As part of the West Virginia University Board of Governor’s Rule 2.2 Program Review process, the WVU Provost’s Office required that a single Program Review Self-Study Form be completed on behalf of all identified programs in the department or unit. This Program Review Self-Study Form was to be submitted to the Provost’s Office by end of day on August 1, 2023. The Provost’s Office reviewed the submitted Program Review Self-Study Forms in early August.

Self-Study content is unvetted by the Provost's Office. As such, the WVU Provost’s Office cannot attest to the accuracy of any data, analyses, or statements provided within. Also, redactions were made where warranted for the protection of individual identities around sensitive information.
Q1.1. BOG Program Review Self-Study Form

This is the self-study form that will be completed in support of the summer 2023 academic transformation program portfolio review.

Only one program review self-study is to be submitted per unit; all of the unit's programs will be covered by one self-study.

Q1.2. Select the appropriate academic unit under review.

College: Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
Department or School: Communication Studies

Q1.3. List all of the unit's programs.

Example:

BA Biology
BS Biology
MS Biology
PhD Biology
Q1.4. Name and Email of the person completing the self-study

Name: Lindsay Morris-Neuberger
Email Address: lindsay.morrisneuberger@mail.wvu.edu

Q1.5. How were faculty given the opportunity to contribute to, review and provide feedback on this self-study?

Communication Studies faculty were given the opportunity to contribute to, review, and provide feedback via direct email to the chair, in-person conversations, phone calls, and a department Zoom meeting. Five faculty directly emailed the chair, 3 faculty had in-person conversations with the chair, 1 called the chair to discuss, and eight faculty (and one staff) attended the department Zoom meeting.

Q2.1. Explain how the unit and its programs contributes to WVU's mission.

This response is limited to 7500 characters, approximately 2 single spaced pages.
Q3.1.

Resources, Revenue, and Expenses

The purpose of this section is to ensure the accessibility and adequacy of the unit's infrastructure and resources and its financial viability.

Responses in this section are limited to 7500 characters or approximately 2 single spaced pages.

Q3.2. Has the unit experienced significant issues with any of the following during the past five years?

By “significant,” we mean issues that interfere with either the unit’s ability to deliver its programs to its students or the students’ ability to complete those programs in a timely manner.
Q3.3. Describe the issues the program has faced in the area(s) identified above.

*This question was not displayed to the respondent.*

Q3.4. Data have been provided on the unit's last three years of tuition revenue, expenses, and net revenue. Address any negative net revenue or any significant changes (positive or negative) to unit's net position.

Revenue by department is the actual tuition revenue, net of any discounting, paid by students taking courses in course subject codes affiliated with the department.

Expense by department is the actual unrestricted, operating expenditures by department within the functions of instruction and academic support.

Net revenue is the revenue minus the expense.
The Department of Communication Studies is a WVU leader in net revenue with a three-year average of $6,782,09 annually. There have been reductions in unit net revenue annually since 2020, but the department still brought in over $6 million last year. According to the figures presented, our average net per faculty member was $485,264 in 2020 and the average net per faculty member in 2022 was $470,957, showing a modest reduction when considering our lowered personnel resources. We are a financially healthy unit that takes in well more revenue than we have in annual expenses. Our expenses have also decreased by over half a million dollars during the study period and continue to decline. We are committed college and university citizens and we understand our revenue helps support other programs across the university. We have already taken action to increase our net revenue position since hiring a new chair and plan to continue doing so both by increasing tuition revenue via major and graduate student recruitment and decreasing expenses. We have already begun decreasing expenses by reducing per course and overload teaching in the unit. Our average annual spending on per course and overload teaching averaged $89,971 between AY18-19 and AY21-22, peaking at $115,780. This past year (AY 22-23) we decreased that spending to $56,407 and we anticipate a further reduction to $24,000 in AY23-24, and $16,000 in AY24-25. This represents substantive cost-savings for the department, college, and university. We plan to continue reducing expenditures by combining lower-enrolled course sections. We also streamlined administrative supplements for departmental leadership. Additionally, we already increased our online course caps from 40 to 45 in Spring 2023 and have further increased those online course caps to at least 50 for AY23-24 in an attempt to increase revenue. We also seek to increase tuition revenue by recruiting more students to our major, minor, and graduate programs, particularly our Online MA. Specific plans to increase tuition revenue via recruitment, curriculum revision, and course cap increases are outlined by program later in this self-study.

Q4.1.

Faculty Composition and Productivity

Responses should be concise but also specific and supported by evidence. Responses in this section are limited to 7500 characters or approximately 2 single spaced pages.

Specific data definitions for these metrics are available on the Academic Transformation webpage.

Q4.2. Data have been provided on the unit's faculty full-time equivalency (FTE) to the median of all majors for fall 18 to fall 22.

Address any differences in the unit's student to FTE ratio and the institution's student-to-faculty ratio of 18-to-1 per IPEDS reporting for academic year 2021-2022.
The Department of Communication Studies exceeds the average WVU faculty-to-student ratio of 18-to-1. According to the data shared with us, our median of department majors divided by total faculty FTE is 22. We are proud of exceeding this metric but are focused on increasing our number of major via strategies discussed later in the self-study.

Q4.3. This question is optional and required only if a unit's doctoral programs are under review.

Data have been provided on the unit's tenure-track / tenured FTE to doctoral student headcount ratio across all of the unit's doctoral programs.

Address any differences in the unit's doctoral student to tenure-track and tenured faculty FTE ratio to the institutional expectation of 2-to-1.
The Department of Communication Studies does not meet the WVU institutional expectation of 2-to-1 tenure-track and tenured FTE to doctoral student headcount. According to the data shared with us, our median PhD enrollments to median FTE of tenured or tenure-track faculty is 1.4-to-1. It is important to note that the Communication Studies PhD is an accelerated three year program while most doctoral programs are four or five years. If we had four or five cohorts instead of three we would exceed this institutional expectation. The figures provided indicate our doctoral program enrollment has grown by 28% in the past few years, indicating successful recruitment work and a commitment to increasing our PhD enrollment. Importantly, we have also made meaningful steps in increasing PhD student retention and persistence. We graduated five PhD students this past year, which exceeds recent departmental norms, and we plan to graduate five more students this year. Our new director of graduate studies who began in July 2023 has an ambitious PhD recruitment strategy and is well-supported by a faculty eager to continue improving and growing our doctoral program.

Q4.4. Data have been provided that show the changes to the unit's total number of faculty over the review period. Data have also been provided that show the total student headcount enrolled in all of the unit's programs over the same period of time as well as a three-year trend in student credit hour (SCH) production. Explain the relationship between the change in the number of faculty in the unit and the change in the unit's total headcount enrollment and SCH production trends.
The Department of Communication Studies total faculty FTE has decreased by 2 in the period under consideration according to the data provided to us. This suggests that in Fall 2022 we had 86.67% of the faculty capacity we had in Fall 2018. Overall departmental SCH production has also decreased over the time period under consideration; we delivered 82.44% of the SCH in Fall 2022 that we did in Fall 2018. We believe this can be attributed to several factors including our reduction in faculty as well as institution-wide SCH trends (i.e., -7.9%). Students report the top barriers to starting or continuing in our undergraduate major are the Eberly BA foreign language requirement and the greater flexibility available in more generalized programs (e.g., Multidisciplinary Studies). We are focused on addressing these issues by working with Eberly to amend the BA foreign language requirements to more accurately reflect student interest and need, and expanding recruitment of students by more effectively sharing the focus, utility, and results of our programs. It is important to note the Department of Communication Studies delivered over 20,000 student credit hours in Fall 2022, which puts us in the top 10 SCH-producing units in the university despite having only 13 full-time faculty members. Our SCH production per faculty member was 1,608 in Fall 2022, which is the highest of units currently under review and second only to General Business across the university. We anticipate growing our SCH production in the coming years.

Q4.5. Data have been provided that shows the unit's research expenditures per the Higher Education Research and Development Survey (HERD).

Does this data capture all of the unit's research expenditures? If not, explain the difference here and provide evidence of additional research expenditures below.
The data provided do capture all the unit’s research expenditures in 2022, our reports indicate we spent $96,772.32 in 2022. Our unit has not historically had a strong tradition of external funding, but that is changing with more faculty applying for and earning extramural research support. For example, recent funding from the National Science Foundation, US and WV Department of Health and Human Services, as well as several foundation and university partners is advancing our funded research portfolio. It is also important to note that issues with the WVU Research Office have severely limited our ability to both apply for and reasonably spend external funds. We have been well supported by staff in the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences, but repeated months of delays to process grants at the university level and the inability to manage workflow has been severely detrimental and even resulted in us leaving external funding unspent by funder deadlines. We are hopeful these limitations will improve, and our upward trajectory of external funding will continue. In 2022 our new chair established two departmental research collaboratives – CReTO (Communication Research Translation and Outreach) and IICRC (Interpersonal and Instructional Communication Research Collaborative) to highlight departmental areas of expertise and better position our unit for future collaboration. This has resulted in increased grant applications including recent submissions to the World Health Foundation and National Science Foundation.

Q4.6. Upload evidence of research expenditures here.

Research Expenditures.pdf
137.8KB
application/pdf

Q5.1. Student Enrollment and Graduation History

Responses in this section are limited to 7500 characters (approximately 1.5 single spaced pages). Responses should be concise but also specific and supported by evidence.

Specific data definitions for these metrics are available on the Academic Transformation webpage.

Q5.2. Data have been provided on all of the unit's program's student enrollment trends.

That data includes:

4-year median fall enrollment (fall 18 through fall 21);
Fall 2022 change from 4-year median (in headcount and in percentage).
Units should address any programs with enrollment below the median for the program level or which has experienced a negative change in enrollment.

Despite 28% enrollment growth from the median in our doctoral program in Fall 2022, the Department of Communication Studies has experienced enrollment decreases in our BA and both of our MA programs from Fall 2018 to Fall 2022. We have already been addressing these reductions in several ways across our programs as outlined below. BA Communication Studies Enrollment in our BA is down. In part to address this, the Department of Communication Studies made substantive BA curriculum changes in AY22-23 including removing two required courses housed outside of the department (i.e., CS 101 and a STAT or ECON course) and adding a course to familiarize students with the major and areas of emphasis (i.e., COMM 173 – Fundamentals of Communication Studies). This shift will both better prepare our students as they begin in the major and drive additional SCH to the department. We have previously noted the Eberly BA foreign language requirement has been a challenge in recruiting and we know Eberly is in the process of revising that requirement, which should help our recruitment. In AY 22-23 we also started more direct major recruitment strategies in our general education courses and met with many prospective undergraduates to encourage them to choose WVU and Communication Studies as a major. MA Communication Studies Enrollment in our traditional on-campus MA in Communication Studies has decreased in the last few years. This program was recently reviewed in the Academic Transformation process which resulted in several helpful curricular changes and a recommendation of “Continuance at the Current Level of Activity” only a few months ago in Spring 23. We have previously had success in recruiting our undergraduate majors to earn their MA, but this has waned over time and needs to be re-examined. We are already working to establish better partnerships with local colleges and universities that do not have graduate programs. Additionally, more targeted recruitment in our undergraduate major programs, particularly capstone is essential. We have been discussing a direct admit BA to MA program and will consider both that and a direct-to-PhD enrollment option in the coming year. Both options would concretize pathways for high-achieving students and potentially increase enrollment. We have not generally offered admission to students without an assistantship in the past, but we shifted that this year and are welcoming a non-assistantship MA student this Fall and intend to increase enrollment that way in the future. Importantly, our MA is offered without adding any additional courses above what is required to deliver our PhD program, so it is operationally cost-effective and has historically represented a strong pipeline for PhD student recruitment. MA Communication Studies (Online) Enrollment has declined in our online MA program for several reasons including increased competition in online education, faculty teaching the program out-of-load, and lack of effective support from WVU Online. Some of our students have also reported losing employer support for their education, which may be affecting our enrollment. We have tried to address these issues by meeting with WVU Online staff to address recruitment but have not been successful in building meaningful collaborations with them. WVU Online has at times been unresponsive and unhelpful regarding our attempts to assist with recruitment. More effective assistance from WVU Online could help increase our program enrollment. The program has also been taught as overload for full-time faculty or managed with per-course instruction. This is currently being addressed by bringing these courses to be taught in-load by our full-time faculty, ensuring better student experience, demonstrating increased importance to our unit, and increasing instructional and personnel effectiveness. We have also worked to streamline our offerings to four courses a term (down from eight in Fall 2018) and sequence more effectively to ensure effective use of personnel and expedite student progress. Recruitment for the online MA will be a top department priority in AY 23-24 and represents a clear place to increase department revenue without increasing expenses. PhD Communication Studies Our PhD program has been growing (up 28%) and we intend to both increase that growth slowly over time and intently focus on retaining our students and ensuring they graduate on time. This past year we facilitated the creation of a graduate student organization led by our PhD students to assist in recruitment, retention, socialization, and support. We believe this will result in stronger persistence and a better pipeline between our MA and PhD programs as well. We have also begun to partner more strategically with colleges and universities that have terminal MA degrees in Communication (e.g., Marshall University) to create a stronger recruitment pipeline.

Q5.3. Data have been provided on the unit’s three-year trend in student credit hour (SCH) production. Units should address any programs with a negative trend in SCH production.
Department of Communication Studies SCH production has decreased over the time period under consideration; we delivered 82.44% of the SCH in Fall 2022 that we did in Fall 2018. We believe this can largely be attributed to our reduction in faculty (i.e., 13.33% less faculty) as well as general institution-wide trends (i.e., -7.9% SCH). In Fall 2022, the Department of Communication Studies delivered over 20,000 credit hours in Fall 2022 with only 13 full-time faculty members, well outpacing most units. Despite our prominence among our peers, we do believe we can grow our SCH in the future through more targeted recruitment and retention efforts. In AY 22-23 our new chair started sending direct email recruitment messages to students who were successful in our general education courses, specifically inviting them to take additional courses in our department and consider majoring or minoring in Communication Studies. At the undergraduate level we have already added a new 100-level course to help recruit new majors (COMM 173--Fundamentals of Communication Studies). Additionally, we are exploring opportunities to both redesign some of our popular general education courses to ensure a better student experience, and increase major recruitment efforts by better showcasing the Department of Communication Studies and the exciting developments in our curriculum in our general education courses. We had also previously had caps in some general education courses restricted by the Eberly College, but we have already enacted plans to moderately increase caps in our general education offerings like COMM 104--Public Communication as well as our popular major courses (e.g., COMM 212 – Gender Communication) to address concerns about decreasing SCH. Additionally, having faculty teach our online MA program in-load and articulating clearer course sequencing will help students see clearer pathways to graduation and increase persistence rates, thus bolstering SCH. Increased recruitment via social media profiles, direct email to alumni, and partnerships with local organizations should help as well.

Q6.1. Assessment of Learning and Program Improvement

The Provost's Office will review the self-studies from the most recent Board of Governor's five-year program reviews for this section. Units may provide updated information below if they so choose.

Q6.2. Provide the unit's plans or ideas to make significant changes to its operations, structure, offerings, or personnel in order to reduce its costs or improve its efficiency.

Provide any significant changes to the department's program curricula, its assessment of learning practices, or any other improvements that have been made since the department's programs completed their most recent Board of Governor's five-year review.
Innovative Plans to Improve Efficiency

We have outlined several ideas and plans throughout this document but will summarize them here as well:

1) We are decreasing per-course and overload costs with last year being half of what we spent in 2021 and this year being half of what we spent last year. We expect this trend to continue next year, lowering to approximately $16,000 in AY 24-25 from $115,780 in 2021. We have increased course caps in our online courses and will continue to do this as possible in targeted general education courses while also working to merge lower-enrolled sections. We are right-sizing our offerings while still allowing for SCH growth, which should result in significant net revenue based on decreased teaching needs and increased SCH. We anticipate at least $15,000 of additional revenue this year and $30,000 next year.

2) We will increase strategic major recruitment efforts among prospective students and in our robust portfolio of general education courses and work with Eberly to address the BA foreign language requirement barrier for majors. We will collect data from our undergraduate students (major and non-major) and graduate students (with particular attention to the online MA) to better understand and adapt to changing student needs.

3) We are right-sizing our offerings while still allowing for SCH growth, which should result in significant net revenue based on decreased teaching needs and increased SCH. We anticipate at least $15,000 of additional revenue this year and $30,000 next year.

4) We will increase strategic major recruitment efforts among prospective students and in our robust portfolio of general education courses and work with Eberly to address the BA foreign language requirement barrier for majors. We will collect data from our undergraduate students (major and non-major) and graduate students (with particular attention to the online MA) to better understand and adapt to changing student needs.

5) We will explore options to bolster our graduate programs including potential BA to MA or direct to PhD recruitment. Strategic focus on Online MA program recruitment via alumni networks and partnerships will help grow enrollment.

Post-BOG Review Improvements

We have made significant changes to our program curricula to better serve our students since our last BOG review in AY 21-22. At the undergraduate level we removed two required courses housed outside of the department (i.e., CS 101 and a STAT or ECON course) and added a new 100-level course Communication Studies course (COMM 173-Fundamentals of Communication Studies). We also revisited our area of emphasis requirements to ensure students could make expeditious degree progress, and revised our minor requirements to give students more flexibility in the courses they take. Additionally, efforts to standardize large lecture courses through the use of consistent syllabi, textbooks, assignments, and assessments have resulted in more consistent student expectations.

We streamlined to four essential learning outcomes and are excited to start a new holistic assessment process this academic year. In AY 22-23 we discussed the importance of assessing student learning throughout our program, not just in specific courses. We identified main pillars of learning that run throughout our curriculum—identifying core disciplinary concepts, conducting research, analyzing content/data, and effective presentation skills. This comes together to form the I-RAP (identify, research, analyze, present) assessment framework we will begin collecting data on this academic year. We believe this will both allow us to more robustly examine patterns in our program and also help our students concretize the skills they are learning in their coursework. We have also made substantive curricular changes in our graduate programs since the last BOG review. Starting this Fall, our MA degree is now 30 credit hours which aligns us with competitive peer programs and provides a strong pathway for students to complete their degrees expeditiously. We also created a more sequenced approach to graduate coursework, requiring students to take both two required courses and two foundational courses as identified by the faculty. We cleaned up some minor curricular issues around our COMM 790-Teaching Practicum course for the PhD program and anticipate making changes like we did with the MA program to require foundational courses in our PhD program this year. Our former director of graduate studies also thoroughly revised the Graduate Handbook in order to clarify processes and clean up some program procedures. Evidence of curriculum changes made in 2023 is attached.

Q6.3. The program may provide additional evidence of program improvement here.

Evidence of Program Improvement.pdf
53.6KB
application/pdf

Q7.1. The unit may provide any additional context or information about the unit’s programs here.
The Department of Communication Studies is a university-wide net revenue and SCH per-faculty leader, and our faculty members publish more articles in more prestigious journals than any other Communication Studies department in the nation. We are taking meaningful steps to decrease expenses, increase efficiencies, and address institutional changes by using our skills, experience, and commitment to best serve our students, our university community, and our state. As a department we are inherently partnership minded, leveraging disciplinary synergies to facilitate success in our teaching, research, and service endeavors. The pride we have in our department and programs does not mean we are unwilling to adapt to changing priorities and needs. Eberly Dean Greg Dunaway has told us that a direct collaboration with the former Reed College of Media is “off the table” at this point per his discussions with Provost Reed, but we remain open to meaningfully exploring opportunities to partner with other units as is helpful to address current and future university challenges. You can find a table outlining reduced unit costs, evidence of unit research productivity, and a pdf containing our response in its entirety attached.

Q7.2. You may use this section to provide any additional evidence referenced in the program review.

Plan to Reduce Communication Studies Unit Costs.pdf
95.9KB
application/pdf

Q7.3. You may use this section to provide any additional evidence referenced in the program review.

research_productivity.pdf
1.6MB
application/pdf

Q7.4. You may use this section to provide any additional evidence referenced in the program review.
Q8.1. Thank you for completing your self-study for the West Virginia University Board of Governors program review. You may now submit the survey and your self-study will be passed on to the Provost's Office for review.

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