California State University, Fullerton, Business Communications
Program Performance Review

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Business Communications Program at California State University, Fullerton. Meeting faculty, visiting classes, and discussing the program with administration offered a compelling view into this program, a program that is critical to student success in the college.

This report includes three sections. First, the report addresses the strengths of the Business Communications Program. Second, the report identifies challenges faced by the program. Last, the report offers recommendations for maintaining the strengths of the program and also addressing the challenges.

Strengths
The individuals associated with the Business Communication Program are dedicated to offering the best possible business communication education to students. With a several decades long history, the program is firmly established and has a clear, progressive pedagogical structure across course offerings from 201 to 301/301a to 501. The courses challenge and educate students at each level of writing proficiency, providing them with much needed discipline-specific skills that often benefit students immediately in their job searches and careers. Different pedagogical approaches such as flipped classrooms, service learning, and other innovations exemplify the program's dynamism. The Business Communications Program encourages such innovation and there is considerable energy dedicated to exploring and developing pedagogical strategies that support student learning. The outreach and internships appear to be especially vital and dynamic.

The faculty is largely contingent. Faculty teach large classes, offer additional study sessions for students, implement pedagogical innovations, work with technology, and strive to remain abreast of changes within the discipline. The faculty members make the most of a challenging situation and are dedicated to student success. The commitment of the faculty members, their hard work, the amount of energy they direct toward the program, and their overall dedication is impressive. The program manages to run on resources currently available, though a certain sense of tenuousness permeates the self-study document.

Despite the fluctuating number of students mentioned in section two of the self-study and the small number of permanent faculty, the program effectively educates a large number of students. The assessment plan in place is of long standing and is thoughtfully implemented. The entry and exit diagnostics provide a foundation of information for the classes and for supporting additional assessment activities. The CLASS and SPEAKS rubrics have been used for some time. The assessments determine strengths and weaknesses in student abilities and then the loops are closed: Curriculum changes are implemented as a result of assessment results.

Challenges
The program faces a number of specific challenges. The class sizes are large. In classes capped at 37, students will not receive the level of writing instruction that they could receive in smaller classes. Both the nature of the assignments and the amount of feedback are impacted by the

class size. Students are limited to writing shorter, in-class documents. While in-class exam-type documents ensure that students are doing their own writing and offer them an opportunity to present, in the moment, what they've learned about a particular type of writing, they also run counter to many writing experiences both within the university and beyond where documents are prepared through multiple drafts and revisions. A situation in which faculty offer extensive, quality feedback to this many students is extremely challenging.

In addition, a larger number of ESL students in the writing courses provide a special challenge for the program given the limited resources available to support these students at the School and the University level. A class size of 37 students makes it impossible for teaching faculty to adequately address the needs of second language learners. Currently, the Business Communication program has no additional resources housed in the business school to support these students. The only existing structural support at the University level involves student-to-student tutoring and the University writing center that has limited resources to support professional writing. The graduate level 501 course in particular has a larger number of ESL students yet only 2 tutors available to work with 60 students.

While there is a stated commitment to student retention, there is not a clearly articulated plan for supporting students to ensure their continued success. The program addresses students across two courses. How many students drop out between the two courses? How many students struggle with their transition into the 301 course after transferring? Addressing these types of questions might direct more pointed retention strategies. The Friday workshops for students and the transitional business writing course for community college transfers offer a good start for retention. Are these strategies working?

The limited number of full-time and PhD faculty will continue to make the program feel unstable and transitional. All of the faculty, full- and part-time, reveal their dedication to students, teaching, and the program in the hours they spend responding to student work, meeting with students beyond class time, and developing pedagogical innovations. Semester to semester or year to year hiring, though, keeps life "up in the air" for the program and the faculty.

The contingency of the faculty pool might also contribute to another challenge faced by the program. As self-identified in the report, it is not unlikely that the number of students might change dramatically from year to year and it's possible that resources will be insufficient to smoothly cover the shift.

Professional development for instructors initially sounds like an important contribution to maintaining faculty currency in the discipline. However, professional development, rather than supporting faculty, might become an additional burden to perform for already overloaded faculty. Additional meetings and assignments, conference participation, and paper presentations designed to keep faculty current in their fields mean additional time over and above the heavy teaching loads. There seems to be an expectation that faculty demonstrate their professional development in the annual review process, but there is a limited mechanism in place to promote and support such professional development among full-time faculty and no support provided for part-time instructors.

Another challenge identified in the self-study is the review process for Business Communications faculty. The Marketing Department Personnel Committee is not familiar with Business Communications Program faculty responsibilities. No clear set of standards and expectations regarding evaluation that shift from year to year make it difficult for faculty to prepare their files. While faculty members are not included in business college accreditation, they are faced with college expectations regarding currency in their discipline. Unclear expectations make it challenging for faculty to prepare for evaluation and also fail to provide clear guidelines for Personnel Committees reviewing Business Communication faculty files.

Recommendations

Writing is an important competency for all CSUF graduates, and the Business Communications Program is important for the MCBE and at the University level.

In terms of curriculum, members of the Business Communication Program could offer more thoughts and develop additional strategies to address issues of student retention and success. Individuals in the program could better elaborate the types of technological innovations incorporated into the program and clarify how these additions of technology better reflect current business practices. More thought on why these particular strategies are being utilized is in order. The innovations are numerous and indicative of the dedication of faculty members who are implementing these curricular changes. More information on why these particular changes and innovations are being developed would make a stronger case for MCBE and the University to support them. The program could be better prepared for Outcomes-based Funding models if pedagogical innovations are thoroughly explained regarding the need for their implementation and carefully tracked for the types of impacts they have on student retention and success.

In terms of the program in general, the recommendations are easily made: Reduce class sizes to align with the University class size of 25 for writing courses, which is already large (the National College Teachers of English organization recommended class size for an intensive writing class is 15). Increase the number of full-time instructors to at least 70%. A number of part-time faculty are already teaching more than the current full-time load of four classes a semester, and it would be easy to transfer these faculty to full-time status to resolve this problem in a timely way. Although, most of these part-time faculty do not have PhDs, this qualification does not appear necessary since business communication faculty are not currently included in the accreditation process for the school.

The implementation of these recommendations is much more challenging without specific resources being dedicated to them. The College could consider developing a Business Communication concentration or a Business Communication Studies program. The program and college could develop ways to incorporate writing throughout the MCBE curriculum as part of this certificate/studies program. Students could be given credit on their transcripts for the certificate/concentration and could also engage in more discipline-specific writing in their coursework. Additional possibilities for engaging students might include: a Business Communications Club, industry experts that visit class, or podcasts of these experts, or experts invited to review student proposals along the already tested insurance writing contest model described in the self-study. A Business Communications Institute funded in part through outside

contributions could further fund these types of innovation. An Institute with a director, full-time faculty, and part-time faculty might offer the possibility for additional funds and a stronger sense of foundational permanence to the program. Even if this route is not pursued, business communication should have its own program with its own director to help provide greater stability for faculty, appropriate performance reviews from qualified faculty, and the opportunity to provide greater interaction among faculty for mentoring and course and assessment development purposes. This goal should be accomplished easily, since it requires little more than the resources already being devoted to faculty salaries and benefits.

In the interim to address personnel concerns, a specially designated DPC drawn from across the college trained to evaluate Business Communication Instructors and a clear set of Personnel Standards for Business Communication faculty would clarify expectations for faculty and for those reviewing faculty files. We recommend to clearly delineate the evaluation criteria for full-time and part-time faculty. Full-time faculty members' annual review should continue to include teaching and professional development. We recommend expanding the criteria for full-time faculty professional development to include not only consulting and conference presentations, but also publications, including textbooks and articles in academic journals and popular sources. These are significant professional contributions that should be encouraged and rewarded through the evaluation system. Part-time faculty should not be held to the same standards without proper support and multi-year contracts.

The program should develop a more formalized mentoring program for its part-time faculty. It should not fall on the shoulders of the program coordinator who has done an excellent job in this role, but it is not feasible to expect her to support 52 adjuncts. We hope to see the number of adjuncts go down and recommend that each part-time faculty should have a designated mentor from the group of full-time faculty.

The MCBE business communication program needs consistent administrative support to properly support second language learners enrolled in the MCBE writing courses. Depending on the available resources, we recommend to either provide consistent tutor support in BUAD 201, 301, and 501 or to address the problem by creating an MCBE tutor center that may be used for additional student support and would include a strong presence of writing tutors to support the writing program.

Other recommendations are of a more secondary nature and include: Add indirect assessment data that references student learning and that might involve surveying students regarding their own learning outcomes. Find ways to incentivize and reward faculty for professional development. Increase real world applicability of the learning through more partnerships with local businesses.

We found much to commend in the Business Communications Program. The dedication and energy of the faculty and people associated with the program bode well for the program growing and strengthening in the future.