this department are eager to try new approaches and be a part of new initiatives. Ground-breakers and trail-blazers abound in this department.
* In terms of its engagement and connectedness to campus, this department is a campus leader. Few other departments come close to approaching the percent of the faculty serving on committees, working on initiatives, serving in other campus positions, and otherwise supporting extra-departmental initiatives at Sinclair. This engagement extends beyond campus, to geographically diverse organizations across the community and the nation. This is a department that develops leaders. There are few cross-functional groups on campus that do not involve a member of this department. This department serves as a model and an example to others across campus in this regard. The department’s volunteer spirit and willingness to roll their sleeves up and get to work helping students is highly commendable. Going the second mile is as familiar to this department as going the first mile.
* The work of faculty outside the department, however, has not diminished their commitment to the work that goes on in their own department or their focus on their students. The Review Team was deeply impressed by the commitment to student success. When discussing the low online success rates in COM 2211, faculty stated that those low success rates had been “unacceptable”, which emphasized the care and commitment to student success that is found in this department. Where other departments at times simply accept low success rates in key courses, the COM department found them “unacceptable” and worked to improve them.
* The COM department’s approach to addressing these low success rates demonstrated the faculty’s keen problem-solving skills and “can do” approach. Faculty implemented a policy whereby students could only enroll in an online course after communicating with a faculty member face-to-face or over the phone. This brilliant approach has been credited with a 30% increase in online success rates in the course since Spring 2016. The faculty’s willingness to invest the time talking to students speaks to their commitment to helping them succeed, in addition to their problem solving prowess. The recent efforts in reaching out to local employers to provide interview opportunities for students is further evidence of this commitment to student success.
* The department benefits from strong departmental leadership, both by the chairperson and by other leaders in the department. The Review Team was greatly impressed that recognizing a potential workload problem the chairperson was able to delegate spearheading the self-study to two faculty members without any concerns whatsoever. The two faculty members then developed a collaborative approach that pulled in all faculty in the department, who utilized a shared drive to make sure everyone had the access and ability to contribute to the development of the self-study document. It is to the department’s credit that the chairperson can rely on the faculty to that extent, and that faculty are able to pull together and collaborate to that degree. The inter-reliance of faculty in the department is truly remarkable.
* The Review Team was very impressed by the goals that the department developed in the study, both in terms of the content of the goals, and their format. The “Action Items” associated with each goal explicitly laid out what the next steps were in achieving the goal. The Assessment Committee is going to take under consideration whether all departments should be required to add “Action Items” to the goals in the Program Review self-study. Well done!
* The department’s involvement in the Oral Communication General Education pilot deserves special mention and high praise. For the first time, direct assessment of whether students are achieving the Oral Communication outcome is occurring, and as with so many other things, faculty in this division are on the forefront of this exciting new initiative. Their willingness to take on this new initiative is greatly appreciated by the Provost’s Office and the Assessment Committee, and will yield great benefits as this approach is expanded to other General Education outcomes and other departments. What is the more impressive is that the department has become true collaborators in directing this project, pointing out the shortcomings in the initial rubric they were given for the project and working with the Assessment Committee to develop an improved version. Their engagement in the evolution of the rubric has shown the Assessment Committee the value of collaborating with departments in development of these rubrics, and this approach is already being used with two of the other General Education outcomes and departments involved in assessing them. In so many ways the department has shown itself to be a leader in assessment in Sinclair through this pilot.
* The department also provides leadership in Sinclair’s diversity efforts, which are among the most important initiatives Sinclair is currently pursuing. Faculty involvement in UUAMP, the Cultural Education Sisterhood, Black Scholars in Communication, the RESPECT project, and the heavy involvement of COM faculty in the Change Agent initiative speak to the impact this department is having in making Sinclair a more inclusive, diverse, globally aware campus.
* While not discussed to a great extent in the meeting with the Review Team, the department also deserves plaudits for overseeing the Sinclair Clarion, the student newspaper. This work provides valuable experience and skill development to students who are pursuing a career in journalism, and represents a substantial investment of time and resources on the behalf of the department.
* Finally, every other department relies heavily on the work of this department. The need for communication skills is voiced by almost every employer that Sinclair personnel encounter. Without this department’s work, Sinclair graduates would be deficient in their ability to communicate in ways that are considered crucial in the workplace. The department’s service in development of these abilities is recognized and appreciated by colleagues and leaders across the institution.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

* The goals that the department presented in the self-study were superb. One of the most important recommendations the Review Team would like to make would be to provide encouragement to the department in working toward these goals.
* There was a great deal of discussion in the meeting with the Review Team regarding students who transfer from the program prior to completing the two-year degree. The Review Team appreciates the importance of the capstone course, particularly in the form that involves the exit interview, and recommends that the department develop an explicit plan to increase the number of students who complete the program without sacrificing the exit interview.
* The department is encouraged to develop more articulation agreements. In doing so, they should work with the Manager of Curriculum, Transfer, and Articulation to develop the highest quality, most student-friendly articulation agreements possible. Where possible, these articulation agreements should specify completion of the Communication transfer degree as part of the agreement.
* Within the last several months Sinclair has developed an increased visibility in social media, successfully raising awareness of many of its programs in an engaging and effective manner. The department is encouraged to reach out to Marketing Services to take advantage of these new social media approaches for the purpose of increasing visibility of the program and recruiting students.
* In Advisory Board/Committee meetings for technical programs at Sinclair, employers often emphasize the need for communication skills in our graduates. The department is encouraged to reach out to technical programs at the College and arrange for COM faculty representatives to attend a small number of Advisory Board/Committee meetings with time scheduled on the agenda to ask employers about the need for communication skills in their new hires.
* The question of access to data for non-chair faculty was discussed at some length in the meeting with the Review Team. Research, Analytics, and Reporting (RAR) has new online reports that are being developed. The department is encouraged to invite representatives from RAR to attend department meetings periodically – perhaps annually – to share available data resources and train faculty in their use.
* Due to new HLC Faculty Credential guidelines, there are some excellent adjunct faculty who will no longer be able to be used by the COM department after September 2017. What can be done to avoid losing their skill and expertise? Is the Faculty Fellows program an option to help these faculty earn the credentials needed? Are there other departments in the College where they would be qualified to teach? Could any of them teach CCP-restricted sections while working on a plan to reach their full 18 graduate hours in the discipline?
* In the self-study, the department mentioned the possibility of developing a COM student group. The department is encouraged to explore this possibility, perhaps utilizing Career Community activities and other currently ongoing initiatives to help provide activities for this group.

**OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT’S ACTIVITIES AND GOALS:**

There are few departments that so completely encapsulate the “spirit of Sinclair” as this one. At Sinclair we emphasize innovation – this department has faculty involved in some of the most innovative initiatives on campus. At Sinclair we pride ourselves on being cutting edge – this department consciously strives to be a part of the cutting edge methodologies being introduced at the College. At Sinclair we go the extra mile for students, we value and promote diversity, we take assessment seriously, we believe in being actively engaged outside the classroom – the Communication Department exemplifies all of these things. Few departments have so many of their faculty in the thick of things. Leadership and engagement are hallmarks of the department. The department is justly proud of its role in preparing the graduates of all programs for the workplace, providing a service that is recognized and valued across campus.

A section of the self-study was devoted to summarizing research that emphasizes the importance of Communication in a college education and throughout a graduate’s career, but the department need not be concerned – its contributions to the preparation of our students is widely valued and appreciated. The fact that only a very few departments have sought an exception to the COM graduation requirement reinforces the importance that other departments place on Communication courses in their curriculum, and the recognition that no other department is as expertly equipped to train our students in communication skills.

The Review Team was unanimous in its praise for the department, and it is hoped that he department felt the sincere admiration of the Review Team members during the meeting. The most important and salient recommendation that the Review Team could pass on to the department is this: keep doing what you are doing, because you are doing great things. Always maintain that level of engagement and connectedness that you are known for. Continue to be the campus leaders you are so widely recognized for being. It is our hope that in the next Program Review, and the one after that, and so on, these same commendations and affirmations will still apply just as well to this department.

**INSTITUTIONAL OR RESOURCE BARRIERS TO THE DEPARTMENT’S ABILITY TO ACCOMPLISH ITS GOALS, IF ANY:**

* This is not the only department that struggles with finding qualified adjuncts, and with recent HLC policy challenges this has become more of a challenge. While Sinclair recently experienced the departure of a key employee in Human Resources who had played a crucial role in recruitment of adjuncts, two recently hired employees in HR may be able to assist departments in developing a pool of qualified applicants. Instruction may need to work with HR to get clarity on the roles of the new HR hires and how they can be utilized to build adjunct faculty pools for departments.
* This is not the only department that struggles with students who transfer or get jobs prior to completion of their degree programs. The institution may be able to find some common approaches that help all departments with this problem. It may not be a bad idea to form a multidisciplinary task force to generate strategies to address this issue.
* There was a discussion during the meeting with the Review Team regarding the need for faculty access to data. Departments across campus may need to be more proactive in approaching RAR about training on availability of information online reports, particularly since RAR is currently developing new reports that would serve this purpose.
* Marketing personnel have achieved remarkable things in the last few months with social media videos. More departments may want to work with Marketing so that they can also take advantage of the recent approaches that have been used.