

Report of On-Site Evaluation

2005 – 2006

Draft Copy*

Accrediting Council on Education
in Journalism and Mass Communications

*NOTE: This copy is only a draft of the final report. It may contain errors.
School and university representatives have an opportunity
to respond and to suggest changes in the report.
The Accrediting Council makes the final accreditation decision.

**Report of On-Site Evaluation
ACEJMC**

2005 – 2006

Name of Institution: Virginia Commonwealth University _____

Name and Title of Chief Executive Officer: Eugene P. Trani, president _____

Name of Unit: School of Mass Communications _____

Name and Title of Administrator: Judy VanSlyke Turk, director _____

Date of 2005 - 2006 Accrediting Visit: November 13-16, 2005 _____

If the unit is currently accredited, please provide the following information:

Date of the previous accrediting visit _____

Recommendation of the previous accrediting team _____

Previous decision of the Accrediting Council _____

Recommendation by 2005 - 2006 Visiting Team: Accreditation _____

Prepared and submitted by:

Team Chair

Name and Title: Douglas Anderson, dean and professor _____

Organization/School: College of Communications; The Pennsylvania State University _____

Signature _____

Team Members

Name and Title: Kathleen S. Kelly, chair and professor _____

Organization/School: Department of Public Relations; University of Florida _____

Signature _____

Name and Title: Nancy Mitchell, sequence head, Advertising, and associate professor _____

Organization/School: College of Journalism & Mass Communications; University of Nebraska-Lincoln _____

Signature _____

Name and Title: Charlie Tuggle, sequence head, Electronic Communication, and associate professor _____

Organization/School: School of Journalism & Mass Communication; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill _____

Signature _____

Name and Title: Charles Wanninger, publisher _____

Organization/School: Port Huron Times Herald, Port Huron, Mich. _____

Signature _____

Name and Title _____

Organization/School _____

Signature _____

Instructions to the site team

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT:

Part I — General Information: The team should include here the General Information pages prepared by the unit in advance of the visit. Some of this information was contained in the original self-study and some is updated information. The unit is expected to prepare these pages before the team's arrival on campus and print them for inclusion in the team report.

Part II — Evaluations regarding individual standards: To enter material into the report, click into the template in the spaces provided and type; the spaces will expand to accommodate your writing. The sections of the report addressing each standard are structured as follows:

Full statement of the standard: For your convenience, this report form includes the full statement of each standard, complete with lists of indicators and suggested evidence.

Unit performance regarding indicators: The report should address the unit's performance regarding each of the five indicators for each standard. If the unit has requested a waiver of any indicator, the team must consider this request. The decision to grant or deny such a waiver must be clearly explained and supported in the report.

Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance: The team must conclude its evaluations of the unit's performance regarding each of the nine standards with either "compliance" or "non-compliance."

Part III — Evaluation of professional master's program: This section may be deleted if it does not apply. Note that evaluations of professional master's programs do not conclude with evaluations of compliance.

Part IV — Summary by site visit team: This section summarizes the team's major findings and evaluations.

GENERAL NOTES:

Overall recommendation regarding accreditation: Accreditation status is determined by the degree to which the unit's program complies with the standards of accreditation and the degree to which the program accomplishes its stated goals. An accumulation of inconsistencies and weaknesses, or a major shortcoming in one or more of the standards, may jeopardize the accreditation status of a unit.

Clarity and accuracy: The Accrediting Committee and the Accrediting Council will base their decisions on the information and explanations presented in this report, so the site visit team has an extremely important obligation to provide complete, clear and accurate information. Teams must avoid words that can have different meanings for different people and must use clear, concrete language.

Non-prescriptive evaluation: Team chairs and members must not suggest to schools or departments that they follow model curricula designed by another organization, because these curricula have not been adopted by the Accrediting Council. The site visit team may offer suggestions for improvement but should avoid stipulations about specific courses, faculty composition or other improvements, because each unit must be free to structure its program to meet its own goals and to meet the standards.

Individual sequences: For the curriculum standard, teams MUST describe and evaluate individual academic sequences in the unit. For other standards, it may be appropriate for the team to comment about individual sequences. However, most of the team's comments should address general compliance or non-compliance with the standards.

PART I: General information

The team should include here the General Information pages prepared by the unit in advance of the visit. The team should ensure that the unit's assessment plan is included with the General Information section.

PART II — Standard 1: Mission, Governance and Administration

The policies and practices of the unit ensure that it has an effectively and fairly administered working and learning environment.

Indicators:

- (a) The unit has a mission statement and engages in strategic or long-range planning that provides vision and direction for its future, identifies needs and resources for its mission and goals and is supported by university administration outside the unit. A professional graduate program must have a separate mission statement and designated administrative oversight for that program.
- (b) The unit has policies and procedures for substantive faculty governance that ensure faculty oversight of educational policy and curriculum.
- (c) The unit's administration provides effective leadership within the unit and effectively represents it in dealings with university administration outside the unit and constituencies external to the university.
- (d) The institution and/or the unit defines and uses a process for selecting and evaluating its administrators.
- (e) Faculty, staff and students have avenues to express concerns and have them addressed.

Evidence:

A mission statement

A strategic or long-range plan

Documents demonstrating administrative oversight for the professional graduate program

A faculty policy manual, handbook or other document specifying the roles of faculty in governance and the development of educational policy

Minutes of faculty meetings, committee meetings and reports

Assessment of unit administrator by faculty and by administration outside the unit

Files on searches and hiring decisions

Files on concerns and complaints

Overview:

The School of Mass Communications at Virginia Commonwealth University was established in 1978, as its self-study notes, “to prepare students for successful professional careers in the mass media—newspapers, magazines, radio and television—and in the professions of advertising and public relations.”

The self-study correctly points out that “the media and communication industries have undergone almost unbelievable change since then . . . [but] the School's mission remains essentially unchanged.”

This is not to say, though, that the curricula, attitudes and approaches within the School have not changed; they clearly have. This is a program very much on the move. The School allowed its accreditation to lapse in 2000, but, beginning with the hiring of a new director in March 2002, it has embarked on an impressively focused, well planned and energetic push to meet its goal of providing students “with a leading-edge education that emphasizes a core of fundamental concepts, values and skills that will prepare them for communication careers in an era of unprecedented change.”

The university traces its roots to 1838 when the Medical College of Virginia was created as part of Hampden-Sydney College. The institution underwent a series of consolidations and structural realignments over the next 130 years before assuming its current form in 1968. Journalism courses originally were offered by a journalism department and advertising courses were offered by the School

of Business. The journalism department gained initial accreditation in 1976, two years before the journalism and advertising programs combined to form the School.

VCU, a state-assisted university that is accredited by the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges, enrolls more than 29,000 students. The third largest research university in Virginia, it is a Carnegie Research I institution that comprises 15 schools and one college: The College of Humanities and Sciences, which is the home of the School of Mass Communications.

An urban university, VCU's student body is diverse: nearly 35 percent are ethnic minorities; 32 percent are parttime; and 10 percent are classified as evening students. Their average age: 25. Students in the School of Mass Communications are ethnically even more diverse than the overall university student body. In 2004-2005, 36 percent of the School's students were of color. Some 24.8 percent of the School's students were African-American, much higher than the university's 20.6 percent.

The School is headed by a director, now in her fourth year, who reports to the dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences. The director's administrative team includes an associate director, who is responsible for undergraduate course scheduling, hiring and supervision of adjunct faculty members, and other internal duties; and the managing director of the Adcenter, the School's graduate program in advertising, which is beyond the scope of this review.

The director, who is responsible for the entire spectrum of administrative and academic work in the School, is one of the country's best known, most experienced and respected mass communications administrators. She is praised internally for jump starting a program that had fallen on difficult times. Indeed, even though a few faculty members expressed some discomfort with the pace of changes since the director's arrival, the overwhelming consensus was that this is a program "on the move" in the most positive sense of the phrase. New faculty members were effusive in their praise. And one veteran staff member summarized the essence of what many others said: "It is exciting to see the program rebuild itself"—and, in most respects, to push well beyond what it was before it fell on challenging times. Faculty members and staff inside the School were quick to credit the director not only for getting the program back on track but for moving with dispatch to expand its horizons.

Faculty morale has rebounded. The feeling of progress—well-planned progress—is palpable. The central administration's marching orders to the new director were clear: Get the School back on track; push it forward; and the university will support your efforts. Both parties have lived up to their pact.

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

- (a) The unit has a mission statement and engages in strategic or long-range planning that provides vision and direction for its future, identifies needs and resources for its mission and goals and is supported by university administration outside the unit.

The School's 36-page five-year strategic plan clearly reflects the massive amount of time and energy that went into it. The program's faculty and staff spent academic year 2002-2003 brainstorming, planning and writing a document that provides a well-plotted blueprint for 2003-2004 through 2008-2009. The plan is action oriented. Clear vision and mission statements precede the five-year plan, which is built logically around them. The plan itself provides goals, strategies, tactics and timelines for areas such as space and facilities, curriculum, faculty, collaborative learning, enrollment management, advising, placement and external funding. The statements and the plan provide solid evidence of focused leadership and shared governance.

- (b) The unit has policies and procedures for substantive faculty governance that ensure faculty oversight of educational policy and curriculum.

The School's faculty meets regularly—12 times in 2004-2005, including two special sessions to discuss and review the ACEJMC self study. The School has a comprehensive *Faculty Handbook*. It also has a full range of standing committees: assessment, curriculum, diversity, graduate, internship, library and facilities, personnel, research/scholarship, search, student affairs and technology. In addition, special committees and task forces are appointed as appropriate. In 2004-2005, for example, task forces were formed to revise the *Faculty Handbook* and to provide leadership for the self-study process.

- (c) The unit's administration provides effective leadership within the unit and effectively represents it in dealings with university administration outside the unit and constituencies external to the university.

The dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences wrote in the director's annual review that she "is clearly one of the most effective directors or chairs in the College . . . She has a clear vision of where the School of Mass Communications ought to be moving. She manages the day-to-day of the School very effectively. She collaborates well across units and departments. And she is a very good spokesperson for the School externally." Faculty members and administrators from across the campus cited the director's energy, enthusiasm and, in the words of one administrator, skill in moving the School forward "by leaps and bounds." An administrative superior said that he had a "really good feeling about the trajectory" of the School—noting that it had made, if not a 180-degree turnaround, "at least 179 degrees." Others noted her "pro-active approach," her consistently collaborative efforts with and overtures toward other programs on campus, and her constant quest to *build*, rather than *divide*.

- (d) The institution and/or the unit defines and uses a process for selecting and evaluating its administrators.

The School has a clear set of procedures for selecting and evaluating its administrators. The director is reviewed annually through the office of the dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences. Faculty and staff are given the opportunity to respond each year to a standardized multi-item form distributed by the dean's office. The director earned exceptionally strong marks on the vast majority of items in the most recent survey. She earned her most positive scores for communicating with the faculty in a timely, responsive manner; for promoting and supporting scholarly/professional activities; for representing the program effectively at the college and university levels; for the way she initiates and sustains action toward defined goals; for dealing fairly, perceptively and impartially with faculty members; and for her sense of quality and standards in evaluating teaching, research and service activities. The dean's annual review takes into consideration the survey responses, the director's self-evaluation and the overall accomplishments of the program. The associate director, who also earns consistently high marks, is reviewed annually by the director. She is praised for her ability to juggle multiple tasks simultaneously; for her deft touch in meeting the needs of both students and faculty members in overall course scheduling; for her even temperament; for her composure when dealing with stressful situations; for her consistently positive can-do approach; and for her general knowledge of the university and community. In short, the director and associate director work well together—and the entire faculty and staff profit from the chemistry of the tandem.

- (e) Faculty, staff and students have avenues to express concerns and have them addressed.

A sound and workable system is in place to deal with complaints and concerns by faculty, staff and students. Procedures are clearly and systematically outlined in a variety of manuals—and the procedures, by all accounts, are followed consistently. Appeals processes also are provided.

Overall evaluation, compliance/ non-compliance:

COMPLIANCE

PART II — Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction

The unit provides a curriculum and instruction that enable students to learn the knowledge, competencies and values the Council defines for preparing students to work in a diverse global and domestic society.

Professional Values and Competencies:

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies and be able to:

- understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
- demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups in a global society in relationship to communications;
- understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- think critically, creatively and independently;
- conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

Units requesting evaluation of a graduate program must also demonstrate how their master's graduates attain this additional core competency:

- contribute to knowledge appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.

Indicators:

- (a) The unit requires that students take a minimum of 80 semester credit hours or 116 quarter credit hours outside of the unit and a minimum of 65 semester credit hours or 94 quarter credit hours in the liberal arts and sciences (as defined by the institution) outside of the unit. ACEJMC expects at least 95 percent of the graduating classes in the two academic years preceding an accreditation visit to meet this requirement.

ACEJMC requires each unit seeking initial accreditation to include in its self-study report the number of semester or quarter hours taken in non-journalism and mass communications and in liberal arts, sciences and social sciences by all members of each graduating class in the two academic years before an initial accreditation visit.

Units seeking re-accreditation must determine the percentage of students meeting the 80/65 or 116/94 requirement, but they are not required to provide a full census of classes.

- (b) The unit provides a balance between theoretical and conceptual courses and professional skills courses to achieve the range of student competencies listed by the Council.
- (c) Instruction is demanding and current; achievements in teaching and learning are recognized and valued.
- (d) Student-faculty classroom ratios facilitate effective teaching and learning in all courses; a student-

teacher ratio of 15-1 in skills and laboratory sections is strongly recommended and the ratio in each section should not exceed 20-1.

- (e) The unit advocates and encourages opportunities for internship and other professional experiences outside the classroom and supervises and evaluates them when it awards academic credit.

Schools may award academic credit for internships in fields related to journalism and mass communications, but credit should not exceed one semester course (or its equivalent) if the internship is away from the institution, and, for the most part, supervised by media professionals rather than academics.

Students may take up to two semester courses (or their equivalent) at an appropriate professional organization where the unit can show ongoing and extensive dual supervision by the unit's faculty and professionals. Students may take up to three semester courses (or their equivalent) at a professional media outlet owned and operated by the institution where full-time faculty are in charge and where the primary function of the media outlet is to instruct students.

Evidence:

Student records and transcripts

Unit bulletins and brochures

Syllabi and other course materials

Records of teaching awards and citations, curricular and course development grants, attendance at teaching workshops, and publications and papers on teaching

Class rosters

Records and statistics on and evaluations of internships, with and without academic credit

For units requesting evaluation of a professional graduate program:

Indicator:

- (f) At least half of the required credit hours must be in professional skills courses that are appropriate to professional communication careers.

Evidence:

Course syllabi and other documents demonstrating that the unit has a professional graduate curriculum that prepares master's degree graduates for significant professional careers that provide leadership and influence.

Undergraduate student records and transcripts demonstrating student experience equivalent to liberal arts education.

Note: Discussions of indicators b, c and e must describe and evaluate the individual academic sequences in the unit.

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

- (a) The unit requires that students take a minimum of 80 semester credit hours or 116 quarter credit hours outside of the unit and a minimum of 65 semester credit hours or 94 quarter credit hours in the liberal arts and sciences (as defined by the institution) outside of the unit.

The School was 95 percent compliant in three of the four cells for the two-year period prior to the site visit. The exception: in 2004-2005, 91 percent earned 80 or more semester hours outside the major, which the School attributed primarily to confusion regarding its new curriculum, which offered a greater number of electives, and a high number of transfer students whose previous credits in communications were counted as general electives by the university. The School has taken steps to avoid falling below 95 percent compliance in future years, including monitoring first-year students in

the major more closely to identify potential 80/65 problems. The need for students to adhere to the 80/65 rule is clearly and prominently stated in advising materials.

- (b) The unit provides a balance between theoretical and conceptual courses and professional skills courses to achieve the range of student competencies listed by the Council.

VCU's School of Mass Communications awards a Bachelor of Science degree in Mass Communications in three sequences, two of which have two tracks: (a) Advertising – Business and Creative Tracks; (b) Journalism – Broadcast and Print Tracks; and (c) Public Relations. The current undergraduate structure resulted from major curriculum revisions implemented by the School in 2003-04.

The School also has an expanding graduate program. At the time of the site team visit, the School offered two master's degrees, one in advertising through the Adcenter – a distinct and financially self-sufficient component of the School – and one in scholastic journalism, which was approved in 2004, and it was preparing to launch a new executive master's program in strategic public relations in Spring 2006. The School was in the final stages of gaining state approval for a multidisciplinary Ph.D. program in media, art and text. The graduate program is beyond the scope of this review.

The School enrolls 365 undergraduate majors and 637 pre-majors. It has a full-time faculty of 24, of which 18 teach in the undergraduate program, including the School's director (the six other faculty teach exclusively in the graduate Adcenter program). Broken down by sequences and tracks, Creative Advertising enrolls the most majors, 119, followed by Public Relations with 89, Broadcast Journalism with 77, Business Advertising with 43, and Print Journalism with 37.

Pre-majors petition for admission to the mass communications major usually the semester before their junior year. To be admitted, students must have a minimum overall GPA of 2.45 (which will increase to 2.5 in Fall 2006); have completed two required core courses, Introduction to Mass Communications and Writing for Mass Media, with a "C" or better; and have completed no more than 60 credit hours (transfer students and newly declared pre-majors with more than 60 credit hours must apply for admission within two semesters). Admission also requires successful completion of a specified set of general education courses, such as economics, and one "collateral requirement," such as a statistics course.

After being admitted, students must maintain a minimum overall and mass communications GPA of 2.45 to remain in the major (which will increase to 2.5 in Fall 2006). The degree requires 120 credit hours for graduation. At least 34, but no more than 40, credit hours must be taken in Mass Communications.

Students in all sequences and tracks take four core courses: the two required for admission to the major, Mass Communications and Writing for Mass Media, as well as Ethical Problems in Mass Media and Communication Law. Three of these core courses are conceptual courses, the other is a professional skills course. Students in all sequences/tracks except Broadcast Journalism must take Media Graphics, and all except those in Creative Advertising must take Fieldwork/Internship.

The curriculum is well balanced between theoretical and skills courses. Meetings with students indicated that they have a good grasp of the values and competencies prescribed by ACEJMC. In particular, students demonstrated a solid "understanding of the diversity of groups in a global society in relationship to communications." The high degree of diversity among mass communications majors and VCU's student body likely promotes acquisition of this competency. Review of syllabi indicated that students are given ample opportunity to achieve the full range of competencies.

ADVERTISING – BUSINESS AND CREATIVE

The Advertising sequence is the largest of the sequences with nearly half (44 percent) of the School's declared majors. In addition to the core courses listed above that all students take, all advertising majors enroll in a common set of advertising classes, including: Introduction to Advertising, Advertising Copywriting and Advertising Campaigns. Advertising majors can opt for one of two concentrations: Business or Creative. Those in each track take courses typically found in advertising departments across the country: Business track – Advertising Account Planning and Media Strategy, Advertising Account Management, Advertising Business Portfolio, Fieldwork/Internship, plus six credits of electives; Creative track – Advertising Art Direction, Advertising Portfolio Development, plus six credits of electives.

Advertising majors enjoy the advantage of being affiliated with the nationally recognized graduate program at the Adcenter. They can, for instance, attend presentations by professionals who speak at the Adcenter. Although the Adcenter is a distinct program of the School located off the main campus, several faculty members have good working relationships with their counterparts at the Adcenter.

JOURNALISM – BROADCAST

In addition to the 12 hours of credit associated with the four School core courses required of all students, broadcasting students must take an additional 21 hours of specified classes. Students are allowed to choose between Electronic Writing II (radio) and Electronic Writing III (TV), and have other choices within the list of required sequence classes -- such as choosing between Documentary and working on the program VCU InSight. However, because 33 course hours are prescribed, students are left with a maximum of two elective courses within the sequence or School. Should they choose, as they are allowed to do, to repeat both the content and production sides of InSight for a maximum of 12 credits, they are left with no room for electives in order to remain within the 40-hour limit of classes in the School. This leads one faculty member to wonder: "Have we 'over-required?'"

All but one of the sequence's core courses (History and Development) are skills based, although three of the School core courses are conceptual. At least one faculty member is concerned that the sequence is not addressing online journalism. Additionally, although at least one course description lists studio production skills as a course outcome, broadcast is currently teaching "only enough studio production to get the show (VCU InSight) on the air." Also, there is no current outlet for work done by students who wish to concentrate on radio.

Graduates and area professionals contacted in relation to this report listed three items they would like the sequence add: (a) Voice and diction, (b) how to cover crime and the courts, and (c) more real-world deadline pressure by way of a weekly, live program. The three faculty members who teach the bulk of the broadcast courses agree that each would be a good addition, but probably as components within existing course offerings rather than as stand-alone classes.

Students expressed some concern about the "logjam" created by so many of them trying to get into the same required classes at the same time. There is a greater concern that required mass communications classes often conflict with one another, particularly print and broadcast classes. Students indicated that it is very difficult to get into the classes they need, and they find themselves "begging for overrides." There is a question among the students about whether certain classes should be required, and whether some sections could be increased in size. They believe scheduling would be easier for them were they to be given more choices. This is one of the top two concerns for journalism students. Additionally, they say it is very difficult to switch from one sequence in the School to another.

JOURNALISM – PRINT

The print concentration prepares students for positions as reporters and copyeditors in newspapers. In addition to requirements expected all majors, students in the print journalism sequence take coursework designed to address both practical applications and theoretical study. All sequence students take: General Assignment Reporting, Electronic Media Writing, Radio Production, Television Production,

Communications Law, and internship and a journalism seminar. Print majors also take Media Graphics, Copy Editing and selective electives that include Advanced Reporting, Specialized Project Reporting and Capital News Service. In addition, students must take a history elective taught by the History Department.

One key option for print journalism majors is the Capital News Service, described as a flagship program for the School. Conducted during the spring semester when the Virginia General Assembly is in session, the course provides students with the opportunity to cover state government for about 40 of Virginia's community newspapers. About 10 students usually participate.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Public Relations curriculum is comprehensive, providing students with conceptual and skills courses that will prepare them for professional careers and advanced education. Majors in the sequence take 12 courses in mass communications, 11 required and one elective. The required courses include the School's four core courses and the two courses common to most other sequences, Media Graphics and Fieldwork/Internship. In addition, students must take Public Relations (the principles course), Public Relations Writing, Public Relations Production, Public Relations Research and Public Relations Campaigns. The required courses mostly are structured by prerequisites so that students must master content in one subject before moving on to the next. For example, students must complete Writing for Mass Media and the public relations principles course before taking Public Relations Writing. The campaigns course serves as the capstone course, in which students utilize knowledge and skills acquired in all previous courses. The required courses and their sequencing mirror curricula of top public relations programs.

Regarding the mass communications elective, students are advised to take Introduction to Advertising; however, the School offers other electives of value to future public relations practitioners, such as Web Site Design. Students must also take five required courses outside the School, including three business courses: marketing, management, and accounting. The accounting requirement is particularly praiseworthy because budgeting is an important aspect of public relations practice.

- (c) Instruction is demanding and current; achievements in teaching and learning are recognized and valued.

Full-time faculty members typically teach three courses per semester. The School employs approximately 25 adjuncts each semester to teach at least one course. In addition, a staff member teaches one course per semester in the Public Relations sequence. The majority of course sections are taught by full-time time faculty.

Teaching is given high priority in the School and throughout the university. It is heavily weighted in tenure and promotion decisions, as well as in annual reviews. For example, faculty members are required to provide evidence of excellence in teaching and instructional skills to earn tenure. Classroom observations and meetings conducted by the site team visit provided strong evidence that faculty earn an outstanding rating in teaching.

In classes visited by team members students were attentive and engaged in learning. Instructors generally were enthusiastic about their subjects and used a range of teaching aids, from the chalk board to the Internet. Interaction with and between students varied by class and topic. A climate of mutual respect was apparent.

Representatives of other campus units repeatedly described the School's faculty as "committed to their students." Instructors are vested in giving students the professional knowledge and skills they need to succeed in their future careers. Students described faculty members as teachers with a lot of real-world

experience, who enjoy their jobs and are knowledgeable about what is expected in the market; most still are well-connected to the professions. Students also agreed that faculty care about them and are very approachable.

A standardized student evaluation survey is administered in every course each semester. The School's full-time and adjunct faculty members consistently earn high scores. Faculty have won numerous awards and grants related to outstanding teaching. For example, an associate professor in Print Journalism was the recipient of the Distinguished Teaching Award from the College of Humanities and Sciences in Spring 2004. Since 2002, five faculty members have received grants from the VCU Center for Teaching Excellence, which they used to develop new courses or enhance existing ones.

A review of syllabi showed that instruction of course content is cutting edge and rigorous. Most syllabi include learning objectives, semester schedules, performance expectations and detailed instructions. Faculty demand the best from their students and provide the support necessary for success.

ADVERTISING – BUSINESS AND CREATIVE

What sets this program apart from many others in the country is the positive esprit de corps. Discussions with faculty, students, alums and people in the business community all shared an enthusiasm for the direction the School and the sequence is heading. Students reported that they are proud to be students in this major. Meetings with students indicated that the curriculum pushes them to achieve high standards that will reward them with the payoff of good jobs. There was a consensus in the student sessions that students expect to work hard in this major. In their words, they are receiving an education that is “current” and “demanding.” They hold their faculty in high regard.

The growing enrollment produces some issues that should be addressed. Students would like more computer access. Some mentioned that they would also like the opportunity to enroll in photography classes as an elective in either the School of Mass Communications or the Art Department. One student suggested that the Advertising students might benefit from working collaboratively with Broadcasting students to produce work jointly.

JOURNALISM – BROADCAST

One of the recognized strengths of the broadcast faculty members is their level of professional experience. Graduates contacted for this assessment were in agreement. In addition, current students value that their instructors' teaching is based on real-world experience and that the faculty members seem to like what they do. Students also value the level of interaction between themselves and the faculty members. Said one: “They're preparing us for a job and not just a degree.” Said another: “I feel that they're more than just professors.” Several noted the willingness of instructors to speak into their lives and to take an interest in them as individuals, not simply teach them a particular subject.

JOURNALISM – PRINT

Students value the fact that print journalism instructors bring extensive professional experience to the classroom. The four full-time faculty members concentrating primarily on print journalism all are well-versed in writing, reporting and editing skills.

Print journalism is the smallest area of concentration on the School and some students feel their efforts are sometimes minimized in the shadow of the successful programs in broadcast, advertising and public relations. Some students are concerned about the difficulty in getting into many reporting classes – where class size is dictated by the number of available computers in the writing labs.

The School has begun preparing students for the modern concept of media convergence. In that spirit, students in both the broadcast and print journalism sequences are required to take basic reporting courses called General Assignment Reporting and Electronic Media Writing. Both disciplines come

back together for a one-credit seminar in which students to a multi-platform project together. Even so, students say that they have little interaction across disciplines once they reach the junior or senior status. There is no involvement with traditional print photography – those courses are handled in the art department, and the perception exists that there is no emphasis on “photojournalism” as the industry knows it. In addition, there appears to be little attention paid to the emerging demands for online writing and presentation.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Three full-time faculty members primarily teach courses in the Public Relations sequence, including the School’s director who teaches one course per semester. In addition, the student services coordinator, who has a professional background in healthcare public relations, teaches one course each semester. By all indications, the faculty members are effective teachers. Syllabi show that they stay current in the field and maintain rigorous standards.

Students believe that they are receiving a top-notch education. They described the faculty as enthusiastic, well prepared, and sophisticated in the use of new technologies. Faculty, both fulltime and adjunct, are praised for their extensive professional experience, the rich international perspectives they bring to the classroom and their commitment to diversity. As an African American woman said: “They embrace diversity – they embrace us!” Students appreciate the fact that faculty push them to master subject content and technology. They are proud of their preparation. One female proclaimed, “We’re trend setters!”

- (d) Student-faculty classroom ratios facilitate effective teaching and learning in all courses; a student-teacher ratio of 15-1 in skills and laboratory sections is strongly recommended and the ratio in each section should not exceed 20-1.

Class sizes generally are small enough to facilitate learning, although one course exceeds 300 students -- for example, the introductory course to mass communications. Enrollment in skills and laboratory sections follow recommended caps; no lab section in the past year exceeded 20 students.

- (e) The unit advocates and encourages opportunities for internship and other professional experiences outside the classroom and supervises and evaluates them when it awards academic credit.

Students in all sequences and tracks except Creative Advertising are required to complete an internship of one to three academic credits. (Creative Advertising students are exempt from the requirement as their number exceeds available internships; still, many students in this track take an internship as an elective.) Students must work 50 hours for each credit earned. In accordance with ACEJMC standards, students may not earn more than three internship credits.

Students enrolled in Fieldwork/Internship are assigned to a member of the School’s Internship Committee, who serves as the student’s faculty adviser. The faculty adviser almost always teaches in the student’s sequence/track. Students must submit a mid-semester and final report to their faculty adviser. Internship supervisors also are required to submit a report evaluating the student’s work. The faculty adviser assigns a grade of pass or fail for the internship.

Students told the site-visit team that they are very pleased with the internship requirement. They reported no problems identifying internship opportunities. The School maintains a database of openings and posts it on the School’s computer network. It sponsors an internship fair each fall. Faculty often use their professional networks to place students. A review of previous internships shows that the quality of internships is impressive. The School does an admirable job in using its urban setting and networks with alumni and other professionals to help students gain valuable internship experience.

Overall evaluation, compliance/ non-compliance:

COMPLIANCE

PART II — Standard 3: Diversity and Inclusiveness

The unit has a diverse and inclusive program that serves and reflects society.

Indicators:

- (a) The unit has a written plan for achieving an inclusive curriculum, a diverse faculty and student population, and a supportive climate for working and learning and for assessing progress toward achievement of the plan.
- (b) The unit's curriculum fosters understanding of issues and perspectives that are inclusive in terms of gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation.
- (c) The unit demonstrates effective efforts to recruit women and minority faculty and professional staff and provides an environment that supports their retention, progress and success.
- (d) The unit demonstrates effective efforts to help recruit and retain a student population reflecting the diversity of the population eligible to enroll in institutions of higher education in the region or population it serves, with special attention to recruiting under-represented groups.
- (e) The unit has a climate that is free of harassment and discrimination, accommodates the needs of those with disabilities, and values the contributions of all forms of diversity.

Accreditation site visit teams will apply this standard in compliance with applicable federal and state laws and regulations.

Evidence:

A written plan
Syllabi and other course materials
Records and statistics on faculty and staff hiring and on promotion and tenure decisions
Records and statistics on student recruitment, retention and graduation
Records on part-time and visiting faculty and speakers

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

- (a) The unit has a written plan for achieving an inclusive curriculum, a diverse faculty and student population, and a supportive climate for working and learning and for assessing progress toward achievement of the plan.

The School has a comprehensive diversity plan, which was approved by the faculty in Spring 2004. The plan comprises six goals directly in support of this standard, complete with strategies. Each spring, the School's diversity committee reviews the plan and strategic outcomes of the preceding year, which can trigger adjustments and new initiatives. The diversity plan is posted on the School's Web site and promoted through a variety of publications.

- (b) The unit's curriculum fosters understanding of issues and perspectives that are inclusive in terms of gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation.

The School strives to include diversity elements as a natural part of all its courses. Review of syllabi showed that, although the goal has not been reached, a substantial number of courses do incorporate diversity and inclusiveness. The School offers two electives that focus on diversity: International Media Coverage and Minorities and the Mass Media. The latter course is cross listed with the African-American Studies Department, which has designated the School as a "collaborating

department.” Meetings with students confirmed that the curriculum is helping students develop an appreciation for and understanding of multiculturalism and diversity.

Minority professionals often visit campus to serve as guest speakers in classes and at special events. For example, actor/director Tim Reid guest lectured in Minorities and the Mass Media course during Black History Month in February 2005.

- (c) The unit demonstrates effective efforts to recruit women and minority faculty and professional staff and supports their retention, progress and success.

Of the School’s 18 full-time faculty members in Fall 2005, 11, or 61 percent, are women; five have tenure; four are on tenure track; and two are in non-tenure accruing positions. One of the women in the latter category will move to the tenure track in 2007-08. Both the School’s director and associate director are women. Three of the 18 full-time faculty (17 percent) are minorities: two African Americans and one Asian.

Of the School’s 24 adjunct faculty members in Fall 2005, 10, or 42 percent, are women and seven, or 29 percent are minority group members. The School employs five staff members, of whom four are women and one is African American.

Although its faculty is less diverse than its student body, the School has made notable progress in recruiting minority faculty members. For example, in 2005-06, it increased its number of full-time minority faculty members from one to three. In 2005-06, seven adjuncts of color taught in the School – in 2002-03, there were none.

The School demonstrates a strong commitment to recruiting and retaining female and minority faculty members. It has followed well-conceived strategies contained in its diversity plan (for example, assigning a mentor to new faculty members). Other innovative actions also have been taken. For example, when an African-American female visiting instructor was hired as an associate professor in 2005-06, she was placed in a non-tenure accruing position to allow her time to get up to speed in her new academic career before moving to tenure track. This action was taken to improve her potential for successfully earning tenure in the three years required for those holding the rank of associate professor.

- (d) The unit demonstrates effective efforts to help recruit and retain a student population reflecting the diversity of the population eligible to enroll in institutions of higher education in the region or population it serves, with special attention to recruiting under-represented groups.

VCU is one of the most diverse campuses in the United States. Minority student enrollment in the School of Mass Communications exceeds the percentages of minorities in the population of its service area and the university. In Spring 2005, minorities and international students represented nearly 36 percent of the School’s undergraduate enrollment, compared to 35 percent for the university. Minority students in the School generally are retained and graduate at a higher rate than non-minorities.

The School has a large and active student chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ). Members of the student chapter regularly interact with members of the professional chapter of NABJ--Richmond Black Media Professionals. Other student organizations, such as the AdClub, focus on topics or projects with a strong diversity dimension.

The School boasts one of the longest running minority high school workshops in the country. Started in 1985, the annual Urban Journalism Workshop brings 12 minority students to VCU’s campus for

two weeks of intensive training and mentoring. It is offered in collaboration with the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund and the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.

- (e) The unit has a climate that is free of harassment and discrimination, accommodates the needs of those with disabilities, and values the contributions of all forms of diversity.

The School has such a climate. A genuine respect for people of all types permeates the School -- in the classroom and in the hallways. Written policies support this desired climate.

As noted above, the School annually assesses strategic outcomes of its diversity plan. The following is a sample of outcomes from 2004-05:

- Several faculty members and students attended the 2004 UNITY Convention, at which it had an information booth to facilitate faculty recruiting.
- Faculty and students participated in the ASNE/VPA Minority Job Fair and the National Association of Black Journalists convention.
- Faculty members conducted research related to diversity. For example, a faculty member was and continues as the principal investigator in Central Virginia for the Library of Congress's Voices of Civil Rights project.
- One Caucasian faculty member was accepted to the Columbia University Journalism Race and Ethnicity Reporting Workshop.

The review also helps to identify areas in which the School falls short. For example, the Spring 2005 review found that the School had done little to address sexual orientation issues. As a result, the diversity committee formed a task force to develop programming for Spring 2006 to sensitize faculty and students to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues.

Planned initiatives demonstrate that the School intends to expand and enhance its efforts in diversity. For example, a proposal is in development to establish a Center for the Study of Media and Diversity.

Overall evaluation, compliance/ non-compliance:

COMPLIANCE

PART II — Standard 4: Full-Time and Part-Time Faculty

The unit hires, supports and evaluates a capable faculty with a balance of academic and professional credentials appropriate for the unit's mission.

Indicators:

- (a) The unit has written criteria for selecting and evaluating the performance of all full-time and part-time faculty and instructional staff.
- (b) Full-time faculty have primary responsibility for teaching, research/creative activity and service.
- (c) Credentials of the unit's faculty represent a balance of professional and scholarly experience and expertise kept current through faculty development opportunities, relationships with professional and scholarly associations, and appropriate supplementation of part-time and visiting faculty. Faculty teaching in the graduate program must meet the criteria for graduate instruction at that university.
- (d) The unit regularly evaluates instruction, using multiple measures that include student input.
- (e) The faculty has respect on campus for its university citizenship and the quality of education that the unit provides.

Evidence:

Faculty and staff manuals or relevant policy procedural documents
Vitae for full-time and part-time faculty
Course evaluations and other methods of determining teaching effectiveness
Evaluation process for annual review of faculty contributions and performance
Search and hiring records

For units requesting evaluation of a professional graduate program:

Faculty vitae that demonstrate a clearly defined graduate faculty who meet the criteria for graduate instruction at that university

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

- (a) The unit has written criteria for selecting and evaluating the performance of all full-time and part-time faculty and instructional staff.

The School can appoint faculty to tenure-track positions at the following ranks: assistant professor, associate professor or professor. Non-tenure-track faculty can be appointed at the following ranks: instructor, assistant professor, associate professor or professor. The self-study document notes that the University's Board of Visitors may designate a rank of distinguished professor, university professor or emeritus professor. The School's director appoints search committees when continuing or collateral full-time positions are vacated or newly created. The search committees follow university regulations and guidelines, review candidates and make recommendations to the director. The director negotiates appointments with the dean and provost. Processes for evaluating faculty are described in the *Faculty Handbook* and the *Promotion and Tenure Guidelines*.

- (b) Full-time faculty have primary responsibility for teaching, research/creative activity and service.

Full-time faculty members generate 67 percent of all the School's student credit hours. The media-rich environment in the Richmond area allows the School to take advantage of professional expertise. Although adjuncts are useful and desirable for the current experiences they can share with their students, there is concern among faculty that adjuncts be used only in certain courses. There is a sense

that there is sometimes inconsistency in the level and type of instruction from one adjunct to another. Although students indicated that some adjuncts went so far as to give students their work and home phone numbers, they do not believe adjuncts can consistently offer them the same quality of “resident” instruction as full-time faculty can because of adjuncts’ other commitments. To address this concern, the director has appointed lead teachers for those courses that are taught in multiple sections to ensure that learning objectives are achieved across the curriculum.

- (c) Credentials of the unit’s faculty represent a balance of professional and scholarly experience and expertise kept current through faculty development opportunities, relationships with professional and scholarly associations, and appropriate supplementation of part-time and visiting faculty.

A review of the curriculum vitae for full- and part-time faculty indicates that they possess the credentials that will enable them to provide students with an education that reflects a balance of professional and scholarly experience and expertise. Several faculty members have been hired recently from the professions; they bring with them knowledge of current industry practices. Faculty members enhance their credentials through consulting projects, as well as participation in professional and scholarly associations.

- (d) The unit regularly evaluates instruction, using multiple measures that include student input.

Both full- and part-time faculty members are evaluated by students using standardized course evaluations. Some instructors choose to augment the standardized forms with other questions. The associate director or lead teachers for courses with multiple sections visit classes taught by adjuncts. The director offers to visit classes of full-time faculty; some pre-tenure faculty members accept her offer of peer evaluation. Additionally, the assessment process has led to the creation of other methods of evaluation. For example, the self study includes forms for evaluating the capstone courses and portfolios.

- (e) The faculty has respect on campus for its university citizenship and the quality of education that the unit provides.

Selected representatives of VCU faculty and administrators praised the School for its work. The School’s faculty members were cited for their collaborative efforts in many areas, including developing public health, honors, assessment, and marketing initiatives. According to these representatives, the dean, alums and area professionals, the director is well respected for her efforts to make major improvements in the School in a relatively short period of time. This includes cooperative efforts to improve education across campus.

**Overall evaluation, compliance/ non-compliance:
COMPLIANCE**

PART II — Standard 5: Scholarship: Research, Creative and Professional Activity

With unit support, faculty members contribute to the advancement of scholarly and professional knowledge and engage in scholarship (research, creative and professional activity) that contributes to their development.

Indicators:

- (a) The unit requires, supports and rewards faculty research, creative activity and/or professional activity.
- (b) The unit specifies expectations for research, creative activity and/or professional activity in criteria for hiring, promotion and tenure.
- (c) Evaluation criteria for promotion, tenure and merit recognition account for and acknowledge activities appropriate to faculty members' professional as well as scholarly specializations.
- (d) Faculty members communicate the results of research, creative and/or professional activity to other scholars, educators and practitioners through presentations, productions, exhibitions, workshops and publications appropriate to the activity and to the mission of the unit and institution.
- (e) The unit fosters a climate that supports intellectual curiosity, critical analysis and the expression of differing points of view.

Evidence:

Faculty guides or manuals on tenure and promotion
Records of sabbatical and other leaves, travel funds and grant support
Records on faculty promotion, tenure and other forms of recognition
Faculty vitae and unit reports on research and creative and professional activities

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

- (a) The unit requires, supports and rewards faculty research, creative activity and/or professional activity.

Faculty can gain tenure through one of two tracks – Professional or Research. Scholarly activity is defined broadly in the *Promotion and Tenure Guidelines*. The School's *Promotion and Tenure Guidelines* and the *Faculty Handbook* explain the requirements for those in each of the tracks. The process for achieving promotion and tenure appears to be transparent. Faculty who were asked said expectations for achieving promotion and tenure have been clearly communicated. Faculty commitment to teaching and their participation on a number of faculty committees have resulted in many positive changes in the School. Those commitments also restrict the time available for scholarly activities to some extent. The School encourages development in the area of scholarship in a number of ways. It offers start-up funds for new faculty members to begin their scholarly work and an incentive program to reward productive faculty members with a course-load reduction. Ten faculty members have received the start-up funds to defray the costs of their research. Four recognition and incentive reassignments were made for the 2005-06 academic year.

- (b) The unit specifies expectations for research, creative activity and/or professional activity in criteria for hiring, promotion and tenure.

Ads announcing open faculty positions clearly communicate the expectations of faculty to be productive scholars.

- (c) Evaluation criteria for promotion, tenure and merit recognition account for and acknowledge activities appropriate to faculty members' professional as well as scholarly specializations.

The *Promotion and Tenure Guidelines* describe the criteria for both professional and research track faculty. It also specifies criteria for collateral faculty, who are full-time faculty on non-tenure eligible lines. Faculty are required to submit a form annually that is used for salary and promotion and tenure considerations.

- (d) Faculty members communicate the results of research, creative and/or professional activity to other scholars, educators and practitioners through presentations, productions, exhibitions, workshops and publications appropriate to the activity and to the mission of the unit and institution.

The following list summarizes faculty productivity during the past six years: 7 books, 6 textbooks, 19 book chapters, 23 articles in refereed journals, 12 proceedings, 67 refereed conference papers, 11 book reviews, 59 electronic publications, 91 popular media, and 230-plus creative materials, products, and exhibitions. The site team noted that the School's director leads by example and is a productive scholar herself. Representatives of the VCU faculty and administrators said that the scholarly contributions from faculty in the School were consistent with expectations of faculty in the two tracks. They noted that they expected scholarly activities to continue to increase with the new faculty members who have been hired.

- (e) The unit fosters a climate that supports intellectual curiosity, critical analysis and the expression of differing points of view.

The visiting team saw no evidence that the unit doesn't foster a healthy intellectual climate in terms of research. The variety of scholarly output suggests that expressing different perspectives is not a problem.

**Overall evaluation, compliance/ non-compliance:
COMPLIANCE**

PART II — Standard 6: Student Services

The unit provides students with the support and services that promote learning and ensure timely completion of their program of study.

Indicators:

- (a) Faculty and/or professional advising staff ensure that students are aware of unit and institutional requirements for graduation and receive career and academic advising.
- (b) Faculty are available and accessible to students.
- (c) The unit keeps students informed about the activities, requirements and policies of the unit.
- (d) The unit and the institution provide students with extra-curricular activities and opportunities that are relevant to the curriculum and develop their professional as well as intellectual abilities and interests.
- (e) The unit gathers, maintains and analyzes enrollment, retention, graduation rates and other aggregate information for improving student services and reducing barriers to student success.

Evidence:

Student records, transcripts and files

Advising guides, manuals, newsletters and internal communication

Statistics on enrollment, scholarships, retention and graduation

Examples of student media and information about student professional organizations

For units requesting evaluation of a professional graduate program:

Documents and records demonstrating that the graduate program has appropriate admissions and retention policies

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

- (a) Faculty and/or professional advising staff ensure that students are aware of unit and institutional requirements for graduation and receive career and academic advising.

The student services coordinator begins each semester by introducing herself to students in introductory classes so that they know who to seek out with questions about class schedules and the like. She tries to prepare students not just for the semester at hand, but also for coming semesters. She would like to see more faculty members adopt this approach. Students say the School does a good job of making them aware of requirements through the student handbook and by way of e-mail, but note that they also need to be proactive and read the materials available to them or seek guidance. They like that they are advised by an instructor within their sequence, and that on-line resources help them stay up-to-date regarding what they've taken and what they still need to take. However, the system does not keep track of whether students have had prerequisites or whether they are enrolled in corequisites, leading at times to students coming into a class for which they are not prepared. Students are not required to have adviser approval before they register for classes.

- (b) Faculty are available and accessible to students

This seems to be the case. Students indicate that most faculty members and the student services coordinator are willing to help them with any issues they have. The associate director is recognized as an accomplished problem solver for students. The advising load for faculty should be lessened considerably in coming terms because advising for 600-plus pre-majors has just been moved to the college level, reducing the number of advisees per faculty member from 75-plus to about 25.

- (c) The unit keeps students informed about the activities, requirements and policies of the unit.

Along with students being advised by the coordinator and faculty members, the peer advising program is recognized as a key way for students to stay abreast of course requirements, to ask questions regarding registration and the like. One peer adviser says most of the questions she gets are fairly standard, and she feels very qualified to answer them. A student taking advantage of the program during the site team's visit indicated that it is often easier to catch up with a peer counselor than to try to schedule an appointment with an already overbooked professor.

- (d) The unit and the institution provide students with extra-curricular activities and opportunities that are relevant to the curriculum and develop their professional as well as intellectual abilities and interests.

Students are made aware of internship opportunities, as well as opportunities at the campus radio station and newspaper, through the faculty and the student services coordinator. The School has active chapters of SPJ, RTNDA, Ad-Club, PRSSA and an off-shoot of NABJ, the Association of Black Communicators. In the past academic year, the School helped students attend the national conferences of SPJ and PRSSA by holding fund raisers and helping students acquire funds from student government.

- (e) The unit gathers, maintains and analyzes enrollment, retention, graduation rates and other aggregate information for improving student services and reducing barriers to student success.

For the most part, the School follows the college's information related to retention and graduation rates, and is a bit above average within the college on these two measures. Once students are in the major, retention and graduation rates are reasonably high, leading to a recent emphasis on retention of pre-majors.

The School works to reduce barriers to student success in a number of ways, including through the Student Affairs Committee (faculty) and the 12-member student advisory board. A recent request from that group resulted in the addition of 10 hours per week of additional Mac lab time. Student leaders say they feel very comfortable taking their concerns to members of the faculty, the coordinator, the associate director, or even the director.

Overall evaluation, compliance/ non-compliance:
COMPLIANCE

PART II — Standard 7: Resources, Facilities and Equipment

The unit plans for, seeks and receives adequate resources to fulfill and sustain its mission.

Indicators:

- (a) The unit has a detailed annual budget for the allocation of its resources that is related to its long-range, strategic plan.
- (b) The resources that the institution provides are fair in relation to those provided other units.
- (c) The facilities of the unit enable and promote effective scholarship, teaching and learning.
- (d) The institution and the unit provide faculty and students with equipment or access to equipment to support its curriculum and the research, creative and professional activities of the faculty.
- (e) The institution and the unit provide sufficient library and information resources to support faculty and student research and professional development.

Evidence:

A detailed budget

Inspection tour of the library, facilities and equipment

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

- (a) The unit has a detailed annual budget for the allocation of its resources that is related to its long-range, strategic plan.

The School's annual expenditures clearly are related to its strategic plan. The School spent \$1,721,381 in 2004-2005—some 8.9 percent more than the \$1,580,784 in 2002-2003. It plans expenditures of \$1,866,846 in 2005-2006. The School is not awash in riches, but it more than manages to meet the basic needs of its students and faculty. As is the case with other academic units at VCU, the School has a permanent—though modest—operating budget from state Educational and General (E&G) funds. In 2004-2005, for example, the School received \$46,684—hardly sufficient to meet the non-salary needs of the program. (Funds for salaries are controlled by the College of Humanities and Sciences for all departments, schools and programs within it.) The School's director and financial manager begin to build the annual budget when notified of the E&G amount. Their spending plan then is vetted with other faculty members.

Fortunately, the School has access to operating funds beyond its E&G allocation. Nearly all of the School's equipment funding comes from the Student Technology Fee (STF) and the Higher Education Equipment Trust Fund (HEETF). These funds flow annually to the College, which, after a review of requests, then distributes shares to its units. In 2004-2005, the School received \$108,334 from STF funds earmarked for computer hardware and software for instructional use and \$168,520 in HEETF money. The total of \$276,854 enabled the School to significantly enhance its equipment. The School was notified of its 2005-2006 HEETF funding share from the college just two weeks before the site visit. Its allocation for 2005-2006--\$121,000—is more than one fifth of the total college allocation of \$600,000.

In addition, the School has been able each fall to submit a proposal to the college for additional E&G funds. In 2004-2005, the School received \$26,000, pushing its total to \$72,684. In 2005-2006, the School received its permanent E&G allocation of \$46,684, plus an additional \$30,000 to push its total to \$76,684. (Because of documented historical need, beginning in 2006-2007, the School will receive a

permanent original E&G allocation of \$76,684. It is not yet known whether it still will be able to request additional special allocations.) Clearly, though, when its annual E&G funds are combined with its share of STF and HEETF disbursements, the School is able to function reasonably well.

The School's general operating budget (when factoring in all sources) and its salaries are, at the very least, in line with other comparably-sized ACEJMC programs. The School also has beefed up funding for faculty travel in recent years, stretching from \$4,904 in 2002-2003 to \$20,926 in 2004-2005—a particularly good sign for a program that has its sights set on enhanced scholarly productivity. In addition, new faculty members receive three years of start-up funding from the college, which generally provides full travel support for that period.

The School's scholarship funds are modest for a program of its size. Only \$12,550 in unit-controlled scholarships were awarded to the undergraduate student body in 2004-2005. The School's plan, however, calls for stepped up private fundraising, with scholarships being among the priorities.

Private fundraising in the School is in its embryonic stages. The School hired its first director of development in 2003. The program has enjoyed some early successes—and well thought out plans are in place for the immediate years ahead. The School has targeted several initiatives, such as scholarships, support of student programs and faculty enhancements. The School's director and its energetic director of development work well together. They recognize that Rome was not built in a day, but they are committed to establishing a firm foundation. Both are working hard to preach—in systematic fashion—the positive changes underway in the School. Their target audience: alumni, friends and professional constituents. By all accounts, the strategy is working. The School is making increasingly excellent use of its high-profile professional advisory board and alumni advisory board to build a network of friends and, in the process, is setting the stage for accelerated future fundraising efforts. The School hopes to bring in \$250,000 from private sources in 2005-2006, an ambitious goal for a program that had virtually no fundraising apparatus in place at the start of this decade. The university is wrapping up its current capital campaign, an undertaking in which the School has not been a major player. When VCU ramps up its next campaign in 2009 or 2010, however, it is expected that, because of its grassroots efforts now, the School will have a noticeable presence at the table. The School recognizes that it needs to build its permanent endowment, which has a current market value of \$1.1 million, a modest amount for a program this size.

The School has done an excellent job positioning itself for available college-wide internal allocations and in laying the groundwork for more sophisticated and significant private fundraising in the years ahead.

Faculty salaries across all three ranks are above ASJMC norms and the attractive start-up packages have made possible the hiring of several talented younger professors.

The School has endured the recent economic challenges of the state and—by cobbling together funds from a variety of sources—it has managed to continue on an upward trajectory.

(b) The resources that the institution provides are fair in relation to those provided other units.

The School is housed in the College of Humanities and Sciences, VCU's largest college with 1,108 graduate students, 9,708 undergraduate majors, 319 full-time and 350 adjunct instructional faculty, 31

administrative or professional faculty and 84 classified staff. The college is home to three schools (including Mass Communications), 15 academic departments or programs, a teacher preparation program, 12 pre-professional programs (pre-dental, pre-law, pre-medicine and so forth) and three centers or institutes. In 2002-2003 and 2003-2004, some 25 percent of VCU's E&G budget was sliced. But the cuts were not across the board. Most of the funding since has been restored. But during the cutting process, the School of Mass Communications suffered far less than most. And in 2004-2005, the School received the largest share of STF and HEETF funds allocated to units in the college. By these measures, it seems clear that the School has been treated more than fairly by the college in which it resides.

(c) The facilities of the unit enable and promote effective scholarship, teaching and learning.

The School is housed in the Temple Building on the university campus, occupying most of two floors. Included are 25 offices and 11 general classrooms that accommodate from 10 to 35 students. Most areas of the building have been upgraded over the past year. In addition, the School includes a television studio, a library/reading room, six computer labs (2 MACs, 4 PCs) and editing bays used for broadcast production. Large lecture classes are conducted in other nearby buildings on campus. The independent student newspaper, an alternative newspaper, a literary magazine and a radio studio were located in the Temple Building, but now have been moved to another location on campus.

The School's technical capabilities have been improved over the past three years with the purchase of new digital cameras and new computers. The student computer labs are well equipped with Dell PCs and MACs -- one of the new MAC labs is particularly good. Students say that lab equipment is good, but say the labs are frequently busy and they must adjust weekly schedules to make sure that they have the access they need.

The building features modern classrooms that include good AV equipment and Internet access. Some include handheld remote devices used by the students. Some faculty members, but not all, appear to make good use of that technology -- Powerpoint, Internet, etc. Students are required to have basic computer competency through a university-wide program, and other publication-specific programs are stressed in class work.

(d) The institution and the unit provide faculty and students with equipment or access to equipment to support its curriculum and the research, creative and professional activities of the faculty.

The School has upgraded its basic classroom and print journalism technology throughout the Temple Building over the past few years. For print classes, the new Dell PCs in the writing labs are in good shape and provide both students and faculty with adequate technology.

In the broadcast area, students indicate the number of field cameras is "not even close" to being enough to go around. They say that weekend coverage of events or projects is especially problematic. At present, the sequence has six field cameras, with another three to come soon. Even with nine cameras and two additional edit bays, according to students, the number of projects required between three or four courses and the InSight program makes it difficult for them to get their work done. One suggested that InSight needs at least three cameras fully devoted to it.

Faculty members in the sequence indicated it has been their philosophy to have fewer cameras, with all of them being high-end, broadcast quality. Although faculty members have tried to address this concern by staggering project due dates, it might be advisable to amend the sequence's equipment philosophy based on students' comments. The lack of field shooting and editing equipment is the No. 1 concern of students in the sequence. A related item is that the students affiliated with InSight are interested enough in a set upgrade that they are considering buying paint and other materials themselves.

Should the sequence faculty members take the advice of area professionals and begin to produce InSight more frequently and live, the amount of broadcast equipment required will raise the stakes even more.

The School picked up additional space in the building when the student media operations were relocated to another spot on campus. School officials have plans to renovate the recovered space, primarily to be used for a new graduate program in public relations.

(e) The institution and the unit provide sufficient library and information resources to support faculty and student research and professional development.

The School's reading room in the Temple Building is primarily a spot to review periodicals, to access the Internet, to study and to meet other students. A more extensive collection of journalism and mass communications material is housed at the James Branch Cabell Library two blocks away from the School's building. The main library holds about 10,000 titles relating to mass media and it maintains an extensive collection of media journals and trade publications.

Students also have broad access to library materials through the Internet and through interlibrary loan programs.

Overall evaluation, compliance/ non-compliance:

COMPLIANCE

PART II — Standard 8: Professional and Public Service

The unit advances journalism and mass communication professions and fulfills its obligations to its community, alumni and the greater public.

Indicators:

- (a) The unit is actively engaged with alumni, professionals and professional associations to keep curriculum and teaching current and to promote the exchange of ideas.
- (b) The unit provides leadership in the development of high standards of professional practice through such activities as offering continuing education, promoting professional ethics, evaluating professional performance and addressing communication issues of public consequence and concern.
- (c) The unit contributes to the improvement of journalism and mass communication as academic disciplines by supporting the faculty's involvement in academic associations and related activities.
- (d) The unit contributes to its communities through service projects, internship and job placements, and faculty involvement in civic activities related to journalism and mass communication.
- (e) The unit supports scholastic journalism through such activities as faculty workshops, visiting lectures and critiques of student work.

Evidence:

Faculty vitae

Unit records, brochures and publications of public service activities related to its mission and strategic plan

Alumni newsletters, surveys, reunions and other activities

Travel and other support for faculty involvement in academic and professional organizations

Information about courses and services available to professionals and the public

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

- (a) The unit is actively engaged with alumni, professionals and professional associations to keep curriculum and teaching current and to promote the exchange of ideas.

The School communicates to alumni in a number of ways, starting with a publication called *Intracomm*. The publication itself is nicely designed and informative, but its "alumni roundup" section contains few updates on anyone who graduated prior to 2000. A new development director has taken on increased involvement with alumni and his work – and that of the director – are being recognized. Alumni report that communication from the School has greatly increased over the past two years, but that there had been little done prior to that.

A new e-newsletter is being produced and e-mailed to 1300 alumni. The director writes an e-mail newsletter. The school hosts events for alumni, such as an internship fair and a Mass Comm Week event that features top speakers and forums for media professionals and students. Alumni receptions have been held in New York and Washington.

Two advisory boards provide input to the School: An Advisory Board comprised of top media executives meets twice a year; and an Alumni Advisory Board also meets twice a year and is asked to assist with alumni communication and fundraising. The advisory boards are relatively new as the School seeks to rebuild alumni and professional involvement.

- (b) The unit provides leadership in the development of high standards of professional practice through such activities as offering continuing education, promoting professional ethics, evaluating professional performance and addressing communication issues of public consequence and concern.

The ACEJMC Standard 8 is incorporated into the School's internal guidelines for promotion and tenure and the School includes service as a part of its regular activities through the development of continuing education, short courses and additional training for professionals. The self-study lists several examples – a design and graphics workshop, a First Amendment seminar, public relations and marketing training and sessions on new convergence synergies.

Faculty members serve as judges for professional writing contests. And the School sponsors top speakers for both campus participants and area professionals – the Turpin Lecture in News Management, for example.

- (c) The unit contributes to the improvement of journalism and mass communication as academic disciplines by supporting the faculty's involvement in academic associations and related activities.

All faculty members are encouraged to participate in national and regional associations and activities. The listing of faculty involvement is impressive – AEJMC, American Marketing Association, Virginia Association of Broadcasters, SPJ, IRE and so forth.

One key service feature of the School is the Capital News Service Program, in which students provide news coverage of the Virginia General Assembly for about 40 community newspapers across the state.

- (d) The unit contributes to its communities through service projects, internship and job placements, and faculty involvement in civic activities related to journalism and mass communication.

All faculty members are encouraged to participate in outside activities – with community groups as well as professional organizations. Part of the involvement comes from the director's push for it and part is initiated by the professors' individual competitiveness. The list of faculty involvement in non-profit organizations is broad – from work with Cub Scouts, to participation with the Greater Richmond Urban League to developing a seminar for the Richmond Health Department to board membership on the local YMCA.

And, as noted below, support for scholastic journalism across Virginia seems to be particularly strong.

Almost all students are required to take internships, and faculty members are supportive in helping students secure those. An internship-posting board and a special internship fair also help the process. Students report little difficulty in getting internships. The School's approach to helping graduates find fulltime employment is less structured. Students may work through the campus-wide placement center, but they are more likely to rely on word-of-mouth contacts made through the faculty.

- (e) The unit supports scholastic journalism through such activities as faculty workshops, visiting lectures and critiques of student work.

The School offers programs for teachers through the Virginia High School League. As many as 800 to 1000 participants attend a fall publications workshop on campus. And a summer weeklong workshop for high school editors is particularly effective in drawing minority participants.

The School co-sponsors an Urban Journalism Workshop (with the *Richmond Times Dispatch* and the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund) in which 10-12 minority participate in a two-week program. Faculty members participate in intensive skills training for students considering a career in the journalism.

Overall evaluation, compliance/ non-compliance:

COMPLIANCE

PART II — Standard 9: Assessment of Learning Outcomes

The unit regularly assesses student learning and uses results to improve curriculum and instruction.

Indicators:

- (a) The unit defines the goals for learning that students must achieve, including the “Professional Values and Competencies” of this Council. (See 2. Curriculum and Instruction .)
- (b) The unit has a written assessment plan that uses multiple direct and indirect measures to assess student learning.
- (c) The unit maintains contact with its alumni to assess their experiences in the professions and to gain feedback for improving curriculum and instruction.
- (d) The unit includes members of journalism and mass communication professions in its assessment process.
- (e) The unit collects and reports data from its assessment activities and uses the data to improve curriculum and instruction.

Evidence:

A written statement on competencies

A written assessment plan

Alumni newsletters, surveys, reunions and other activities

Records on information collected from multiple measures of assessment and on the application of this information to course development and improvement of teaching

For units requesting evaluation of a professional graduate program:

Outcomes appropriate to a professional graduate program could include: a professional project, thesis or comprehensive exam that demonstrates that graduate students have developed analytical and critical thinking abilities appropriate to the profession

Unit performance with regard to indicators:

- (a) The unit defines the goals for learning that students must achieve, including the “Professional Values and Competencies” of this Council.

The School has done a superb job defining goals for student learning. Drawing from its five-year strategic plan, the School’s faculty developed three broad goals for its graduates. Within these goals, the School then developed specific objectives and outcomes for students in each of its three sequences: Advertising, Journalism and Public Relations. The three broad goals: (1) to communicate clearly and effectively in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve; (2) to understand a core of fundamental concepts, values and skills that include strategy development, critical thinking, problem solving and understanding the ethical and legal implications of the media and communication industries; and (3) to apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications profession in which they work.

- (b) The unit has a written assessment plan that uses multiple direct and indirect measures to assess student learning.

The School is no Johnny-come-lately to the assessment process. As VCU geared up in the years prior to its 2003-2004 review by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), it moved

systematically to ensure that each of its academic programs and educational support services would engage in meaningful assessment procedures. The procedures would fall within an approach VCU labeled WEAVE, an acronym for an assessment cycle that would: **W**rite expected outcomes/objectives; **E**stablish criteria for success; **A**ssess performance against criteria; **V**iew assessment results; and **E**ffect improvements through actions.

The School relied upon three sources to develop its outcomes and objectives: its strategic plan; results of a 1997 survey of broadcast and print newsroom managers concerning skills that they deemed important for communications graduates; and the ACEJMC standards of accreditation. The School's timetable for assessment more than meets ACEJMC expectations. The School conducted its first assessments in Spring 2003; its assessment committee drafted a formal plan, which was ratified by the faculty and implemented in Fall 2004; and, as the ACEJMC expectations have evolved, the School's assessment committee has continued to update its plan.

The School's assessment plan identified nine measures that would help determine whether students in the program are meeting the three overarching goals noted in section (a) above. The original nine: entrance testing for the basic writing course; rating numerous writing examples produced in and drawn from the basic writing course; assessment by faculty and professionals in capstone courses of students' communication skills; internship evaluations conducted by supervisors and faculty; rating of students' abilities to demonstrate successful problem solving and strategic planning; rating students' abilities, through final exam questions, to understand the role media play in society and the importance of First Amendment freedoms in a democratic society; measuring students' basic computer competencies through use of the College of Humanities and Sciences' instrument; rating of students' basic competencies in technology skills by faculty using a scoring rubric; and exit interviews with a sample of graduates to determine their perceptions of the preparation they received to enter their professions.

The assessment plan includes timelines to analyze the results from the measures and determine any appropriate actions to take. Assessment forms and survey instruments are included in the assessment plan

- (c) The unit maintains contact with its alumni to assess their experiences in the professions and to gain feedback for improving curriculum and instruction.

The hiring of the School's first director of development in 2003, who also has responsibility for alumni relations, has led to significantly expanded outreach efforts to graduates of the program. Feedback from alumni is sought through (1) periodic mailed surveys to targeted segments of the population (for example, those who have been in the workforce for five years or more); (2) stamped and addressed cards inserted in each issue of the three-times-a-year alumni newsletter; (3) regular e-mail surveys; and (4) one-on-one visits by the School's director or director of development. Some samples of comments concerning curriculum and instruction from graduates who recently responded: "My academic journalism background gave me a strong foundation toward a better understanding of organizing and developing high-quality copy, and working within deadlines;" "I consider myself fortunate to have benefited from the classes and hands-on work assignments I was exposed to;" "[The School] introduced me to tools that I use almost daily, Illustrator, Photoshop, Quark, etc. Plus the copywriting classes helped me really hone my writing in on the message I need to communicate to our audience;" and "The courses and professors urged me to think 'outside of the box.'"

(d) The unit includes members of journalism and mass communication professions in its assessment process.

The School has a sound program in place to involve professionals in the assessment process. That involvement includes: supervision of interns and an evaluation of their work; reviews of student portfolios (for example, Richmond area advertising professionals regularly judge portfolios produced by students in capstone advertising courses and Virginia editors review portfolios that have been prepared by journalism students); and work in capstone courses across the sequences is reviewed by professionals (for example, practitioners judge PRSSA case studies; producers at the Richmond PBS affiliate review student work to ensure that it meets standards before airing; and editors whose newspapers subscribe to Capital News Service regularly review student submissions). Administrators believe that, through these systematic processes, the vast majority of students' work is evaluated, at some juncture, by working professionals

(e) The unit collects and reports data from its assessment activities and uses the data to improve curriculum and instruction.

The School works systematically to close the loop on its assessment efforts. As assessment information is gathered each fall and spring semester, the School's associate director compiles it and enters it into the University reporting system. The results are reviewed to determine any appropriate followup actions. For example, the associate director, when compiling and analyzing data from 2004-2005, noted that nearly one-fourth of the students had received "barely adequate or not adequate ratings" from faculty members and external observers who had assessed end-of-semester oral presentations in capstone courses. The associate director has since asked the curriculum committee and the assessment committee to consider whether the direct and indirect measures were sufficient to warrant such a finding and, if so, to determine actions that might be taken to improve performances. Among the possibilities: Consider requiring a course in Speech for Business and the Professions.

Overall evaluation, compliance/ non-compliance:

COMPLIANCE

PART III: Evaluation of professional master's program
(complete only if applicable)

Overall evaluation:

NOT APPLICABLE

PART IV: Summary by site visit team

1) Summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the unit.

The School has several strengths:

- Well-qualified, balanced, hard-working and productive faculty that is committed to instruction and students.
- High-energy, strong and dedicated leadership.
- Solid service to the professions, including outreach to high-school journalism students and teachers.
- Extensive collaborative efforts with others units on campus.
- Positive can-do entrepreneurial School-wide spirit and approach to teaching, research and service.
- Notable student diversity and commendable efforts to further diversify the full-and part-time faculty.
- Sound and consistently expanding relationships with media outlets and professional constituents in the Richmond metropolitan market.
- Aggressive early efforts to implement a systematic, thoughtful and workable assessment process—one that also lends itself to evolutionary adjustments.

The challenges that it needs to address:

- A need to continue to build from the foundation now being constructed to further connect to alumni and to enhance private fundraising efforts.
- A need for more full-time faculty members to keep pace with the growing student body and the School's appetite to expand its research and service horizons.
- A need—as the School continues to consider initiatives—to establish clear priorities that are tied to financial and human resources.
- A need to acquire specialized equipment in quantities sufficient to allow students to complete required projects in a timely manner.
- A need to make optimum use of its faculty, classrooms, hardware and software by considering strategies to consolidate courses and streamline access to them.

2) List the standards with which the unit is not in compliance.

NOT APPLICABLE

3) Summarize the problems or deficiencies that must be corrected before the next evaluation (i.e., related to non-compliance with standards).

NOT APPLICABLE

- 4) In the case of a recommendation for provisional accreditation, list the deficiencies that must be corrected before the provisional status can be removed.

NOT APPLICABLE

- 5) In the case of a recommendation for denial of accreditation, clearly and fully explain the reasons that led to that recommendation.

NOT APPLICABLE

- 6) If the unit was previously accredited, summarize the significant deficiencies noted in the previous report and the actions taken to correct them.

NOT APPLICABLE

- 7) The self-study is the heart of the accrediting process, and often the quality of that document determines the degree of success of the accrediting visit. Summarize the team members' judgment of the self-study.

The multi-volume self-study was comprehensive, candid, thorough, logically organized and well edited—clearly the product of comprehensive planning, attention to detail, involvement of multiple faculty and staff members, and strong leadership.