

January 4, 2016

Dr. Ginger Durham
Assistant Vice Chancellor of Faculty Development
Board of Regents, University System of Georgia
270 Washington Street, SW
Atlanta, GA 30334-1450

Dear Dr. Durham and Members of the Selection Committee,

On behalf of the University of West Georgia, I am pleased to nominate the Department of Mass Communications for the FY2016 Regents' Award for Excellence Department/Program Award. Mass Communications became an independent department in 2011, and since that time its faculty and staff have worked enthusiastically to develop and implement a strategic plan, make significant changes to its B.S. program and concentrations, increase majors, help students progress toward graduation, create systems of unit and program assessment, and improve faculty and staff engagement and satisfaction.

The Department of Mass Communications has focused much of its effort in student success initiatives, concentrating on improved advising, experiential learning opportunities, and career readiness. The department worked collaboratively to convert its broad-based liberal arts B.A. program to a professionally oriented B.S. degree program with concentrations in convergence journalism, digital media and communications, film and video production, and public relations. In reforming its program, the department added experiential learning opportunities to prepare students for careers. Students have opportunities to work in on-campus labs such as the *bluestone* Public Relations Firm, WOLF Internet Radio, the campus TV station (WUTV) or the campus newspaper (*The West Georgian*). In addition, each year approximately 70 junior and seniors complete internships off-campus, working with companies such as CNN, Carroll County Chamber of Commerce, WSB-TV, and Southwire. As curricular reforms have been implemented, the department has seen a 28% increase in majors, from 97 in AY 2012 to 124 in AY 2014.

To further support student success, the department ensures that students receive discipline-specific advising each year, and once students reach their junior year, a department advisor meets with them each semester to help them progress toward graduation. To aid in advising, faculty developed 4- and 6-year student plans to increase student progression, and they work collaboratively to create 2-year course rotations to help students and their advisors effectively

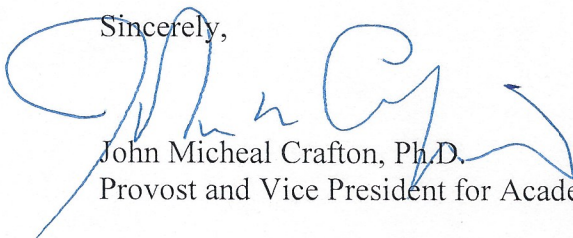
plan courses of study. As a result of these efforts, first to second year retention rates for new undergraduate students have increased from 43% in AY 2012 to 73% in AY 2014. Additionally, undergraduate degrees conferred have seen a steady increase, from 53 in AY 2012 to 63 in AY 2012, and 78 in AY 2014—a 46% increase in majors.

The Department of Mass Communications has been a leader on our campus in program assessment, developing student learning outcomes for its program, engaging in a curriculum mapping process, and analyzing data to make ongoing improvements. Each summer, faculty and staff in the department take part in a two-day strategic planning retreat that includes sessions on curriculum development and assessment, including ongoing training in assessment. Based on conversations in their 2015 summer retreat, faculty are currently working together to identify common learning objectives and measures for each course in the program to further strengthen the program assessment system and support student learning.

As part of our university's Engage West! initiative, the Department of Mass Communications has used our faculty and staff engagement and satisfaction survey results to create a departmental action plan to address concerns related to communication, workload, and professional growth and development. Leadership in the department has engaged in additional efforts to support staff and faculty, including the creation of the Visionary Leadership Award and the Best Practices Power Lunch series. The Visionary Leadership Award recognizes and honors exemplary performance related to strategic priorities, and the Power Lunch series focuses on creating a culture of teaching and research excellence.

The faculty, staff, and leadership in UWG's Department of Mass Communications are a strong model of co-leadership. Faculty and staff work with the department chair in strategic planning, curriculum development, and unit and program assessment, always keeping in mind the vision of making UWG the best comprehensive university in America—sought after as the best place to work, learn, and succeed. Thank you for the opportunity to nominate the Department of Mass Communications for the 2016 Regents Teaching Excellence Award.

Sincerely,



John Micheal Crafton, Ph.D.
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs



Regents' Teaching Excellence Award - Department/Program Category

Submitted By
 Dr. Camilla Gant, Professor & Chair
 Department of Mass Communications
 University of West Georgia
 January 4, 2015

Narrative Statement

The Department of Mass Communications offers a Bachelor of Science in Mass Communications and minors in Film & Video Production and Mass Communications. Through sequenced study, students are educated and trained across media industries to meet the demands of a complex, technological media landscape and multicultural society. Students master an understanding of the paramount economic, legal/policy, ethical, social, and effects issues facing mass media within the context of freedom of speech, freedom of press, media competition, and media convergence. The program vision is to educate and train students for successful integration into the global community as industry professionals, leaders and thinkers in the fields of convergence journalism, digital media and telecommunication, film and video production, and public relations; and the program mission is to empower students to communicate clearly, act responsibly, think critically, and demonstrate conceptual understanding and aesthetic sensitivity in complex communicative contexts. The curriculum offers a balance of theoretical and conceptual courses that challenge students to think critically, creatively, and collaboratively, and professional skills courses that give students an opportunity to apply their knowledge in cutting-edge experiential learning labs – *bluestone* Public Relations Firm, *The West Georgian*, *The WOLF* Internet Radio, and WUTV. Moreover, given the program's relatively close proximity to Atlanta, students regularly network and intern with mass media and public relations professionals in the top-10 media market. In fact, each year, approximately 70 juniors and seniors complete at least one internship or practicum experience, and majors graduate with portfolios that showcase their scholarship and skills, and give them a competitive edge in the industry.

The Convergence Journalism concentration engages students in courses that build knowledge and skills in writing, reporting, and producing socially responsible and responsive news in today's converging multimedia landscape. Students learn to exercise news judgment, honor the tenets of journalism, and create news for and with audiences across traditional and emerging digital media platforms. Students gain hands-on experience early on and throughout their tenure with WUTV, *The West Georgian* and *The WOLF* Internet Radio. The Digital Media & Telecommunication concentration engages students in courses that build knowledge and skills in traditional electronic and emerging digital media. Students explore historical, theoretical, and structural concepts of programming, management, and production of informational and entertainment radio, television, and digital content to serve today's multicultural society. Students learn the art and science of successful storytelling, and create and produce original

content for multiple digital media platforms. Students gain hands-on experience early on and throughout their tenure with WUTV and The WOLF Internet Radio.

Film & Video Production engages students in courses that build knowledge and skills in writing, analysis, production, and editing for film and video outlets. Students learn the art of cinematic storytelling, image design, and sound editing along with advanced post-production techniques and strategies within the broader field of film and video production. Students gain hands-on experience early on and throughout their tenure with workshops, seminars, and collaborative projects that lead to the distribution of their work via various traditional and digital outlets, e.g., competitions, film festivals, online platforms, screenings, social media, etc. Public Relations engages students in courses that build knowledge and skills in today's multicultural domestic and global public relations industry. Students learn the importance of and processes behind building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and target publics through effective interactive communication. Students also gain hands-on experience in media relations, community relations, and employee relations through *bluestone* Public Relations Firm and experiential and service learning projects for private, nonprofit, corporate, and public sector clients.

As part of the department's inaugural strategic plan, faculty and staff are committed to Invested Teaching, Experiential Learning, and Connectedness as strategic priorities. Hence the program's tagline, *Connecting, Inspiring, Empowering*. Invested Teaching is defined as inspiring and equipping students to discover their personal, intellectual, and professional potential through teaching excellence, academic coaching, and career mentoring; Experiential Learning is defined as offering students early and on-going diverse hands-on learning opportunities to develop and enhance personal, intellectual, and professional growth; and Connectedness is defined as serving as the hub that connects and cultivates partnerships among key stakeholders to enhance personal, intellectual, and professional growth. Key stakeholders include administrators, faculty, staff, students, alumni, industry, community, and friends.

Following the reorganization of the College of Arts & Sciences, the Department of Mass Communications, formerly the Department of Mass Communications & Theatre Arts, became an independent department housed in the College of Social Sciences, effective Spring 2011. Within the past four years, the department has made impressive strides in promoting, supporting, and recognizing teaching and learning excellence due in large part to the alignment of dedicated faculty and staff, passionate students, and supportive department, college, and university leadership. Evidentiary sources include assessment of student learning outcomes at the program level, which strengthens program quality, rigor, and teaching and learning curves; professional values/competencies and learning outcomes centric curriculum mapping to guide student success; assessment of program effectiveness, which strengthens program viability; integrated advising, which strengthens retention, progression & graduation; career readiness initiatives to educate and train students as scholar-professionals; invested and innovative academic support that cultivates engaged learning; and success highlights that are indicators of teaching and learning excellence. These evidentiary sources are a testament to the Department of Mass Communications' commitment to the University of West Georgia's vision, under the leadership of its esteemed President Kyle Marrero, to be the best comprehensive university in America – sought after as the best place to work, learn, and succeed!

Fact Profile

- The Department of Mass Communications offers a Bachelor of Science in Mass Communications with four concentrations - Convergence Journalism, Digital Media & Telecommunication, Film & Video Production, and Public Relations, as well as two minors - Film & Video Production and Mass Communications.
- Mass Communications is a top-five major (approximately 650) and popular minor (approximately 60); and the department is home to award-winning, cutting-edge experiential learning labs, including *bluestone* Public Relations Firm, *The West Georgian*, The WOLF Internet Radio, and WUTV, all of which are student-managed.
- Located less than an hour west of Atlanta, a top-10 U.S. media market, the department partners with nearly 100 professionals to offer networking, professional development, and internship opportunities.
- Students participate in scholastic competitions; and serve as members and leaders in department chapters of Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), the largest organization for students studying public relations, and the National Broadcasting Society (NBS) - Alpha Epsilon Rho. NBS-AERho is a professional and honorary society of over 85 chapters that aim to encourage and reward scholarship and accomplishment; to establish meaningful communication between student and professional broadcasters, and to foster integrity in the use of radio, television, film, cable and associated businesses and industries.
- The faculty is comprised of 15 full-time members, including 2 Professors; 2 Associate Professors; 6 Assistant Professors; 4 Lecturers; and 1 Instructor; and 2 part-time faculty, including 1 Associate Professor and 1 Instructor.
- The staff is comprised of 5 members, including an Office Manager, The WOLF Internet Radio Operations Manager & Adjunct Instructor; WUTV General Manager & Adjunct Instructor; WUTV Executive Producer; and a Media Lab Assistant.
- In addition to being intellectually and professionally diverse, faculty and staff are also demographically diverse, including 61% female; 65% Caucasian, 26% African American; 4.5% Asian; and 4.5% Hispanic/Multi-Racial.
- Faculty and staff are active members of and hold leadership positions in prominent professional associations in the discipline; regularly serve as authors, editors, presenters, and reviewers for prominent conferences and journals in the discipline; engage in fellowships and continuing education efforts; serve numerous departmental, college, university, and USG committees; advise prospective majors, majors, and student organizations; and support public service initiatives.

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at the Program Level: *Strengthening Program Quality, Rigor, Teaching & Learning Curves*

For the first time in the history of the department, faculty engaged in systematic assessment of learning outcomes. From the onset of becoming an independent department Spring 2011, the department chair began hosting annual strategic planning retreats each summer. During the retreats, faculty and staff engage in two days of intensive dialogue and workshops regarding strategic priorities for the academic year; and each year, curriculum development and assessment are standing sessions, including assessment training. Faculty have worked diligently to align assessment efforts with the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC) criteria in part because of its impending accreditation application, but most importantly because the criteria serve as a benchmark for academic quality and rigor.

Student Learning Outcomes

ACEJMC purports that three criteria should guide assessment of student learning within journalism and mass communications -- awareness, understanding, and application. ACEJMC defines *awareness* as familiarity with specific information, including facts, concepts, theories, laws and regulations, processes and effects; defines *understanding* as the assimilation and comprehension of information, concepts, theories and ideas; and defines *application* as competence in relating and applying skills, information, concepts, theories and ideas to the accomplishment of tasks. Accordingly, the following program student learning outcomes were assessed for the period of 2010 - 2013.

Learning Outcome 1 - Awareness

Students will demonstrate *awareness* of mass communications scholarship, i.e., theory/research; paramount economic, ethical, legal/policy, social, and technological issues; and the role of principle personalities and stakeholders within the context of freedom of speech, freedom of press, media competition, media convergence, diversity, and/or social responsibility.

Learning Outcome 2 - Understanding

Students will demonstrate *understanding* of mass communications scholarship, i.e., theory/research; paramount economic, ethical, legal/policy, social, and technological issues; and the role of principle personalities and stakeholders within the context of freedom of speech, freedom of press, media competition, media convergence, diversity, and/or social responsibility.

Learning Outcome 3 - Application

Students will demonstrate effective application of mass communications scholarship, i.e., relate and/or apply concepts, theory/research, and professional principles to analyze and synthesize information, create, develop, produce, and/or write for converging digital, multi-media, and traditional media.

Assessment Process

The initial assessment cycle included awareness, understanding and application assessment measures/learning objects for a sample of 12 theoretical/conceptual courses. The sample

included all required courses across concentrations and at least one required course for each concentration. To strengthen assessment reliability, faculty collaboratively linked each course to the learning outcome that predominately relates to course learning outcomes. Additionally, the sample includes six theoretical/conceptual courses and six skills courses. This balance of courses aligns with ACEJMC standards. Moreover, faculty collaboratively mapped program learning outcomes to the curriculum to ensure that courses across varying levels address and assess at least one of the learning outcomes as well as core professional values and competencies (see Figure 4).

Assessment Outcomes

The average percentage of students who performed at the exemplary level (90 or above) or proficient level (70 - 89) on awareness (91%), understanding (90.5%), and application (86.7%) measures across measurement points is impressive (see Figures 1, 2, 3). The students' performance indicate that they are mastering knowledge and skill competencies that position them to contribute to the discipline as intellectually and technologically savvy scholars, professionals, and leaders. Annual review of performance data coupled with affiliate retreat sessions and qualitative analysis of supervisor internship evaluations and feedback from Media Day panels of professionals resulted in several curricular modifications that contributed to student performance. Specifically, faculty and staff converted the degree program from a broad-based, liberal arts B.A. to a specialized, professional-oriented B.S. with emphasis on critical cognate areas, i.e., strong oral and written communication, and creative, analytic, research, and technologic knowledge and skills; developed four concentrations and 14 new courses, including permanent offerings and special topics; and wrote several extensive proposals to secure 6-figure level funding to renovate learning spaces and acquire state-of-the-art technologic resources to support teaching and learning excellence, including realizing a new Convergent Learning Center, which houses a centralized equipment pool with new audio and video equipment, an iMac Lab, editing suites, a studio, an audio suite, and radio suite, as well as renovating and expanding technologic resources for The WOLF Internet Radio and WUTV experiential learning labs. These upgrades allow students to heighten their career readiness and enhance their portfolios which showcase their scholarship and skills, giving them a competitive edge in the industry.

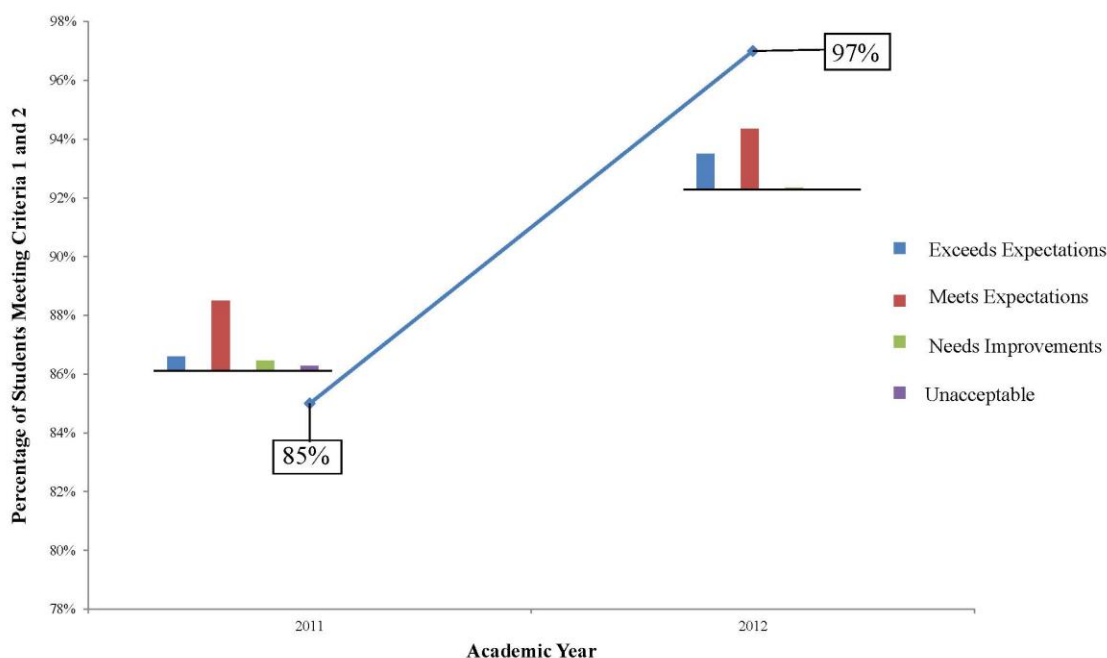
Regarding the next phase of assessment (2014 -2017), although faculty collaboratively linked each course to a specific learning outcome, they independently identified learning objects and assessment measures for each course, which likely account for the varying student performance averages at each measurement point, though student performance averages across measurement points are generally consistent - again, awareness 91%; understanding 90.5%, and application 86.7%. To strengthen reliability, ideally, the same learning objects and assessment measures should be used whether different faculty teach the same course or the same faculty teach different sections of the same course within or across semesters. Therefore, during the Summer 2015 strategic planning retreat, faculty began identifying common learning objects and assessment measures for each course. Additionally, the initial assessment cycle sample included required core courses for the major, required courses across concentrations, and at least one required course for each concentration. During the next assessment cycle, faculty plan to expand the sample to include all required courses for each concentration. This expanded sample will provide a more accurate picture of how well students are achieving program learning outcomes -

awareness, understanding, and application – and core professional values and competencies given that assessment points will include all required courses across varying courses levels.

Figure 1
Awareness Learning Outcome

Department of Mass Communications | University of West Georgia

This graph displays measurements of Awareness Learning Outcome for the 2011-2012 time period as indicated by the blue line. The left-hand axis represents the percentage of students either meeting or exceeding expectations. Each bar graph displays the specific scoring breakdown at each measurement point as indicated in the legend on the right-hand side of the graph. Although faculty collaboratively linked each course to a specific learning outcome, they independently identified learning objects and assessment measures for each course. Additionally, the initial assessment cycle included a purposive sample of required courses. These factors, which are being addressed in the current assessment cycle, likely account for varying student performance averages each measurement point, though the 2-year average is an impressive 91%.



Data: Provided by UWG Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment

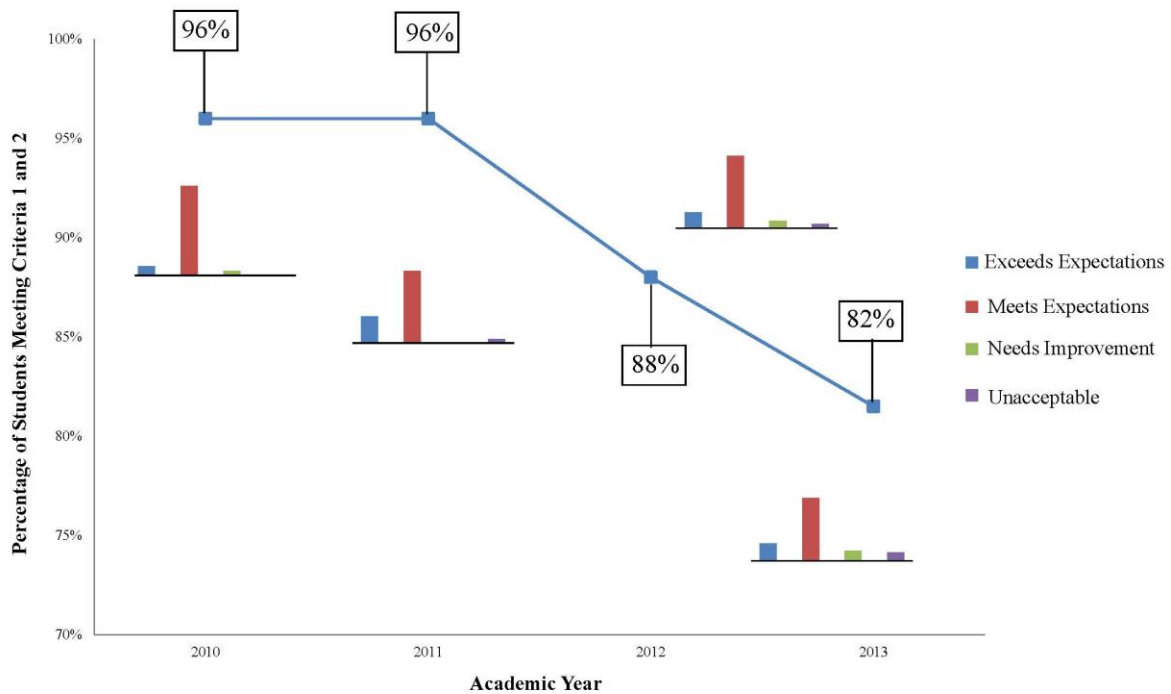
Academic Year	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Needs Improvement	Unacceptable
2011	14%	71%	10%	5%
2012	36%	61%	2%	1%

Figure 2

Understanding Learning Outcome

Department of Mass Communications | University of West Georgia

This graph displays measurements of Understanding Learning Outcome for the 2010-2013 time period as indicated by the blue line. The left-hand axis represents the percentage of students either meeting or exceeding expectations. Each bar graph displays the specific scoring breakdown at each measurement point as indicated in the legend on the right-hand side of the graph. Although faculty collaboratively linked each course to a specific learning outcome, they independently identified learning objects and assessment measures for each course. Additionally, the initial assessment cycle included a purposive sample of required courses. These factors, which are being addressed in the current assessment cycle, likely account for varying student performance averages each measurement point, though the 4-year average is an impressive 90.5%.



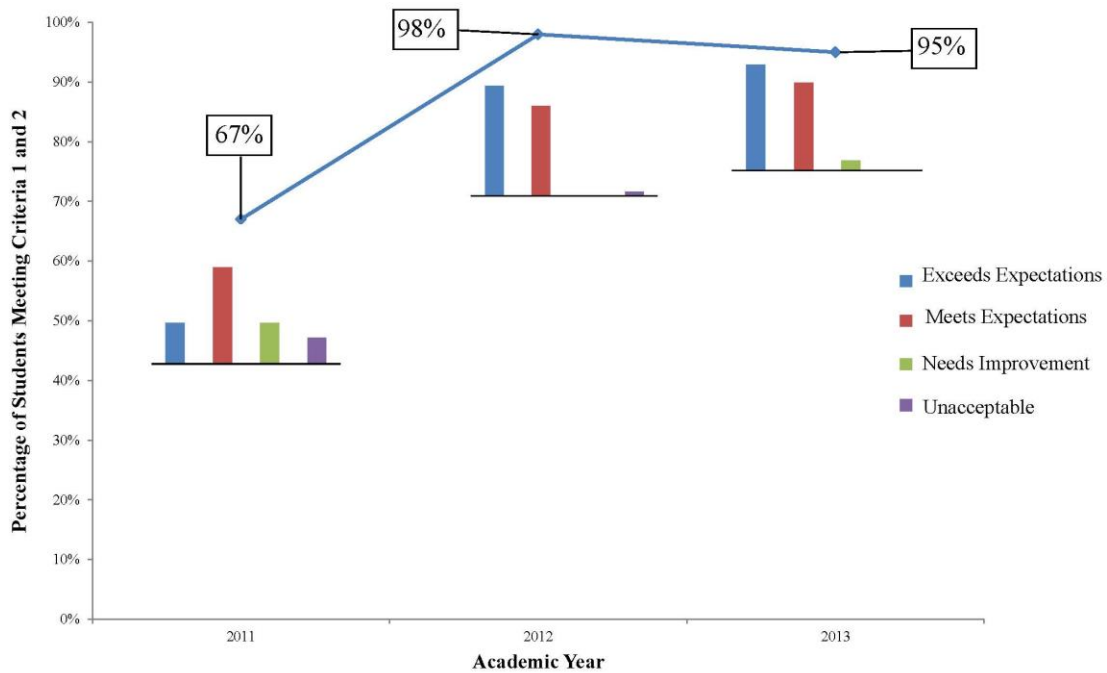
Data: Provided by UWG Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment

Academic Year	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Needs Improvement	Unacceptable
2010	9%	87%	4%	0%
2011	26%	70%	0%	4%
2012	16%	72%	8%	5%
2013	18%	64%	10%	9%

Figure 3 Application Learning Outcome

Department of Mass Communications University of West Georgia

This graph displays measurements of Application Learning Outcome for the 2011-2013 time period as indicated by the blue line. The left-hand axis represents the percentage of students either meeting or exceeding expectations. Each bar graph displays the specific scoring breakdown at each measurement point as indicated in the legend on the right-hand side of the graph. Although faculty collaboratively linked each course to a specific learning outcome, they independently identified learning objects and assessment measures for each course. Additionally, the initial assessment cycle included a purposive sample of required courses. These factors, which are being addressed in the current assessment cycle, likely account for varying student performance averages each measurement point, though the 3-year average is an impressive 86.7%.



Data: Provided by UWG Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment

Academic Year	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Needs Improvement	Unacceptable
2011	20%	47%	20%	13%
2012	54%	44%	0%	2%
2013	52%	43%	5%	0%

Professional Values/Competencies & Learning Outcomes Centric Curriculum Mapping: Guiding Student Success

Faculty within each concentration collaboratively devised a curriculum map in accordance with the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications criteria. The map accounts for all required courses for each concentration to ensure that faculty educate and train students to be aware of and able to perform 12 core values and competencies. Additionally, by mapping all required courses, faculty ensure that all paths to graduation address the 12 core values and competencies.

Figure 4
Curriculum Map

Core Value/Competency	Awareness	Understanding	Application
Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances	1154, 3350		3302, 4402, 4414, 4450, 4454
Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.	1154, 3350, 4413	3301, 3313, 3355, 3356, 4405, 4455	
Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications.	1154	3301, 3313, 3356, 3357, 4455	
Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.	1154	3301, 3356, 3357, 4455	4414
Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information.	3305, 3353	1110, 3351, 3352, 4405, 4406, 4407	3303, 4403, 4421NPRT, 4444, 4452
Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.	1154	2254	3302, 4402, 4450, 4454
Think critically, creatively and independently.	4413	3305, 3353	3354, 4405, 4406, 4407, 4421NPRT, 4452
Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.	1154	1110, 3355, 4444, 4484	3302, 4402, 4450
Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.	1154, 3301, 3353	3305, 3356, 4451, 4484	3302, 4402, 4421N, 4450
Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.	3353	3305, 4405, 4406, 4407	3302, 4402, 4421NPRT, 4450, 4444, 4452
Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.	1154	3355, 4484	3302, 4402, 4421N, 4450
Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.	3305, 3353	3351, 3352, 4405, 4406, 4407	3303, 4403, 4421NRT, 4444, 4452

Assessment of Program Effectiveness: *Strengthening Program Viability*

The department measures program effectiveness relative to performance on four factors as prescribed by the university (see table below). In regard to *growth of new undergraduate students*, the department significantly updated its website and promotional material to highlight program strengths, e.g., cutting-edge curriculum; high quality, engaged faculty and staff; experiential learning, internship and career opportunities, etc.

In regard to *1st – 2nd year retention rate for new undergraduate students*, the department implemented integrated advising, which is detailed in subsequent advising section, as well as an annual Open House, which affords majors and prospective majors an opportunity to tour departmental, state-of-the-art experiential learning labs and explore volunteer, training, and practicum opportunities offered by each - Convergent Learning Center, *bluestone* Public Relations Firm, *The West Georgian*, The WOLF Internet Radio, and WUTV. Additionally, Fall 2015, the department launched two discipline-specific, first-year learning communities which faculty and staff anticipate will strengthen retention.

In regard to *growth of undergraduate degrees conferred*, the faculty and staff implemented several curricular modifications, as detailed in previous assessment section, to realize a competitive and progressive curriculum; and implemented an integrated advising plan, which includes academic and career coaching from freshmen to senior year, 4-year and 6-year student plans, and 2-year course rotations to increase likelihood that students complete only courses required to satisfy degree requirements, and do so in appropriate sequence, thereby shortening time to degree.

In regard to *faculty/staff engagement satisfaction*, drawing on EngageWest survey results, faculty and staff devised an EngageWest Action Plan to address primary concerns within departmental purview – streamline communication and service workloads; and enhance administrative support and PGD opportunities. Given that the EngageWest AY 13 survey differed from the AY14 version, it is difficult to make valid comparisons. However, it is encouraging that faculty/staff engagement was consistent both years, and faculty and staff are hopeful that implementation of the EngageWest Plan will strengthen faculty/staff engagement.

Program Effectiveness Criteria	AY12	AY13	AY14
Growth of New Undergraduate Students	97	99	124
1 st – 2 nd Year Retention Rate for New Undergraduate Students	42.7%	68%	72.7%
Growth of Undergraduate Degrees Conferred	53	63	78
Faculty/Staff Engagement Satisfaction	n/a	3.8/3.7	3.72

In addition to university measures, the department has targeted initiatives to heighten program effectiveness. Accordingly, the department chair launched the Visionary Leadership Award to strengthen faculty morale and honor exemplary performance in regard to departmental critical initiatives and strategic priorities; launched a Best Practices Power Lunch series to foster a culture of teaching and research excellence; and launched a Student Leadership Advisory Board

to keep abreast of student concerns; ensure proactive, student-informed decision-making; and strengthen teaching and learning curves through student counsel regarding curricular, professional development, advancement, and special event initiatives.

Integrated Advising: *Strengthening Retention, Progression & Graduation*

Advising is critical to keeping students engaged in the program and strengthening their retention, progression, and graduation. Therefore, the department revamped its approach to ensure that each major receives academic and career coaching from freshmen to senior year, including information resources to make informed scheduling and career readiness decisions.

- Freshmen and sophomores are assigned a discipline-specific advisor in the university Advising Center; and the advisor in consultation with the department chair advises students based on a core curriculum student plan. In addition to guiding students' core curriculum selections, the plan stipulates that select Core Area F courses should be completed sophomore year to ensure that the prerequisite knowledge for upper-level courses is better retained the junior year. Additionally, the department chair or a faculty representative periodically meets with underclassmen during the Advising Center's group sessions to answer questions students may have regarding the major or involvement in other department initiatives such as student organizations or the student-managed public relations firm or collegiate media, including *The West Georgian*, The WOLF Internet Radio, and WUTV.
- Beginning their junior year, formerly after completing 45 credit hours, majors are assigned a faculty advisor in the department based on their concentration. All faculty members, 100% regardless of rank, serve as advisors; and they meet with advisees at least once a semester, typically 20-30 minutes. During advising sessions, faculty typically cross-check students' course selections to ensure that they adhere to program requirements; clarify program guidelines; conduct audits for courses, particularly transfer courses, that are listed as potential electives to determine if they can apply toward the degree via petition; and assist students with questions they may have, typically regarding course and/or minor selections relative to their career aspirations, internship opportunities, career readiness, etc. Moreover, given that students generally remain with the same advisor until graduation, faculty become their mentors and academic/career coaches; and students value their relationship and input beyond graduation.
- Faculty within each concentration collaboratively developed 4-year and 6-year student plans to inform students' course selections and shorten their time to degree by increasing the likelihood that they only complete courses that satisfy degree requirements. Additionally, the student plans, which are accessible via the department website and office, were designed in tandem with the departmental course rotation to ensure that courses are offered when indicated on student plans. Moreover, the student plans offer flexible options, e.g., stipulate elective course or minor course rather than specific courses, to avoid stifling students' progression based on availability of specific courses or open seats.
- Faculty collaboratively devise 2-year course rotations, which are administered during advising as well as via the department website and office. The 2-year rotation allows

students and advisors to plan major course selections for impending and future semesters and project graduation date. Additionally, the department chair maintains a faculty rotation in tandem with the course rotation to ensure that students benefit from the faculty's intellectual and professional diversity and have diverse options in regard to teaching and learning styles.

- Fall 2015, an advising link was added to the department website which includes useful information regarding the advising process, e.g., how to sign up for an appointment, how to prepare for appointment, how to secure overrides, etc. Students can now refer to the link for information relative to FAQs and to access resources needed for their advising sessions, thereby realizing more time for dialogue regarding other pertinent issues during advising sessions.
- Effective Spring 2016, faculty will devise suggested minors and electives for each concentration. Currently, the program prescribes a list of approved multidisciplinary electives. However, students often rely on advisors to inform which electives would best serve students within a particular concentration. Collaboratively developing such a list will ensure that students benefit from the expertise of all faculty within a particular concentration rather than from one faculty member.

Career Readiness: *Educating & Training Scholar-Professionals*

Career readiness is a critical indicator of teaching and learning excellence, particularly for convergence journalism, digital media and telecommunication, film and video production, and public relations which are highly competitive professional disciplines that require mastery of specialized communication, research, and technologic scholarship and competencies, as well as critical, analytical, creative, and entrepreneurial thinking.

- Each year, approximately 70 juniors and seniors complete at least one practicum or internship, which gives them a competitive edge in the industry. Students apply their knowledge in cutting-edge experiential learning labs – *bluestone* Public Relations Firm, *The West Georgian*, *The WOLF* Internet Radio, and *WUTV* - and film screenings; and regularly intern in metro Atlanta, a top-10 media market, and beyond (note some partners below).



Application

- *bluestone* Public Relations Firm was launched to address the absence of an experiential learning lab for the most popular concentration. The student-managed firm provides a professional and stimulating application environment in which students cultivate the art of exceptional thinking, creativity, innovation, and communication excellence. Students provide strategic communication research and planning, media relations, image and brand management, and social/digital strategy development services for corporate, government, and non-profit clients. These services also support several university strategic imperatives, engaged undergraduate research, enhanced community relations, and future workforce development.
- Additionally, the Public Relations Career Ready Certificate program was piloted to aid students in the transition from the academic to professional world; ease seniors' anxiety about preparing for graduation and employment; and establish a follow up post-graduation mechanism. To obtain the certificate, students are required to complete a checklist of career ready activities that culminate with the presentation and grading of a professional portfolio and resume, three-year plan, and review meeting (see Figure 5).
- The WOLF Internet Radio performs approximately 484 live remote broadcasts or live events on campus or in the local community, including play-by-play coverage of sporting events such as football, basketball, volleyball, soccer, baseball and softball. These events utilize industry-standard Audio Technica headset microphones and Comrex ACCESS for wireless or hardwired connection from event to studio.
- WUTV expanded new, original student-produced programs and weekly newscasts to include 33 programs, Internet editions of broadcast news coverage, live shots, and live broadcasting.

Invested & Innovative Academic Support: *Cultivating Engaged Learning*

- ***Strategic Plan*** - Faculty and staff devised an inaugural strategic plan for 2012 - 2017 including revising mission and vision statements; drafting SMART goals and action steps; and identifying strategic priorities that guide annual goals and assessments. Strategic priorities are Invested Teaching - to inspire and equip students to discover their personal, intellectual, and professional potential through teaching excellence, academic coaching, and career mentoring; Experiential Learning - to offer students early and on-going diverse hands-on learning opportunities to develop and enhance personal, intellectual, and professional growth; and Connectedness - to serve as the hub that connects and cultivates partnerships among key stakeholders to enhance personal, intellectual, and professional growth. Key stakeholders include administrators, faculty, staff, students, alumni, industry, community, and friends.
- ***Diversity Plan*** - Perhaps the only university unit to do so, faculty and staff devised an inaugural diversity plan which was approved October 18, 2013. The plan outlines the department's commitment to offering a diverse and inclusive program that serves and reflects a multicultural society, as well as strategic goals to educate and train socially responsible, responsive, and sensitive communication scholars, professionals and global citizens. Specifically, the goals are to foster understanding of issues & perspectives inclusive of

diverse cultures in a global society; recruit, retain, and engage, diverse faculty & professional staff; recruit, retain, and engage a diverse student population; foster a climate that prohibits discrimination & harassment. Both the strategic plan and diversity plan align with ACEJMC standards, Complete College Georgia, COSS, UWG, and USG strategic goals and imperatives, and strengthen program viability.

- **Media Day** - 2016 will mark the department's 35th Media Day, a signature event to celebrate academic and professional/development achievements of majors, distinguished alumni, and distinguished university/community/industry service; and to create professional networking opportunities for majors, prospective majors, and minors. The day-long event begins with a morning panel of 4-5 professionals followed by a professional networking session, known as the corridor of success, which includes approximately 70 professionals from Atlanta, Carrollton, and beyond, 50% - 60% of whom are generally alumni. Then the afternoon concludes with an Honors luncheon that honors distinguished alumni, university/community/industry service partners, and nearly 100 students, whose meals are complimentary thanks a *Times-Georgian* corporate sponsorship as well as university sponsors. Also, these Media Day connections often realize internships and career opportunities for students, as well as classroom partnerships for the department.
- **Professionals in Residence** - PIR program is designed to expand curriculum offerings, particularly in regard to specialized content and content voids; and to afford students an opportunity to learn from and network with high quality, industry professionals throughout metro Atlanta. Ideal candidates have a minimum of five years of professional experience in the discipline; teach at least one course; and serve as consultants for a departmental strategic initiative.
- **Academic Success Partners** - Faculty and staff maintain an active relationship with nearly 100 industry, community, and internship partners; and forged chapter partnerships with two national student organizations, Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) and the National Broadcasting Society (NBS) - Alpha Epsilon Rho, which enhance the prestige and visibility of the program as well as provide valuable professional connections and professional development experiences for students. Departmental collegiate media and student organizations have received numerous chapter and individual awards and honors in national and international scholastic competitions (see subsequent Student Highlights section).
- **Leveraging Public Speaking** – Each fall, communication faculty host an annual Gibson Public Speaking Contest and Spotlight On Symposium. This year (2015) marks the 10th anniversary of the Gibson Public Speaking Contest which was named in honor of the Dr. Chester Gibson, who chaired the Department of Mass Communications & Theatre Arts for many years; and was the guiding force behind UWG's nationally acclaimed debate team. The contest showcases and rewards best persuasive speeches from Public Speaking courses (one candidate per faculty member); and the speeches are recorded and integrated in Public Speaking courses as analysis and teaching objects. Each spring, communication faculty host an annual Spotlight On Symposium which engages a panel of professionals, educators, and students in a dialogue regarding a hot topic that critically impacts students and higher

education, followed by audience Q&A. Offered as an extra credit opportunity for Public Speaking students, the goal is to heighten their civic engagement. Symposia topics since its 2012 inception include campus security, diversity, college or alternatives, and communication soft skills. Given that 2016 is an election year, the topic will be *Your Political Voice*.

- ***Connecting with Alumni*** – Department and college leadership regularly connect with alumni, which total more than a thousand, via the *Perspective* publication, hard copy and online editions; and by regularly inviting them to engage with the program, e.g., update profile; serve as a guest speaker in the classroom, an internship partner, a Media Day panelist; make a donation the program or university.
- ***WOLF- in-Training*** - The WOLF Internet Radio's WIT program offers out-of-class training designed to educate and train students regarding the basics of creating a live radio show and the on-air experience. Training requires a commitment of two hours a week throughout an entire semester; and strengthens students' portfolios to qualify for future student assistant and leadership positions with The WOLF.

Faculty/Staff/Student Success: *Highlighting Indicators of Teaching & Learning Excellence*

Student Highlights

- Each year, more than 100 students receive departmental academic excellence awards, concentration excellence awards, and professional development awards, as well as nominations for honor societies and distinctions.
- The WOLF Internet Radio received five 2015 Intercollegiate Broadcasting System honors - Best Use of Social Media Winner and Finalist for Best Blog, Promo Series, Best Celebrity/Artist Interview and Best Online Station; Staff Advisor, Shawn Isaacs, The WOLF Operations Manager.
- The WOLF Internet Radio was nominated as a 2015 Finalist for Best Station Imaging by the College Broadcasters Inc. National Student Production Awards; Staff Advisor, Shawn Isaacs, The WOLF Operations Manager.
- Film & Video Production alumni and students' film *Mom, Dad & The Kids* was a finalist in the Fall 2015 48 Hour Horror Film Project; Faculty Advisors, Deon Kay, Assistant Professor and Film & Video Production Head, and Chris Renaud, Assistant Professor.
- Amber Dees' short film was one of a few student works screened alongside a commercially produced film at the Spring 2014 Les Tournees Film Festival; Faculty Advisor, Deon Kay, Assistant Professor and Film & Video Production Head.
- NBS-AERho chapter received 11 chapter and member honors at the NBS-AERho 2013-2014 National Convention. The chapter was named 1 of 4 Model Chapters (out of approximately 70 chapters); and earned Honorable Mention Awards for Chapter of the Year and

Community Service. President Chad Brock received the Student of the Year Award; Lacey Hill was the Grand Prize Winner for the Academic Paper Competition; and five members were finalists in the Electronic Media Competition; Faculty Advisor, Dr. Brad Yates, Professor & Digital Media & Telecommunication Head.

- NBS-AERho chapter received the 2013-2014 Center for Student Involvement Community Service Award; Faculty Advisor, Dr. Brad Yates, Professor & Digital Media & Telecommunication Head.
- *The West Georgian* received two 2014 Georgia College Press Association awards, the first since 2007. The staff received a 3rd place award for Most Improved Newspaper and Illustrator Bob Chesser received a 3rd place award for Best Editorial Cartoon in a Series; Faculty Advisor, Dr. John Sewell, Assistant Professor.
- *The West Georgian* Chief Copy Editor Kathleen Sturgeon received SGA's 2014 Toyal Jackson Making a Difference Award; Faculty Advisor, Dr. John Sewell, Assistant Professor.
- *The West Georgian* Editor-In-Chief Ashley Copeland served as Secretary for the Georgia College Press Association; and received SGA's 2013 Toyal Jackson Making a Difference Award; Faculty Advisor, Dr. John Sewell, Assistant Professor..
- The WOLF Internet Radio received the 2013 International College Radio Day Best Community Outreach Award and Best On-Air Programming Spirit of College Radio Award; Staff Advisor, Shawn Isaacs, The WOLF Operations Manager.
- NBS-AERho chapter received five chapter and member honors at the 2012-2013 NBS-AERho National Convention. The chapter received the Most Improved Chapter of the Year Award and was recognized as a Motivated Chapter (1 of 6 across 56 chapters); Joshua Winters was the Grand Prize Winner for the Academic Paper Competition; and two members were finalists in the Electronic Media Competition; Faculty Advisor, Dr. Brad Yates, Professor & Digital Media & Telecommunication Head.

Faculty/Staff Highlights

- Faculty generally maintain above average median and mean averages on student evaluation discipline-centered and instructor-centered variables, typically earning ratings between 4.0 – 5.0 on a scale of 1.0 – 5.0 in which 5.0 is the highest ratings.
- Faculty and staff maintain active professional growth and development agendas, and integrate their scholarship and expertise in the classroom to enrich teaching and learning. Though relatively few in numbers, particularly in regard to tenured/tenure-track faculty, it is impressive that faculty developed 14 new courses, including permanent offerings and special topics; published 4 book chapters; published 9 peer-reviewed articles and 2 scholarly works; presented 21 refereed research papers and 5 juried exhibitions; and made 30 scholarly presentations while concomitantly managing full-time teaching workloads and heavy service

workloads during a three year span - 2010-2011, 2012-2013, 2013-2014 (note data were not available for 2011-2012, and have not been analyzed for 2014-2015).

- Eighty percent of faculty have completed the College of Social Sciences Online Course Development Grant program which involves intensive summer training that culminates in the development of a new online or hybrid course; and some also completed Quality Matters certificate courses.
- Deon Kay and Gail Reid received research grants to participate in conferences to advance innovative and effective instruction - Institute for Curriculum and Campus Internationalization and Institute for Pedagogy in the Liberal Arts; Teaching & Learning Conference on Best Practices for Promoting Engaged Student Learning.
- Dr. Camilla Gant and Dr. Brad Yates were awarded promotion to the rank of Professor; Dr. Patrick Hadley, Dr. Soo Moon, and Dr. Amber Smallwood were awarded tenure and promotion to the rank of Associate Professor.
- Deon Kay, Assistant Professor and Film & Video Production Head, and Chris Renaud, Assistant Professor, collaboratively developed a 3-tiered film production curriculum and secured 6-figure level funding to create the aforementioned Convergent Learning Center, which significantly expanded and upgraded technology resources and learning spaces.
- Several faculty and staff received the College of Social Sciences highest honor since its 2012 inception – Sonya Barnes, WUTV General Manager & Adjunct Instructor (Outstanding Staff Award); Dr. Camilla Gant, Professor & Department Chair (Outstanding Mentor Award); Shawn Isaacs, The WOLF Operations Manager (Outstanding Staff Award); Dr. Soo Moon, Associate Professor & Convergence Journalism Head (Outstanding Research Award); Dr. Amber Smallwood, Associate Professor & COSS Associate Dean (Outstanding Junior Faculty Award), Dr. Brad Yates, Professor and Digital Media & Telecommunication Head (Outstanding Mentor Award, Outstanding Service Award, Outstanding Teaching Award); and Teresa Yates, Office Manager (Outstanding Staff Award).
- Teresa Yates, Office Manager, and Dr. Brad Yates, Professor and Digital Media & Telecommunication Head, received the university's Best of the West highest division honor; and Shawn Isaacs, The WOLF Operations Manager, received the 2014 Academic Affairs Divisional Award of Excellence.
- Six faculty and staff have received the department's highest honor, Visionary Leadership Award, since its 2012 inception - Dr. Brad Yates, Professor and Digital Media & Telecommunication Head, and Dr. Amber Smallwood, Associate Professor & COSS Associate Dean (2012); Shawn Isaacs, The WOLF Operations Manager (2013); Deon Kay, Assistant Professor and Film & Video Production Head, and Chris Renaud, Assistant Professor (2014); Sonya Barnes, WUTV General Manager & Adjunct Instructor (2015).
- Dr. Camilla Gant, Professor & Department Chair, served as an Executive Leadership Institute scholar September 2010 - April 2011. ELI is an initiative of the Board of Regents

and Chancellor Erroll B. Davis Jr. to encourage and support leadership development throughout the University System; Primary emphasis is placed on identifying, developing, and supporting high-potential employees within the University System as a strategy to attract and retain the best talent.

- Dr. Patrick Hadley, Associate Professor, completed the Council for Adult & Experiential Learning Prior Learning Assessment training, Spring 2015.
- Shawn Isaacs, The WOLF Operations Manager, received the 2014 Academic Affairs Division Outstanding Staff Award; and was appointed to serve the College Radio Day Executive Board, Spring 2013.
- Dr. T. Randahl Morris, Associate Professor, piloted the Public Relations Career Ready Certificate Fall 2015; served as a Center for Teaching & Learning Fellow Summer 2015; and served as faculty advisor for the branding of *bluestone* Public Relations Firm.
- Dr. Brad Yates, Professor & Digital Media & Telecommunication Head, completed Quality Matters Peer Reviewer Certification; was elected to serve the National Broadcasting Society-Alpha Epsilon Rho Board of Governors, March 2014; received the NBS-AERho Advisor of the Year Award Spring 2013; and received the 2013-2014 Center for Student Involvement Advisor of the Year Award.

Figure 5

Public Relations Career Ready Certificate Checklist

CAREER READY EXPERIENCES - Students should have at least 8 instances of the following experiences.

- _____ Job Shadow Experience
- _____ Informational Interviews
- _____ Internship(s)
- _____ **b-l-u-e-s-t-o-n-e** Associate or Manager
- _____ Workshop on Networking
- _____ Workshop on Interviewing
- _____ Workshop on Career-Related & Readiness Skills
- _____ National or Regional Conference

INTERVIEW MATERIALS - Students are required to have all items in professional form.

- _____ Portfolio Reviewed and Revised (Minimum score of 80 - see evaluation form)
- _____ Sample Cover Letter
- _____ Resume review by at least two public relations professionals
- _____ Social Media Presence
- _____ Business Cards
- _____ Professional Photo
- _____ Online Portfolio

TRANSITIONAL PREPARATION - Students are required to complete all items.

- _____ Career Readiness Assessment & Follow-Up Training
- _____ Review of Research Article (handout) and "5 Ways to Land a Job" (attached)
- _____ Final Review of Interview Materials
- _____ Three-year Plan Completed (attached)
- _____ Graduation Interview (Schedule with Dr. Morris. Submit portfolio prior to meeting)
- _____ Bring detailed/completed checklist and Three Year Plan.