

*This is a letter sent to the Grand Forks Herald on April 10, 2009 by Dean Martha Potvin in regards to the dissolution of the School of Communication. This letter was designed to correct some misinformation that has been communicated about the state of the program.*

GRAND FORKS, ND (April 10, 2009) - The University of North Dakota's Communication programs have a long and impressive history on campus. In all of its disciplines from speech to journalism to advertising and more the University has prepared graduates that have gone on to achieve success locally, regionally, and nationally. I want to assure everyone that this tradition is continuing.

As you may have heard, the School of Communication at UND was dissolved as of January 1, 2009. This is primarily an administrative change affecting the organization and management of the program. Some of the important facts of this restructuring are:

- The University will continue to offer communication classes and accept students into communication programs
- Students will still continue receive UND undergraduate and graduate degrees with majors in Communication
- Students will continue to receive scholarships and awards designated by generous alumni for students in communication disciplines
- Students will continue to be advised by communication faculty as well as a professional advisor
- The office for the Programs in Communication and most faculty offices will move to upgraded spaces in several buildings on campus
- The North Dakota Newspaper Hall of Fame will be moved, along with the Schlasinger Reading Room, back to Merrifield Hall, its original home.

All faculty and staff have been retained and reassigned to departments that, for the most part, are aligned with their specialties. These alignments will increase the likelihood that new ideas will emerge and enrich the curriculum.

Faculty aligned with the more professional aspects of the program (e.g., journalism, broadcasting, public relations, advertising) were reassigned to the English Department where their is growing interest and expertise in editing, publishing, digital text analysis and new media technology. Even with the rapid rise in the use of digital and interactive technology that requires technical and hands on experiences for students, they still need to develop the basic skills to document and report the facts about current events, issues and people in our communities.

Faculty aligned with speech communication were reassigned to the Department of Communication Science and Disorders, the department that provides testing through its Speech and Hearing Clinic for all students who take introductory speech classes. Virtually all UND students fulfill an oral communication requirement in the Essential Studies program by taking the introduction to speech course. This department will also provide oversight for the administration of the degree programs in Communication.

Faculty aligned more with interpersonal and health communication were assigned to the Department of Psychology. Recent research collaborations between the Department of Psychology and the College of Nursing have highlighted the importance of these aspects of communication in addressing critical health care issues, especially in underserved populations. The Native Media Center now reports to the Indian Studies Department where the expertise and strong connections to native communities will expand the possibilities for support and growth of the program.

Change was necessary both to improve the learning environment for students and to allow faculty to do their best work. Following the announcement of the dissolution of the School, a number of conversations have occurred that indicate the change was welcome and indeed necessary for students to prepare for the career demands of a rapidly changing field.

Even though the changes are not yet visible, plans are progressing to upgrade a significant amount of space in OKelly and Merrifield Halls with fresh paint, new carpets and the technology infrastructure to improve the learning and working environments for UND faculty, staff and students. The upgrades are designed to encourage the type of collaboration and synergy that will add value to academic programs in both the humanities and the social sciences, including communication. The departments of history and Indian studies will be relocating to OKelly Hall as part of this reorganization. Already, the change has led to a proposal to the State Board of Higher Education to offer the bachelors degree in Communication on-line and at Bismarck State College where both on-line and face to face courses will be taught.

Except for the understandable initial concern of students about whether they could complete their degrees with the level of quality and support they expected, it has been a relatively smooth transition. I anticipate that their degrees will only increase in value as their learning environment is enhanced. A first priority is to continue to fill faculty vacancies. A search is underway to hire several new faculty for the Program. Over 80 applicants have applied for these positions and this level of interest from around the country and internationally is encouraging.

North Dakota newspapers continue to report that the communication program lost its accreditation in the early 1990s. Those statements are somewhat misleading. The Communication program has been, and continues to be, accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, the national accrediting organization for all of UND's programs. Until the early 1990s, the School also held a voluntary accreditation from the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC), an organization that certifies professional programs in journalism and mass communication as having met a number of clearly defined standards. That professional accreditation was lost in the early 1990s and not sought since. The communication major has a comprehensive, integrated curriculum that aligns well with the ACEJMC standards yet focuses more broadly on academic as well as professional skills. The current reorganization should result in stronger professional offerings (e.g., journalism, advertising, broadcasting, public relations etc.) guided, in part, by ACEJMC standards. UND may choose to seek professional accreditation in the future but many of the nations strongest and most successful communication programs have not chosen to seek professional accreditation. In this era of increasing collaboration between traditional disciplines, we are looking for our newly re-organized communication program to eventually serve as a model for how programs can be

more responsive to both the changing market demand for graduates as well as advances in the field. In addition to our clear track record of preparing highly successful communication graduates, our goal is for UND to become the institution of choice for professional education in communication.