



UCF Academic Program Review 2012-13 Consultant Department Review

Department: **Nicholson School of Communication**

Consultant(s) Name(s): Drs. Krystyna Aune (Univ. of Hawaii – Manoa), Jerold Hale (Univ. of Michigan – Dearborn), Roderick Hart (Univ. of Texas – Austin), Alisa White (Univ. of Texas – Tyler)

Report Author(s): Roderick P. Hart, University of Texas at Austin - input from all

If known, please provide the number of faculty who support similar programs at your current and/or former institution(s): The College of Communication at the University of Texas has five academic departments, 125 tenure-track faculty, 50 part-time and/or adjunct faculty, 3,500 undergraduate majors, and 500 graduate students (M.A., M.F.A. and PhD).

Instructions: Please offer your assessment of each item below, considering when appropriate, your knowledge of other public research institutions. While a few items solicit an open-ended response, most ask you to rate a particular characteristic of the academic department as exemplary, appropriate, or needing improvement. At the end of each section, please elaborate on any items in that section identified as exemplary or needing improvement. Additional comments are optional. You may offer recommendations for improvement on the topics covered in each section at the end of the respective section and/or you may provide all recommendations for improving the department in item 4.3 at the end of this document.

Section 1 Strategic Planning and Partnerships

Please evaluate the following

1.1 Department's strategic plan(s)

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

1.2 Department's current benchmarking efforts (e.g., peer and aspirational peer institutions identified, discipline benchmarking tools used) – *(if applicable - may not be appropriate for non-terminal degree programs)*

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

1.3 Existing partnerships internal to UCF

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

1.4 Existing partnerships external to UCF

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section (1.1 - 1.4) as exemplary or needing improvement. Other comments are optional.

The self-study was highly professional; much good thought went into it. On the other hand, we suggest that greater thought be given to articulating the distinctive goals Nicholson has in mind for its various programs. For example: Why would someone want to come to UCF to study communication? What is the "added plus" that Nicholson provides vs. all the other communication programs in the State of Florida? Also, curricular information is currently buried on the School's website (under "files and forms"), which makes it arduous for students and non-students to discover what's going on at Nicholson.

Recommendations, if any, in the area of strategic planning and partnerships:

The School needs to describe the content of the discipline (and its sub-disciplines) more clearly and more persuasively in its various promotional materials and on its website. Also, the School needs to think more carefully about how it compares to its existing and aspirational peers and then reflect on what it does best and why.

The School needs to build more robust partnerships with (1) UCFTV/WUCF, (2) WNSC, (3) the University's film program, and (4) Central Florida Future. The fact that Nicholson's ties to these entities is so embryonic after so many years remains one of the Reviewing Team's greatest frustrations.

Section 2 Resources and Support Services

Please evaluate the sufficiency and quality of existing resources in each category below to meet the applicable needs of the department and particularly the educational program(s) under review.

2A Faculty Member Resources

2A.1 Number of faculty members and balance among full-time faculty members, adjuncts, and teaching assistants

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

2A.2 Diversity of department faculty members

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

2A.3 Overall faculty member quality

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section (2A.1 – 2A.3) as exemplary or needing improvement. Other comments are optional.

Nicholson has a fairly diverse faculty from the standpoint of gender but not on the basis of race or ethnicity. Quality-wise, the School has a number of fine faculty members, many of whom have been recruited in recent years. Much work needs to be done, though, to build a consistent level of quality among the faculty. Top-level researchers need to increasingly publish in Class A journals rather than in regional and specialty journals, a possibility that would be substantially increased if the School's most productive scholars were allowed to teach a 2/2 load more often. Mid-level researchers need to either increase their output or narrow their research foci to

achieve real distinction. Faculty members not currently publishing their work (of which there are several) need to pick up the pace.

Recommendations, if any, in the area of faculty member resources:

The student-faculty ratio in the Nicholson School (35:1) is considerably higher than the rest of the College of Sciences (30:1), a fact that seemed surprising to many on the Provost's staff. With 42 regular faculty members and 3,000 student majors, the burden on the Nicholson faculty is excessive. Amazingly, morale is generally high but that will change if the School does not add more faculty. "Raids" on the Nicholson faculty seem imminent.

2B Other Resources and Support Services

2B.1 Number and amount of GTA and/or GRA assistantships compared to those found in programs of similar size at other public research universities

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

2B.2 Instructional space (e.g., lecture classroom space, instructional labs or studio facilities)

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

2B.3 If applicable, faculty member laboratories and/or studio facilities

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

2B.4 Equipment (e.g., computers)

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

2B.5 Library resources to meet the needs of the faculty members and the educational needs of the program(s) under review

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

2B.6 Office and meeting space for faculty members and students

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

2B.7 Sufficiency and ability of office personnel

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

2B.8 Overall sufficiency of resources to support department strategic plan and stated goals

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section (2B.1 – 2B.8) as exemplary or needing improvement. Other comments are optional.

The administrative, advising, and technical staff members are excellent. Universally excellent. The television studio is first-rate, although many programs of similar size have two or three such studios on their campuses.

Recommendations, if any, in the area of other resources and support services:

On all other fronts, the picture is bleak. GTA assistantships are not competitive (nor are tuition waivers distributed generously enough) and the overall space situation is unacceptable. Nicholson faculty members complain that the relatively small film program has far more space than it needs while they, in contrast, are crowded into shared offices. Re-rationalizing the space in the Communication Building should become an immediate, high priority for upper administration at UCF.

Section 3 Faculty Member Activity and Quality (In addition to the self-study documents, you may find it useful to consult the *Faculty Information* library in the UCF APR Web site to assist you in responding to the following items.)

3A Faculty Instructional Activity

Please evaluate the following, as applicable

3A.1 Faculty member teaching load

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

3A.2 Quality of faculty member instruction

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

3A.3 Faculty member involvement of undergraduate students in research or other creative activity

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

3A.4 Faculty member involvement of graduate students in research or other creative activity

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

3A.5 Minimum faculty member qualifications required for teaching in the discipline(s) (The state and our regional accrediting body require UCF to review the qualifications of our faculty members. To inform related reviews, the department/unit has developed a statement articulating the minimum qualifications necessary to teach the discipline(s) it houses. Qualifications beyond the minimum may also be sought when hiring faculty members. We would appreciate your assessment as to whether or not the minimum qualifications identified by the unit appear consistent with common practices in the field. Please refer to the document labeled *Faculty Teaching Qualifications – Statement of Good Practices in Discipline*, located in the *Faculty Information* library in the UCF APR Web site.

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section (3A.1 – 3A.4) as exemplary or needing improvement. Other comments are optional.

A 3/3 teaching load for tenured faculty members is standard at Nicholson (and at other M.A.-only institutions). At the same time, however, the Nicholson faculty's peers at PhD-granting institutions almost never teach 3/3 loads. While we are aware that UCF is currently undergoing considerable fiscal pressure, creating a more research-intensive faculty will ultimately require a less onerous teaching schedule for its most productive researchers.

Happily, pre-tenured faculty at Nicholson are teaching a 2/3 load to give them more time for research, a wise decision on the part of the School's leadership.

Recommendations, if any, in the area of faculty member instructional activity:

Both undergrads and graduate students report having considerable contact with faculty members outside of class. The Reviewing Team was delighted to see this kind of intellectual involvement.

3B Faculty Member Scholarly and Creative Activity

Please evaluate the following, as applicable

3B.1 Quality and productivity of faculty member research and/or creative activity compared to faculty members in the discipline at comparable public research universities

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

3B.2 Level of faculty member success in obtaining grants and contracts

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

3B.3 If applicable, competence (considering scholarship and qualifications) among the graduate faculty members to provide instruction, advising, mentoring, research guidance and opportunities to graduate students

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section (3B.1 – 3B.3) as exemplary or needing improvement. Other comments are optional.

The Nicholson School does not offer the Ph.D. and that changes everything. As an M.A.-only unit, Nicholson can be justifiably proud of the faculty it has assembled. At the same time, though, the faculty does not compare favorably to those at PhD-offering institutions as evidenced by (1) the relatively small number of Class A journal articles being produced by the faculty, (2) a scant number of university press books, and (3) the absence of grant-getting.

Recommendations, if any, in the area of faculty member scholarly and creative activity (e.g., opportunities for new extramural funding):

The Nicholson School has identified two excellent areas for future growth: (1) crisis communication and (2) health disparities. Both can lead to significant extramural funding. The Reviewing Team strongly urges upper-

administration at UCF to support these fledgling initiatives. Two other areas that Nicholson has identified for growth (African media and investigative journalism) are far less promising but may produce modest benefits.

3C Faculty Member Service Activity

Please evaluate the following, as applicable

3C.1 Faculty member service contributions outside UCF (consider contributions to the Central Florida Community, State of Florida, and national and international arenas)

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

Please elaborate if you identified item 3C.1 as exemplary or needing improvement. Other comments are optional.

This is one of Nicholson's greatest strengths. Faculty in the School are deeply involved in the greater central Florida community. The self-study lists impressive (and frequent) forays into such areas as global health, science communication, environmental journalism, jury deliberations, intercultural training, and much else.

Recommendations, if any, in the area of faculty member service activity:

These externships and partnerships should be promulgated more widely by the School than they are at present.

3D General Faculty Activity Support and Structure

Please evaluate the following:

3D.1 Collegiality among the faculty members

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

3D.2 Expectations for faculty member teaching, research, and service

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

3D.3 Opportunities and support for interdisciplinary appointments and activities

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

3D.4 Effectiveness of faculty member mentoring in the department

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section (3D.1 – 3D.4) as exemplary or needing improvement. Other comments are optional.

It was hard to get a bead on faculty mentoring, although overall faculty relations seemed exemplary. The Nicholson School employs hard-working people who believe in what they do and who do it well. There is little doubt that faculty members know what is expected of them on both the teaching and research fronts. Surprisingly, given how burdened they are by the high student-faculty ratio, faculty members are remarkably collegial with one another.

Recommendations, if any, in the area of general faculty activity support and structure:

Section 4 Analysis and Recommendations

Please use the spaces available to provide a general analysis for the department

4.1 Please identify up to five areas of greatest departmental strength.

The Nicholson School has (1) a hard-working and thoughtful director who provides real leadership, (2) a faculty that is deeply committed to teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, (3) a faculty that has improved greatly in recent years in the area of research, (4) an energetic, thoughtful, and excited group of undergraduate majors, and (5) a broad-based vision for, and commitment to, meaningful interaction with the greater Central Florida community.

4.2 Please identify up to five areas of greatest department-level concern (e.g., departmental weaknesses, barriers, threats, unique vulnerabilities).

(1) An unreasonable and unhealthy student-faculty ratio in the School, (2) insufficient cooperation between the other media-related entities at UCF and the Nicholson School, (3) inadequate space in the Communication Building, (4) inability to attract first-rate M.A. students, and (5) inadequate faculty strength -- or funding -- to host a PhD program.

4.3 Please use the space below to offer any additional recommendations that are not articulated in the sections above or in a program consultant report. Alternatively, if the prior sections of this report contain extensive recommendations with regard to departmental-level matters, please use this space to identify those deemed of highest priority.

Most of the problems the Reviewing Team identified during its visit to Nicholson came down to insufficient faculty resources. If Nicholson's unseemly student-faculty ratio is not reduced, the School will lose its best faculty, its remaining faculty will be demoralized, students will be less well taught, opportunities for building connections to the Central Florida community will be compromised, potential grant funding will be reduced, and the task of drawing together UCF's media-based operations will become ever more arduous. Faculty numbers are not everything but they are definitely not nothing.

The matter of fund-raising was not addressed during the on-site visit nor in documents the Reviewing Team received prior to arriving in Orlando. Nonetheless, fund-raising must become a priority for the Nicholson School in the years ahead. The director of the School must lead this effort but he will also need additional staff support to make his mark.

In retrospect, two things concerned the Reviewing Team about the campus schedule: (1) we spent far more time with central administrators and local staff members than with faculty; (2) we never got to visit with the Nicholson faculty in its entirety. This second oversight particularly bothered us. Does it signal a dangerous diremption between the Human Communication and Mass Communication faculties? We suspect not. Still, not being able to see all members of the

faculty engage one another in discourse -- especially during something as important as a program review -- is worrisome. While the field of Communication, like all disciplines, has its sub-specializations, the field is neither so large nor so diverse that it lacks a common focus. Indeed, with the field being rapidly reshaped each day by ever-changing technologies, it has never been more important for its practitioners to stay in constant contact with one another. We urge the Nicholson faculty to reflect on why we did not meet with them collectively and to ensure that it does not happen again.

The Reviewing Team deeply appreciates the exceptional hospitality and professionalism showed us during our campus visit. We were especially impressed by the openness and candor we found, a philosophy that is surely a credit to upper-administration. Even when probing sensitive matters that clearly frustrated people, we found an absence of finger-pointing. It is clear that the Director, the Dean, the Provost (and his staff) are working hard -- and openly -- to make UCF a first-rate institution. We wish them godspeed in that endeavor.