**Assessment Plan**
**School of Journalism and Strategic Media**
**Implemented in Fall 2017 following reaccreditation**

**Plan Background**

Refinement of the assessment plan for the School of Journalism and Strategic Media resumed in Fall 2017, following the unit's reaccreditation during the 2016 – 2017 academic year.

Assessment data collected prior to the last reaccreditation has been used to close the loop. Among other things, the unit established a Bachelor of Science in Journalism following the decision of the Electronic Media program to abandon accreditation. The journalism program revised much of its curriculum, using feedback provided by the last site team as guidance. Media law was added as a requirement, along with an entry digital media skills class to accompany the introductory media writing course; every student in the program completes as least one credit of internship or practicum; all students complete a one-credit career development class. The new core established continuity in the curriculum and made it easier for students to shift or change from one internal concentration to another. These steps have moved the unit ahead in preparation for the 2023 – 2024 reaccreditation visit. The assessment approaches reflect efforts to close the loop in response to data findings.

**Objectives for Student Learning**

The faculty, administrators and staff of Middle Tennessee State University's School of Journalism and Strategic Media recognize the value of defining student learning objectives and both continually and systematically assessing the degree to which these objectives are being met. This assessment plan describes the unit's student learning objectives and the unit's strategy for recursively assessing progress toward meeting those objectives. Results of program assessment are included in the unit's self-study for program reaccreditation by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC).

The faculty, administrators and staff of the School of Journalism and Strategic Media value all aspects of educating students, especially those that encourage understanding of free expression, history and especially multicultural history, diversity and inclusion, presentation or images and information, clear and clean writing, ethical actions, critical thinking and reasoning, presentation and understanding of data and numerical concepts, critical self-evaluation, and the use of tools and technologies that are part of the professional media world. These goals reflect the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication's Professional Values and Competencies (ACEJMC, 2023).

**Student Learning Values and Competencies**

Students studying in the School of Journalism and Strategic Media will demonstrate knowledge or proficiency in the following during their enrollment in and graduation from the program:
1. apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, in a global context, and for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located;

2. demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;

3. demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts;

4. present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies;

5. write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;

6. demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;

7. apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;

8. effectively and correctly apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;

9. critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;

10. apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

**Assessment Plan**

To assess the effectiveness of the School of Journalism and Strategic Media's curriculum in providing an environment for achieving the student learning objectives, we follow these assessment steps:

**Audit of Core Courses.**

The school revised its class core as fundamental step to the program's assessment strategy. The new core took effect just as the unit was up for its previous reaccreditation. That self-study reported the new core; this core is the baseline for the 2023 – 2024 reaccreditation review. A web-based form was used in 2016 to ensure that faculty were aware of the values and

competencies and that they were represented in the curriculum revisions. The form stores time-stamped results in an associated Google Sheets table, making the results easy both to archive and to download for analysis.[1] Core SoJSM courses have been identified as addressing the 10 values and competencies that were part of the ACEJMC accreditation revisions.

The table below shows how instruction aimed at meeting these objectives is distributed across core requirements in each School of Journalism and Strategic Media's sequences: Advertising, Public Relations, Public Relations – Recording Industry, Journalism, Media Studies, Sports Media, and Visual Communication.  In these tables, an "E" at the intersection of a given course's row and a given objective's column indicates that content addressing the objective is a key component embedded in the course.

**Direct Measures of Student Learning Objectives**

**Student Resumes and Cover Letters.** Students complete a one-credit senior core class in their last year of study. The goal of the class is to enable students to develop a cover letter and resume for use in seeking outside employment. But these documents are also a program assessment tool to allow faculty or outside media personnel a chance to provide feedback regarding students' preparation for employment.

**Conceptual knowledge assessments**. The Major Field Test includes batteries of questions that measure the school's "Freedom of speech and press," "History," "Ethics," "Diversity and Inclusion," and "Analysis" competencies. Questions also cover effective writing and understanding of data and numerical concepts. Both the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and Middle Tennessee State University require degree assessment. Faculty in the SoJSM created a new exit exam; the document was reviewed by two external reviewers. It was a productive opportunity for the School of Journalism and Strategic Media faculty to refine and update the exit exam. As one measure of the exam's reach across the curriculum, multiple faculty took the test to provide feedback on question structure.

**Grammar, spelling and data skills assessment**. Derived from faculty-produced research the school's JOUR 2710 Media Writing course has become an assessment foundation. Grammar, Spelling and Data Skills assessment are part of the assessment protocol. The assessment is designed to indicate knowledge of pronoun usage, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, confusable words, percentages, percent change, averages, spreadsheet functions, and data visualization.

**JOUR 2710 writing assessment**. This measure involves collecting an end-of-semester writing sample from each student in JOUR 2710, the unit's introductory course in media writing, then randomly selecting a subset of the writing samples to be reviewed by off-campus media professionals who are recruited for the task.

The samples are obtained via a standard, graded writing exercise that JOUR 2710 instructors administer to their students as a stand-alone writing assignment toward the end of the semester. Students are given a set of facts and are asked to write a story based on the facts. As a control for

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[1] SoJ Course Values and Competencies, http://tinyurl.com/mtsusojvc.

the assignment, the story was taken from the local newspaper, the Daily News Journal. The story review include the DNJ story as an evaluation control.

De-identified, uniformly formatted, text-only versions of the randomly selected, student-authored stories are then mixed, in random order, with a de-identified, identically formatted, text-only version of the actual story. The evaluators would be asked only to evaluate the stories for publish-ability.

**External review of advanced student work and Student Internships.** All students in SoJSM programs complete an internship or practicum. This experience offers the opportunity for media professionals to provide feedback about student skills and performance. Supervisors are asked to complete an evaluation of student work. Additionally, they are reminded to offer feedback and guidance to the students during the experiences. Internships include work at news and sports outlets (print, broadcast or online), for-profit organizations or public service organization, social media assignments or social media firms, and advertising or public relations firms.

**Student resumes and cover letters.** One indication of student preparation is to examine the resumes and cover letters of graduating students. JOUR 4880 Professional Development provides instruction and coaching for resume development, cover letter writing, development of an online portfolio of student work, and the chance for students to develop an elevator pitch.

**Indirect Measures**

**Student Competitions and Awards.** Throughout the assessment period, students won awards for notable performance in media-related endeavors. (These awards, and their recipients, are listed by year in the self-study.) The school tracks student entries and award winners as a measure of national, regional or state program competitiveness. Award competitions provide an opportunity to encourage students to strive to compete nationally. This is less an assessment approach and more of a student motivator but success in national awards we believe indicates graduates who are competitive in the professional marketplace and thus it is an indirect measure of program assessment.

**Student and alumni surveys.** The unit's assessment plan considered data from surveys regularly conducted by the university. The surveys, taken together, provide indirect assessment measures, and they are discussed below:

*National Survey of Student Engagement.* Hosted by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, the NSSE surveys a sample of students at four-year colleges and universities to assess the frequency of practices by both students and institutions that are associated with desirable higher education outcomes.[2] MTSU freshmen and seniors participate in this survey twice per five-year performance funding cycle. The university makes breakdowns available by major shortly after the conclusion of each survey. The breakdowns show the average of responses to each question for the major, college, and university. During a given assessment year, the most recent available data are considered. Unhelpfully, the university reports NSSE results as averages; percentages would be more informative. Moreover, the

[2] See: http://nsse.iub.edu/

university does not report the standard deviations associated with its averages, so estimating the probable randomness of mean differences is not possible. Thus, the results offer some feedback and help the university respond to SACSCS assessment questions but the data are less helpful to our assessment.

*Alumni Surveys.* The university has in the past administered an alumni survey. The survey contacted students who graduated two years prior to the survey's field period and assesses their overall satisfaction with their collegiate experience. Several items in the survey ask how well instruction both at MTSU generally and also within the major prepared the respondent for the workplace, and still others ask about present employment status. Unfortunately for the current reaccreditation period, the alumni survey focused only on personal information updates and did not gather data about graduates' satisfaction with their education. We look forward to a return to educational rigor queries and have expressed this interest with the alumni office.

**Assessment Schedule**

Assessment following the last reaccreditation was set to follow a three-year cycle, with a significant faculty data collecting effort in the 2019 – 2020 academic year. Analyzing and responding to the results would take place during the following academic year. As we know higher education received a significant jolt from the COVID pandemic. We resumed data collection in 2020 and 2021, with added analysis in 2022 and 2023.

| Core Courses | Freedom of Speech & Press | Multicultural History | Diversity, Equity and Inclusion | Present Images and Information | Effective Writing | Ethics | Think! | Numerical Competency | Reflection and Evaluation | Apply Tools | Integrative thinking and reflection |
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| JOUR 1020 American Media | E | E | E | | E | E | E | | | | E |
| JOUR 2710 Media Writing | E | | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E |
| JOUR 2720 Digital Media Skills | E | | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E |
| JOUR 4250 Mass Communication Law | E | E | E | | E | E | E | | E | | E |
| JOUR 4880 Professional Dev'mt | E | | E | E | E | E | E | | E | E | E |
| JOUR 3580 Practicum or JOUR 4000 Internship | | | | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E |