Minutes of Division of Communication  
February 6, 2009


The meeting had the single purpose to discuss results of assessments of the Division’s degree program.

WEAVE: K. Quintanilla described WEAVE and its future use on campus. She shared the most recent entries to begin the discussion of the targets/goals the division had set for 2007-08. and the extent they were achieved.

Points of Discussion follow:

1. Excellence in Teaching/Evaluations of Faculty: D. Ivy questioned if student evaluations were the best way to evaluate teaching effectiveness. Others pointed out that the FARs provided opportunities to list other contributions to effective teaching, but it is not reported in WEAVE. S. Wahl added that peer observations could be another method of evaluation. The group decided to make this a topic at the spring retreat.

2. Data on number of graduates and majors was discussed. Quintanilla pointed out that the number of majors has been declining, but the SCHs produced by the Division have increased. The following were ideas that the group considered to increase majors: (1) put office hours on the web site; (2) an undergraduate club is being formed and its members can serve as ambassadors and assist with recruiting; (3) Quintanilla talked about undecided and students who want to change their major; (4) Luna suggested that we email the undecideds about a communication major; and (5) all agreed that changes in advising should help recruit and retain majors. Recruiting majors will remain a topic for the spring retreat.

3. Quintanilla discussed the issue of equity for faculty who left last year. She pointed out that COMM was the second worse discipline in the college when comparing salaries to benchmarks. V. Wheeless told the group about an initiative that was being considered at another university where every 3-5 years, full professors could apply for increased base pay (like promotions receive) to address compressed salaries for deserving full professors. All agreed that COMM faculty salaries are lower than they should be and urged the chair and dean to continue to make this an issue in the College.

4. Quintanilla talked about the community outreach part of the college WEAVE report and reminded faculty to put this on their FARs so that we can assess our activities against our goal. The Division excelled in this category in 07-08.
5. Wahl noted that we need to add goals for the graduate program and this could be done at the spring retreat. The group again discussed the need to know how many GAs we would get so they can be awarded and we can plan the fall schedule. E. Thompson reminded Quintanilla that he wants a GA for Film and Culture. She responded that it is in the request. Quintanilla encouraged the graduate admissions committee to identify those who should receive assistantships and she would find-out about the “real number” expected. It was noted that the Dept. of Art has assistantships that are in the budget. Quintanilla will explore why this happened and if the same can be done for Communication.

6. Assessment of Learning Objectives for program, 2007-08: Wheeless led a discussion of the results of the assessment of how well graduating students achieved the learning objectives using methods of research agreed to at the Division’s January 2008 division meeting.

Students met expectations for LO 1 (Create presentations with effective communication strategies), but the faculty noted the following areas of concerns:

   a. Students rely too much on power-point presentations, often reading them word-for-word. It seems that students do not retain what they learned in COMM 1315 about effective speaking.
   b. Organization of some presentations could have been improved with better previews and conclusions.
   c. Requirements for upper-level courses are generally group presentations which could hide how effective majors are at communicating in front of audiences.
   d. When the faculty discussed assignments in their upper-level courses, the majority of them require major group presentations and few individual presentations. This was an area of concern for the faculty and they will discuss it at the Spring retreat. Wahl noted that perhaps we should offer a senior-level course which emphasizes professional communication and students would make presentations in several forms. Wheeless offered the idea that perhaps we should change assignments in some upper-level courses so students make more individual presentations. Thompson told the group that some students complain about inconsistencies in grading among COMM professors. He offered to create a rubric of what constitutes A, B, etc. work for further discussion. Another faculty member mentioned that students also needed more work on good group communication skills.

The content of presentations was generally good and students appeared to research their topics well in the Legal and Ethics course demonstrating average knowledge about ethics. The group concluded that the students met LO 2 (Identify and analyze issues in communication ethics.) However, Wheeless
shared data that B. Huie offered that showed data for two semesters of COMM 4395 where a high percentage of students did not receive a C or higher on tests about Ethics (percentages of the number of scores above C on the first tests were Spring 08 – 2 exams with 48% and 77% with C or better; and Fall 08 – 4 exams in 2 sections with 50%, 55%, 79%, and 82%). The faculty were concerned about the figures and want to explore it more at their Spring retreat.

Students wrote papers in COMM 3310 where they were to demonstrate that they met LO 3 (Understand communication theory and analyze interactions.) While the papers showed that they understand the theories and students were able to analyze interactions of theories and communication, the vast majority of COMM students were not good writers. Faculty gave examples about student writing in their courses. R. Aippeerspach remarked that writing has always been a problem in her courses. The question raised was - Are we grading or teaching writing? And how can we help students improve their writing in large classes? This topic will be discussed at the retreat.

The faculty also discussed the methods used to assess LO achievement. Thompson raised a question about using group and individual presentations and not presentations using mediated sources. The group added this to the Spring retreat along with a more thorough discussion of methods used to evaluate LO achievements.

While the assessment of learning objectives for 2007-08 student work showed that students achieved the expectations, the faculty raised important questions that need to be discussed further, some about the LOs themselves, methods of assessment, and how well students achieve them. Since a Spring retreat has already been set, the faculty noted items that should be discussed at that meeting.