



## **The National Communication Association's Guidelines for Undergraduate Communication Programs** Updated April, 2011

A variety of disciplinary organizations have developed specialized accreditation guidelines that are used in evaluating the quality of a given department in that discipline. Specialized accreditation guidelines work well for disciplines that have a relatively narrow focus. Given the breadth and depth of the communication discipline, the National Communication Association has chosen a different path that focuses on guidance and support rather than strict adherence to a particular set of guidelines. NCA recognizes the value of guidelines that can be used to support the development of communication departments, point the way for program improvement, and serve a rhetorical function in making the case to institution administrators concerning both the quality and the needs of a department.

NCA believes that a set of guidelines for undergraduate programs that meets the goals listed above can serve members in a variety of useful ways. To that end, NCA has developed a set of guidelines that are organized into the seven areas listed below. Furthermore, NCA encourages departments to adopt and adhere to these guidelines. The seven areas are:

1. Missions, Goals and Learning Outcomes
2. Administration and Governance
3. Resources and Personnel
4. Faculty and Professional Staff
5. Hiring and Evaluation of Faculty, Promotion and Tenure
6. Curriculum
7. Student Advising

### **Guideline #1: Mission, Goals and Learning Outcomes**

**The program should have a clearly articulated mission and clearly specified goals that are tied to the institution's missions and goals. The program should also have clearly specified learning outcomes for each of the undergraduate programs. These goals and outcomes should be tied to assessment measures and the results of assessment should be incorporated in ongoing program refinements.**

1. The mission of the program should support and contribute to the institution's mission.
2. The program should have clearly defined goals that reflect its mission.
3. The program's mission and goals should reflect how the program defines academic excellence in communication.
4. The program should have a clearly specified procedure for tracking progress toward meeting program goals that are separate from learning outcomes such as program development, faculty lines, budget, etc. These goals should include multiple measures adequate to assess the attainment of program goals.
5. The program should have student learning outcomes that reflect the competencies, skills, and knowledge its graduates are expected to attain.
6. Courses and experiences required of students should be clearly linked to the student learning outcomes.

7. The program should have multiple measures adequate to assess the students' attainment of the learning outcomes and the program's attainment of its goals. These measures may include specific assignments within classes (e.g. projects, exams), experiences outside formal classroom structures (e.g., internships, service learning projects) and summary data collected through surveys, portfolios, etc.
8. The program should have a clear, strong mechanism for the assessment and development of teaching.
9. The program should routinely evaluate and refine its program in light of the information gleaned from its assessment activities.

### **Guideline #2: Administration and Governance**

**The communication program should have an organizational structure that supports and facilitates the achievement of its mission, goals, and objectives. There should be evidence of ongoing assessment of unit leadership and faculty participation in decision-making.**

1. The program should have clearly identified and appropriately qualified leadership charged with fulfilling the program's mission.
2. The administrative head of the program should have sufficient authority to establish class schedules, assign faculty, and conduct appropriate evaluations of faculty performance.
3. The administrative head of the program should have authority over the program's budget and resources.
4. Faculty should have significant input into program decision-making. Faculty should have sole authority in the areas of curriculum, program goals, and student learning outcomes.
5. The communication program should have clearly articulated faculty handbook that contains relevant institution policies and procedures regarding faculty (e. g., faculty evaluation, tenure policies), and relevant program-specific policies that govern its operations.
6. The program should have a process for assessing the leadership that draws input from faculty, staff, and students.

### **Guideline #3: Resources and Personnel: Administrative support, personnel, facilities, budget and equipment**

**The communication program should have sufficient resources to achieve its mission. The resources devoted to the program should be comparable in quantity and quality to similar programs within the institution and communication programs in comparable institutions.**

1. The unit should have sufficient administrative support staff to execute its educational mission.
2. Release time for administration of the program, development of new courses, or for service and research should be appropriate to the mission of the program and institution.
3. Program budget should be comparable to similar programs in the institution. The cost per credit hour for the program should be comparable to similar programs in the institution.
4. The program should have resources adequate to support its mission, including resources to support faculty development. These resources may be internal to the unit (e.g., reassigned time for mentoring new faculty or conducting research) or external to the unit (e.g., institutional grants for curriculum development and research, teaching/learning centers).
5. The program should have an operational budget sufficient to assure the development and support of instructional activities.
6. The program should have sufficient office space for faculty and staff to assure the effective

implementation of the educational program.

7. The program should have access to appropriate classrooms, educational and meeting spaces to fulfill its mission.
8. The library holdings should be sufficient to support the educational and research activities of the students and faculty.
9. The program should have appropriate equipment, including computers, and technological support for faculty and staff to ensure effective implementation and program excellence.

#### **Guideline #4: Faculty and Professional Staff**

**The communication program should have an adequate number of qualified full-time and continuing faculty and staff lines to meet its mission and goals. (Note: In programs which have tenure, "continuing" faculty refers to tenured and tenure track faculty).**

1. A program should have sufficient full-time continuing faculty and staff to meet its mission and assure high quality undergraduate education.
2. The full time-faculty/student ratio should be appropriate to the mission of the program and the institution, comparable to similar programs in the institution, and to communication programs at similar institutions across the country.
3. Institutional expectations for teaching, scholarship, and service should be comparable to similar programs nationally.
4. The ratio of full-time to part-time or adjunct faculty should be appropriate (**Note:** We should come up with a range here) to the mission of the program and the institution and comparable to similar programs in the institution and in other similar communication programs throughout the country.
5. The background and experience of all faculty, full or part-time, in a communication program should be appropriate to the missions of the program and the institution and comparable to faculty in similar programs.
6. Faculty should have demonstrated competence in the areas for which they have teaching responsibilities. Evidence of competence could include formal education, professional experience, teaching experience and scholarly publications related to teaching assignments.
7. Continuing program faculty, full or part-time, should have at least a master's degree in communication or a closely related area and where appropriate, relevant professional experience.
8. All part-time and adjunct faculty as well as graduate students should receive appropriate training, compensation and integration into the department.

#### **Guideline #5: Hiring and Evaluation of Faculty, Promotion and Tenure**

**Continuing full-time faculty should be involved in the recruiting, hiring, and evaluation of new faculty. In accordance with unit and institutional by-laws, the faculty should be involved in tenure and promotion decisions within the communication program. Programs should seek to attract diverse faculty, students, and staff.**

1. Continuing faculty in a communication program should be actively involved in recruiting and hiring decisions of new instructional staff for the program, both full and part-time as well as graduate students.
2. Continuing faculty should help develop position descriptions and search processes for new faculty that accord with achieving the program's mission.

3. Continuing faculty should be actively involved in recruiting and hiring new faculty, including part-time faculty, for the communication program.
4. Programs should demonstrate ongoing efforts to attract and retain a diverse faculty.
5. In accordance with institutional policies, all instructional staff should receive regular and systematic feedback on their performance.
6. Continuing program faculty should be involved in the evaluation process for all instructional staff, including graduate students.
7. In accordance with unit and institutional by-laws, tenured program faculty should have a strong voice in decisions regarding recruitment and retention of faculty. In programs without tenure, continuing faculty members should have a strong voice in the decision to continue appointment.
8. A communication program should have, proportionately, the same number of tenured and tenure track or continuing faculty members of various ranks as other comparable units in the institution and communication programs in similar institutions across the country. Appropriate measures of proportionality include but are not limited to: majors/FTE faculty; student credit hour FTE/faculty FTE; and fulltime/part-time faculty ratios.

#### **Guideline #6: Curriculum**

**The communication program should provide course offerings that enable students to meet the learning outcomes of the program with appropriate, balanced attention to theory, research, and application. In addition, the program should enable students to understand the challenges of and opportunities for effective and ethical communication in a diverse society.**

1. The curriculum as a whole should have a sound rationale that is directly tied to the program's mission, goals, and student learning outcomes and national trends in the discipline.
2. The program should display appropriate, balanced attention to theory, research and application of communication knowledge
3. The program curriculum should reflect an underlying rationale for the progression through the major from introductory courses, to courses of increasing complexity, and a capstone experience in the major.
4. This may be accomplished in courses specifically devoted to theory, research and application or materials may be dispersed across a variety of courses.
5. Required or recommended courses that are essential to a student's graduation should be offered with sufficient frequency to enable students to progress toward their degrees in a reasonable amount of time.
6. The program should provide for student organizations and co-curricular activities that enable students to enhance their educational experiences.
7. If appropriate, the program should provide opportunities for students to work with faculty on research and/or service projects.
8. General education or service communication courses should correspond to the mission and needs of the institutions or disciplines served. They should also reflect the intellectual content of the communication discipline and have appropriate rigor.
9. In some disciplinary areas, class size should be limited to assure appropriate student learning. Units should provide pedagogical and disciplinary rationales for class size in each course. In performance, production, and advanced writing classes, disciplinary integrity requires reasonable class size restraint. Specific examples of classes that should be restricted in size include but are not limited to:

- performance courses (e.g., public speaking, acting);
  - production classes (e.g., television or radio production, theatre);
  - writing intensive (e.g., reporting, writing for broadcast);
  - research or computational intensive; and
  - Capstone or internship courses that require intense supervision.
10. Performance classes should be comparable in class size to similar programs in the institution and in communication programs across the country but should not have more than a 25:1 student /faculty ratio. The other classes from the list above should generally have a 15:1 ratio. Clearly, institutions may develop curricula according to the needs of the institution.

#### **Guideline #7: Student Advising and Support Services**

##### **The communication program should provide students with appropriate levels of academic advising, support for classes, and professional development.**

1. The program should have venues for communicating to students the institutional and program requirements for declaring the major or emphasis, obtaining needed assistance, and proceeding to graduation.
2. Students in the program should have access to faculty or professional staff for academic advising.
3. Faculty should be available to provide guidance and advice to students about their professional development.
4. Faculty should keep sufficient office hours or opportunities for out-of-class contact to assure students the ability to contact them about curricular or other academic concerns.
5. Persons who advise students should have adequate training to provide accurate, current information to them.
6. Engaging in effective student advising should be recognized in evaluations of faculty and staff who provide such service to students.
7. The availability and effectiveness of student advising should be evaluated as a part of the unit's assessment program.
8. The unit should provide opportunities for co curricular and extracurricular activities that enhance student learning and development.