

## Mass Communications Retention, Progression, Graduation Plan

Submitted By

Camilla Gant, Ph.D.

Director of Mass Communications

April 6, 2010

### Advising

We believe that advising is a critical aspect of engaging and cultivating a relationship with pre-majors and majors, and it demonstrates our commitment to their success in the program and profession.

- Assign each student an advisor upon approval of major declaration application. Advisors primarily assist with class scheduling; maintain advisee records, track progress toward graduation, serve as the liaison for the Academic Affairs graduation rate initiative, and provide guidance regarding academic, career, and experiential learning issues and opportunities.
- Provide majors with a *Suggested Electives* handout that identifies suggested course electives relative to career goals. Suggested electives streamline advising sessions; strengthen students' knowledge base and skills set; and posture students to be more competitive for internships and entry-level positions.
- Facilitate advising training and/or devise an *Advising Guidelines* handout for faculty to use as a resource to ensure that majors avoid common scheduling oversights that stifle progression, such as enrolling in courses that exceed or do not satisfy degree requirements, e.g., completing nine credit hours in an area that requires three credit hours.
- Appoint a pre-major advisor. The pre-major advisor will primarily be responsible for collaborating with the Excel Center liaison assigned to the program to ensure that pre-majors are informed of program-specific recommendations and avoid common scheduling oversights that stifle progression, such as enrolling in courses that exceed or do not satisfy degree requirements, e.g., completing nine credit hours in an area that requires three credit hours; informing pre-majors of advising sessions and information meetings; assisting pre-majors with necessary course overrides during the pre-major/major transition process; and assisting pre-majors with the major declaration application process, including offering guidance to those who do not qualify to declare Mass Communications as a major.
- Assist the Excel Center staff with advising during pre-major advising sessions. Such opportunities allow pre-majors to meet and develop a relationship with faculty early on, and give the program a face, i.e., familiar faces for pre-majors to seek out if they have questions or concerns prior to becoming majors.

- Assist the College of Arts & Sciences and Student Affairs staff with advising during orientation sessions for new and transfer students. Again, such opportunities allow prospective majors to meet and develop a relationship with faculty early on, and give the program a face, i.e., familiar faces for prospective majors to seek out if they have questions or concerns prior to becoming majors.

## **Communication**

We believe that consistent and open communication allows us to demonstrate our commitment to keeping pre-majors and majors informed and connected, and being proactive in keeping abreast of and responding to their concerns and interests.

- Maintain listservs for pre-majors, majors, and minors to allow faculty, staff, and students to more effectively share information, e.g., curriculum updates, advising reminders, meeting reminders, invitations for special events or speakers, suggested readings, etc.
- Schedule general information meetings and/or Q&A sessions with pre-majors and majors to keep abreast of and respond to their concerns and interests; and to share information, e.g., curriculum updates, advising reminders, meeting reminders, invitations for special events or speakers.

## **Experiential Learning**

We believe it is critical to provide opportunities for and to encourage participation in experiential learning given the high import of hands-on experience and professional portfolios in our discipline to secure entry-level positions. Beyond professional development, experiential learning opportunities allow students to cultivate peer and professional support networks that keep them engaged in the program and profession.

- Appoint a faculty member to serve as the internship coordinator each semester, and continue to seek funding to hire an internship coordinator. The internship coordinator is primarily charged to centralize and manage publicity and the application process; assess evaluation criteria in accordance with the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications criteria; track student and employer statistics; and coordinate an annual internship fair. If funding is securing to hire an internship coordinator, said staff member will be additionally charged to generate and cultivate employer opportunities.
- Enhance publicity to encourage participation in student organizations within the program, i.e., the Broadcast Club and the Mass Communications Society. Both organizations sponsor professional development and social networking activities.
- Schedule information meetings and open houses to encourage participation in campus media, i.e., UTV-13, *The West Georgian*, and The WOLF Internet Radio.

## Program Prestige

We believe that the Mass Communications program is well positioned to strengthen student recruitment and retention, and advance USG and UWG strategic efforts to position the university as an institution of choice within the new robust tier of comprehensive universities. The Mass Communications account for the fifth highest number of majors in the College of Arts & Sciences; and the program confers the second highest number of Bachelor of Arts degrees, and the fourth highest number of overall bachelor degrees among programs in the College. Given the appeal of the program and its unique proximity to Atlanta, a top-ten media market in the nation, we believe a moderate commitment of financial resources and administrative support for the following initiatives will heighten the prestige of the program and the university, strengthen student recruitment and retention, and yield invaluable professional, social, and economic dividends for our majors and alumni.

- Modify curriculum to allow majors to specialize in convergence journalism, multimedia storytelling, and public relations with an emphasis on convergence in all tracks. This curricular shift will give students a competitive edge in the multi-media landscape that demands both industry-specific and cross-media knowledge and skill sets.
- Pursue accreditation with the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC), ideally by Fall 2010. As an ACEJMC accredited program, Mass Communications would join a distinguished list of two such programs within the state (Savannah State University and the University of Georgia), and 19 such programs within the contiguous states of Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee.
- Research the feasibility of pursuing independent department status to strengthen ACEJMC application, and to heighten program visibility and autonomy. A review of the 21 accredited mass communication and journalism programs in Georgia and the contiguous states of Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee reveals that none are housed in departments with out-of-discipline programs (as is the case with our program, the Department of Mass Communications & Theatre Arts). Also, given that all have department chairs or directors within the discipline, there is some uncertainty regarding whether having a department chair out-of-discipline will pose an issue.
- Make annual request for the program to remain a priority candidate for instructional space in the proposed Advanced Classroom Building. Positioning Mass Communications within the Advanced Classroom Building would allow for a more integrated learning experience and enhance faculty-student relations by housing offices, classrooms and experiential learning laboratories (UTV 13, *The West Georgian*, The WOLF Internet Radio, radio lab, speech labs) in one location. Moreover, the Advanced Classroom Building would afford state-of-the-art digital television and radio production, digital audio and video instructional media, and web-based and wireless technologies to support and strengthen the curriculum and experiential learning initiatives.

- Re-focus the Media Day luncheon to more significantly recognize and celebrate the academic and professional development achievements of students and alumni.
- Design a program brochure to be distributed to prospective majors, particularly during Preview Days and Mardi Gras of Majors. Brochure will feature program strengths, experiential learning opportunities, and career options.

### **Assessment**

Assessment of RPG initiatives will be incorporated into the program's annual assessment process.

- Program Annual Report. Progress regarding RPG Initiatives will be reported in the program annual report.
- Faculty/Staff Annual Evaluations. Chair, faculty and staff reports will include achievements regarding RPG initiatives relative to teaching, professional growth and development, and service activity and achievements.
- Senior Exit Survey. The survey, which is administered to graduating seniors to assess their perceptions of program quality, will be revised to include items that address applicable RPG initiatives.