

**COMING TOGETHER, ENVISIONING THE FUTURE:
THE STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION,
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**



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INTRODUCTION

The academic study of communication theory and practice at the University of Maryland is as old as the institution itself. With the formation of the Department of Public Speaking in 1901, this academic pursuit was institutionalized and formalized and in the intervening one hundred and ten years, thousands of students at the University have taken courses, pursued degrees, and graduated with expertise in the communication arts and sciences. This tradition continues today through the degree programs and departmental activities of the Department of Communication.

Coming Together, Envisioning the Future sets forth a vision and a plan for the future of the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland. Honoring our past, and respecting the challenges and demands of the future, this strategic plan is the culmination of months of work and assessment by faculty members, students, staff, and members of the University of Maryland community, all committed to envisioning a brighter, progressive, successful tomorrow for this department.

Specifically, this plan is based on efforts made over a three-year period: the Department conducted an internal self-study in 2007; a site visit and report from external reviewers was presented in May, 2008; the College of Arts & Humanities Dean's review letter was issued in October, 2008, followed by the University of Maryland Provost's review dated May, 25, 2009. The Department Chair responded to the Provost's report on June 25, 2009. The Department of Communication faculty held several strategic planning meetings during the 2009-2010 academic year. This final report was approved by the Department of Communication's Departmental Assembly on December 3, 2010.

MISSION

The Department of Communication is committed producing innovative and influential scholarship, service to the discipline and community, and leadership in the discipline and profession of communication. The Department of Communication's mission is to provide quality undergraduate and graduate student education that prepares B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. students to successfully enter their chosen careers in communication and related fields through our educational leadership in communication research, theory, and practice. The Department achieves this mission through the pursuit of the study of the strategic use of discourse in the public sphere.

STRENGTHS, CONSTRAINTS, OPPORTUNITIES

STRENGTHS

Reputation—With an outstanding, engaged, productive faculty dedicated to teaching, research, and service, the Department of Communication is recognized as one of the top departments in the nation for both research and graduate education. In 2010, the Communication Institute of Online Scholarship (CIOS) ranked the Department of Communication as a “Top Ten” program in nine areas of research emphasis, including classical rhetoric, communication ethics, gender communication, politics and government, presidential communication, public relations, and popular culture. A 2006 Academic Analytics survey of scholarly productivity reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* identified the Department as seventh nationally, joining, among other universities, the University of Arizona, the University of Michigan, Cornell University, and the University of Pennsylvania. The National Communication Association’s 2004 reputational survey of doctoral programs ranked the Department’s doctoral program as one of only fifteen universities to place three or more research areas in the top ten: Intercultural-International Communication (5th); Political Communication (8th); and Rhetorical Communication (7th). The University includes the Department as one of the 36 Maryland programs that were among the top 25 programs in their fields based on one of the National Research Council’s 2010 study of doctoral education’s two general assessment methods.

Location—Proximity to the nation’s capital, with all of its diversity and research resources, is of great benefit to the Department. Faculty and students take advantage of the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and other nearby manuscript and document repositories for their research. The Department of Communication has obtained grants and awards from an array of government agencies, including the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Joint Institute for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, the Food and Drug Administration, and the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism.

Research Centers—The Department of Communication houses two research centers. The Center for Risk Communication Research (CRCR) and the Center for Political Communication and Civic Leadership (CPCCL) have achieved national prominence because of their research productivity and service contributions. The CRCR conducts state-of-the-art research on risk prevention, risk perception, risk and the media, and emotion, cognition and risk decision making and provides scholarly resources and expertise in several content areas including: food safety, environmental harm, security, and health risks. The CPCCL is committed to the advancement of a diverse and productive democracy through the study of human

communication, and it develops projects and sponsors events (such as the NEH sponsored Web site, *Voices of Democracy: The U.S. Oratory Project*) designed to explore the nexus between communication behavior and political life. The CPCCL also is a resource for the political community, offering expertise, analysis, and commentary about political communication.

Highly Qualified, Diverse Students—At both the undergraduate and graduate levels, the Department of Communication attracts high quality, energetic, productive students. The Department's 879 undergraduate majors in the Spring of 2010 earned an average grade point average of 3.16 (by comparison, the average grade point average for all student in ARHU is 3.10; the average grade point average for English majors is 3.08). For the undergraduate majors, the Department's four year graduation and overall retention rates are high—above the University average. At the graduate level, the overall entering grade point average is 3.5, and the average Graduate Record Examination scores are high. The graduate program was praised by the University's Graduate School for a "time to degree" average that is "well above the college and campus averages." Both the undergraduate and graduate students are diverse in terms of sex, race/ethnicity, and national origin.

Excellent Graduate Program—Since FY 2003, the department has averaged over 200 applications per year, including 201 applications in FY 2009 and 235 in FY 2010. Overall, the department's acceptance rate was 16 percent of those who applied for admission in FY2009 and three percent of those who applied in FY2010. The Department's graduate students are actively publishing and attending conferences. During the 2009-10 school year alone, Communication graduate students published 10 peer-reviewed journal articles, one book chapter, two book reviews, and 58 conference papers. The Department's placement record for Ph.D. students securing tenure-track positions at four year institutions upon graduation is strong. Since 2004, 80% of Communication Ph.D. students who received degrees secured a tenure-track position after graduation. Communication graduate students are completing certificate programs campus-wide, which strengthens their interdisciplinarity and their qualifications for a broader array of academic positions. In particular, such certificates have been completed in Critical Theory, Statistics, and Women's Studies. Graduate students receive state-of-the-art teaching training and are offered teaching options that help diversify their teaching experiences in the Department. Communication students also have been successful in receiving teaching awards from the UM's Center for Teaching Excellence.

Effective Undergraduate Programs—The undergraduate program provides a breadth of academic course offerings. ARHU Dean James Harris, in his 2008 evaluative report of the Department, noted: "A highlight in the undergraduate program is its internship program. The Department supervises 70-90 student interns in a program described as 'amazing' by the students and 'excellent' by the external reviewers for the breadth and depth of internships

available.” The public relations track has gained national reputation for its undergraduate public relations education and was recertified by the Public Relations Society of America in 2010.

CONSTRAINTS

Underfunding & Budget Uncertainty—The 2008 global financial crisis and national economic downturn resulted in three years of budget cuts from the State of Maryland, and included mandatory faculty and staff furloughs as well as the elimination of the Department’s \$400,000 surplus. The inability to hire new faculty or replace those who have left the university has resulted in too few tenure-track faculty members to meet Departmental curricular goals. The Department currently has a student-faculty ratio for undergraduate majors of 51/1.

Lack of Space & Facilities—The Department lacks sufficient space for instruction, offices, and meetings. Graduate students must meet with their students in shared offices and double-up on desk space. The Department has one conference room for classes, meetings, and seminars. There is no dedicated space for undergraduate meetings or undergraduate student engagement. The loss of discretionary spending has resulted in inadequate technology for the Department’s Media Center and for the Department’s seminar room. The Department is incapable of offering appropriate courses in digital communication and it lacks full-time support staff, equipment maintenance, scheduling, and upgrades for its Media Center.

Large Undergraduate Population—The Department employs a Limited Enrollment Program (LEP). As requested by the UM Provost, the Department recently removed a requirement from the LEP of a 60 credit limit for applying to the major and the result was an increase in undergraduate majors from the target level of 600 students to well over 800 majors. This increase creates a series of constraints for the effective delivery of the Department’s undergraduate curriculum: larger classes, limited coursework with effective writing assignments, and limited faculty/student interaction. The Department is also responsible for junior/senior curriculum at the UM’s Shady Grove campus that must meet specific full-time equivalent targets at a time when the Department lacks sufficient faculty and staff to meet its College Park operations.

Inadequate Graduate Program Support—Budgetary constraints weaken the Departmental goal of increasing graduate student stipends, fellowship support, and graduate student travel support. The work and teaching load of the Department’s graduate students is higher than the teaching loads at its aspirational peer institutions and in other departments in UM’s College of Arts & Humanities. The Department cannot match the graduate financial offers made by competing institutions, and students have rejected the Department’s offer of an assistantship, choosing instead programs that offer larger support contracts, including Stanford University,

the University of North Carolina, the University of Wisconsin, and Cornell University. Approximately 36 percent of those offered admissions during FY 2009 rejected the Department's admission offer. The mandated reduction in the number of the Department's graduate students make it increasingly challenging to achieve the College's imposed threshold of six students per graduate course, limiting the number of topical seminars offered by the department.

OPPORTUNITIES

Demand for Communication—Student interest in the Department's graduate and undergraduate programs continues to be robust and growing. Communication, nationwide, is an increasingly attractive undergraduate course of study because it provides knowledge and skills that are basic to a wide variety of jobs. Students seeking graduate degrees in Communication do so because of the continuing number of college and university teaching positions that are available and/or because of the value of Communication graduate degrees for professional advancement.

Increased Institutional Support—In Fall 2010, the University's Provost reallocated funding to the Department to allow for a faculty search in intercultural communication. The Department also received reallocated funds to begin raising graduate student stipends and to reduce the teaching load of the graduate students. The Department has hired a new program coordinator at the Shady Grove campus. The College of Arts & Humanities Dean has also reallocated funds to the Department for graduate student travel and research to be granted via a competitive application process. The Dean has noted "The Department is worth the investment as it is already highly ranked in all of its discrete areas of expertise and will only get stronger if these are accomplished."

CORE PRIORITIES

- Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity
- Graduate Program
- Undergraduate Program
- Collegiality and Service

GOALS & STRATEGIES

Research, Scholarship, & Creative Activity

Goal 1: The Department will re-envision the definition and classification of research areas and emphases pursued by its faculty members and graduate students and encourage the active production, dissemination, funding, and circulation of research, scholarship, and creative activity.

Strategies:

- The Department will classify and publicize the research areas pursued in the Department as: Feminist Studies; Health Communication; Intercultural Communication; Media Studies; Persuasion & Social Influence; Public Relations; Rhetoric & Political Culture.
- The Department will recruit and employ tenure-track faculty members that pursue research in these areas.
- The Department will identify and publicize research and scholarship opportunities for faculty members and graduate students in these research areas.
- The Department will actively encourage and promote undergraduate research in these research areas.
- The Department will increase funding to enhance and support faculty and graduate research efforts and dissemination, including increased travel support, enhanced support for grant writing and grant administration, and service to the disciplinary distribution of research through journal editing and convention organizing.

Goal 2: The Department will support its two research centers: The Center for Risk Communication Research and the Center for Political Communication & Civic Leadership.

Strategies:

- The Department will continue its support of the research centers with the allocation of graduate assistant assignments, the distribution of space and facilities, and the use of institutional resources.
- The Department will develop a strategy to aid and encourage the development, solicitation, and procurement of funding from public and private granting agencies by the research faculty of the Department and by the research centers.

Graduate Program

Goal 1: The Department will re-envision its graduate program in response to a right-sized graduate student population and increased demands for student enrollment in graduate courses.

Strategies:

- The Department will complete changes to the program requirements and curriculum to create a Ph.D. program for students who enter with a B.A. in Communication.
- The Department will complete changes to the program requirements and curriculum necessary to revise the Department's M.A. program.
- Working with the Office of Extended Studies, the Department will develop a terminal professional M.A. program for communication professionals interested in pursuing an advanced degree for career advancement.

Goal 2: The Department will expand its support for graduate students and intensify its assessment of graduate student progress toward degree completion.

Strategies:

- Pending funding availability, the Department will increase graduate assistant stipends and create competitive programs to support graduate student research, travel, and summer stipends.
- Pending funding availability, the Department will reduce graduate student annual teaching loads.
- The Department will formulate and implement assessment measures for graduate students to evaluate student progress in meeting departmental and UM benchmarks for timely progress toward successful degree completion.
- The Department will strive to place more students as faculty members in Communication programs that offer the Ph.D. and that are classified as Carnegie RU/VH and RU/H Doctoral Research Universities.
- The Department will place more students in federal agencies or prominent public service and professional positions upon completion of either the M.A. or Ph.D. degree.

Undergraduate Program

Goal 1: The Department will re-envision its undergraduate program consistent with increased demand for the Communication major and the University of Maryland's 2008 Strategic Plan.

Strategies:

- The Department will fully and completely assess the strengths, constraints, and opportunities of its undergraduate program.
- The Department will evaluate and enhance its undergraduate advising program.
- The Department will enhance and expand its Honors Program through increased faculty involvement and through active recruitment of excellent undergraduate majors.

- The Department will strategize and assess the linkages and connections that exist between the undergraduate and graduate programs.
- The Department will continue to evaluate the implementation of its limited enrollment program.
- The Department will fully and completely assess the strengths, constraints, and opportunities of its program offerings at the Shady Grove campus.
- The Department will explore and develop innovative and unique curricular offerings for its program at the Universities at Shady Grove, including programs in digital media.
- The Department will implement strategies to meet its targeted enrollment goals for its program at the Universities at Shady Grove including implementation of the Maryland Transfer Advantage Program.

Goal 2: The Department will increase its involvement with the University's General Education program.

Strategies:

- Pending resource availability, the Department will prepare and offer enough sections of COMM 107 and COMM 200 to meet the UM General Education oral communication requirement for every student at the university.
- The Department will continue its work with the Office of Undergraduate Studies to develop and refine standards and assessment tools for the UM General Education oral communication requirement.
- The Department will assess the applicability of other courses within its undergraduate curriculum to the UM General Education program.
- The Department will encourage the development of new courses and the revision of existing courses to meet the UM General Education requirements.

Collegiality & Service

Goal 1: The Department is committed to building a collegial community through dialogue and positive interaction. The Department seeks to build a enriching and nurturing environment for faculty, staff, and students that encourages coming together, intellectually and supportively, in support of professional and personal well-being.

Strategies:

- The Department will periodically conduct a thorough review and revision of its policies and procedures to eliminate inefficiencies and inaccuracies and to encourage productivity and involvement in departmental operations.

- The Department will actively seek to increase tenure and tenure-track salaries for existing faculty members and in the recruitment of new faculty members, using the UM average salary/rank as its aspirational guide.
- The Department will actively seek to reduce and eliminate salary and compensation inequities and imbalances within tenure and tenure-track faculty ranks.
- The Department will seek additional staff positions in support of advising, grant-writing, outreach, and Media Center management.
- The Department will actively support mentoring efforts and initiatives for both faculty members and graduate students.
- The Department will systematically investigate and assess recent departures from the faculty to address issues of “faculty melt” and to continue to improve the organizational climate of the Department.

Goal 2: Recognizing the important role of alumni as ongoing University stakeholders, the Department is committed to building and strengthening relationships with its graduate and undergraduate alumni.

Strategies:

- The Department will create, convene, and support an Alumni Advisory Board.
- The Department will seek out and establish contact with its graduate and undergraduate alumni.
- The Department will develop, sponsor, and host events and activities aimed at maximizing alumni involvement with the Department.
- The Department will encourage the active involvement of alumni in its research and teaching efforts.

