

# Report of ACEJMC Evaluation

Undergraduate program  
2025–2026

Name of Institution: **University of Memphis**

Name and Title of Chief Executive Officer: **Bill Hardgrave, president**

Name of Unit: **Department of Journalism and Strategic Media**

Name and Title of Administrator: **Matthew J. Haught, chair**

Date of 2025-2026 Accrediting Visit: **Nov. 9-12, 2025**

Date of the previous accrediting visit: **Jan. 27-30, 2019**

Recommendation of the previous site visit team: **Reaccreditation**

Previous decision of the Accrediting Council: **Reaccreditation**

**Recommendation by 2025-2026 Visiting Team: Reaccreditation**

*Prepared and submitted by:*

## **Team Chair**

Name and Title: Caesar Andrews, professor/distinguished chair in media ethics and writing

Organization/School: University of Nevada, Reno/Reynolds School of Journalism

**Signature**



## **Team Member**

Name and Title: Marianne Barrett, Ph.D., associate professor emerita

Organization/School: Arizona State University/Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication

**Signature**



## **Team Member**

Name and Title: Michael Cherenson\*, APR, Fellow PRSA

Organization/School: SCG Advertising + Public Relations

**Signature**



## **Team Member**

Name and Title: David Wozniak, associate professor - advertising

Organization/School: Penn State University/Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications

**Signature**



\* Serving remotely due to travel challenges resulting from FAA restrictions/government shutdown.

## PART I: General information

**Name of Institution:** University of Memphis

**Name of Unit:** Department of Journalism and Strategic Media

**Year of Visit:** 2025-2026

### 1. Check regional association by which the institution now is accredited.

- ☐ Higher Learning Commission
- ☐ Middle States Commission on Higher Education
- ☐ New England Commission on Higher Education
- ☐ Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
- ☒ Southern Association of Colleges and School Commission on Colleges
- ☐ Western Association of Schools and Colleges

*If the unit seeking accreditation is located outside the United States, provide the name(s) of the appropriate recognition or accreditation entities:*

### 2. Indicate the institution's type of control; check more than one if necessary.

- ☐ Private
- ☒ Public
- ☐ Other (specify)

### 3. Provide assurance that the institution has legal authorization to provide education beyond the secondary level. It is not necessary to include entire authorizing documents. Public institutions may cite legislative acts; private institutions may cite charters or other authorizing documents.

The University of Memphis was founded September 12, 1912, as the West Tennessee State Normal School, which provided training for primary and secondary teachers under the Tennessee General Education Law of 1909. The law required the establishment and maintenance of three normal schools, one in each of the three geographic divisions of the state: East, Middle and West Tennessee. In 1941, the institution expanded its liberal arts curriculum and the name was changed to Memphis State College. The undergraduate program was reorganized into three schools and a graduate school was added in 1951. Memphis State achieved university status in 1957 and on July 1, 1994, the name was officially changed to the University of Memphis.

From 1972 to 2016, the university was part of the Tennessee Board of Regents system, which consisted of every public higher education campus in the state not part of the University of Tennessee system. The University of Memphis was the flagship university of the system.

The University of Memphis Board of Trustees was established in the FOCUS Act of 2016 by the Tennessee state legislature. The Board of Trustees of the University is vested with the power and authority to govern the University and to exercise all powers and authority as set forth in the laws of the State of Tennessee. The membership of the Board consists of 10 members, nine voting members and one non-voting member. Of the nine voting members, at least six members must be residents of the state of Tennessee. Eight of the voting Board members are appointed by the Governor of the State of Tennessee, with at least three being alumni of the University. A University faculty member shall serve as one voting Board member to be selected by the University Faculty Senate. The non-voting member shall be a student representative to be appointed by the Board.

**4. Has the journalism/mass communications unit been evaluated previously by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications?**

☒ Yes

☐ No

**If yes, give the date of the last full accrediting visit. If there was a revisit, give the date of the last full visit and the date of the revisit:** January 27-31, 2019

**5. When was the unit or sequences within the unit first accredited by ACEJMC?**

1971

**6. Insert here the unit's mission statement. Statement should give date of adoption and/or last revision.**

*Mission Statement*

We produce career-ready graduates for ever-changing media professions. We produce industry-relevant research and engage in profession-driven public service for the benefit of our communities and industries.

*Vision*

We seek to be the nation's leading urban journalism and mass communication program.

*Values*

The University of Memphis Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, as an engaged learning professional program, celebrates:

- The pursuit of excellence in journalism and strategic media teaching and research.
- Integration of our programs with the Mid-South professional community and the broader global community.
- A collegial environment that supports the breadth of our community and encourages the richness of free expression.
- Creating relationships with students to help them persist and succeed.
- Growing relationships across CCFA and the University.

Statement adopted January 2025.

**7. What are the type and length of terms?**

Number of weeks in a semester: 16

Number of weeks in summer sessions: 5 and 10

Number of weeks in intersessions: 3 (May)

**8. Check the programs offered in journalism/mass communications:**

X Bachelor's degree

X Master's degree

X Ph.D. degree

**9. List the specific undergraduate degrees as well as the majors or sequences being reviewed by ACEJMC. \*Indicate online degrees.**

Bachelor of Arts, Journalism major\*

Bachelor of Arts, Journalism major, Broadcast Journalism concentration

Bachelor of Arts, Journalism major, Creative Mass Media concentration

Bachelor of Arts, Journalism major, Sports Media concentration

Bachelor of Arts, Strategic Media major, Advertising concentration\*

Bachelor of Arts, Strategic Media major, Public Relations concentration\*

Bachelor of Arts, Strategic Media major, Integrated Social Media concentration\*

\*Online degrees are also available.

**10. Credit hours required by the university for an undergraduate degree:**

120 semester credit hours.

**11. Give the number of credit hours students may earn for internship experience.**

3 semester hours repeatable up to 6 semester hours.

**12. List each professional journalism or mass communications sequence or specialty offered and give the name of the person in charge. Add lines as needed.**

**Name of Sequence or Specialty**

Journalism major

Journalism major, Broadcast Journalism concentration

Journalism major, Creative Mass Media concentration

Journalism major, Sports Media concentration

Strategic Media major, Advertising concentration

Strategic Media major, Public Relations concentration

Strategic Media major, Integrated Social Media concentration

**Person in Charge**

Dr. Robby Byrd

Dr. Robby Byrd

Prof. Michael Robinson

Dr. Robby Byrd

Prof. Kim Marks Malone

Prof. Kim Marks Malone

Prof. Kim Marks Malone

**13. Number of full-time students enrolled in the institution:**

15,292 (as of Sept. 2, 2025)

**14. Number of undergraduate majors in the accredited unit, by sequence. (If the unit has pre-major students, list them as a single total). Give the semester and academic year represented. Add lines as needed.**

| <b>Name of Sequence or Specialty</b>                   | <b>Fall 2025 undergraduate majors</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Journalism                                             | 39                                    |
| Journalism, Broadcast Journalism concentration         | 32                                    |
| Journalism, Creative Mass Media concentration          | 42                                    |
| Journalism, Sports Media concentration                 | 46                                    |
| Strategic Media, Advertising concentration             | 15                                    |
| Strategic Media, Public Relations concentration        | 49                                    |
| Strategic Media, Integrated Social Media concentration | 14                                    |
| <i>Total</i>                                           | <i>237</i>                            |

**15. Number of students in each section of all skills courses (newswriting, reporting, editing, photography, advertising copy, broadcast news, public relations writing, etc.). List enrollment by section for the term during which the visit will occur and for the preceding term. Submit two semesters with the self-study. Include a separate list for online skills courses, which also must meet the 20-1 ratio. (The Council has ruled that campaigns courses are exempt from the 20-1 ratio.)**

*Skills courses are defined internally as courses coded with a lecture-lab schedule type. Section numbers that begin with an M are taught online.*

**Spring 2025**

| <b>Course-Section</b> | <b>Title</b>              | <b>Enrollment</b> |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| CRMM 4526-001         | Photojournalism           | 20                |
| CRMM 4900-001         | Creative Media Lab        | 7                 |
| JOUR 3526-001         | Multimedia Storytelling   | 13                |
| JOUR 3526-002         | Multimedia Storytelling   | 15                |
| JOUR 3629-001         | Broadcast Reporting 1     | 7                 |
| JOUR 4150-001         | Sports Writing/Reporting  | 14                |
| JOUR 4190-001         | Opinion Writing/Reporting | 10                |
| JOUR 4629-001         | Broadcast Reporting 2     | 9                 |
| JOUR 4639-001         | TV News Producing         | 12                |
| JOUR 4998-001         | Multimedia News Lab       | 12                |
| JRSM 1750-001         | Media Writing 1           | 7                 |
| JRSM 1750-002         | Media Writing 1           | 14                |
| JRSM 1800-001         | Intro to Radio            | 11                |
| JRSM 2121-001         | Media Writing 2           | 12                |
| JRSM 2121-002         | Media Writing 2           | 11                |

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|               |                              |    |
|---------------|------------------------------|----|
| JRSM 3900-001 | Visual Media                 | 17 |
| JRSM 3900-002 | Visual Media                 | 14 |
| JRSM 3905-001 | Graphics for Strategic Media | 13 |
| STRM 3210-001 | Intro to Strategic Writing   | 19 |
| STRM 3211-001 | Ad Copywriting               | 7  |
| STRM 3212-001 | Public Relations Writing     | 11 |
| STRM 4221-001 | Ad Creative Strategy         | 8  |

*Online courses*

|               |                              |    |
|---------------|------------------------------|----|
| CRMM 4140-M50 | Publication Design           | 3  |
| JOUR 4165-M50 | Feature Writing/Reporting    | 15 |
| JRSM 1750-M51 | Media Writing 1              | 20 |
| JRSM 1750-M90 | Media Writing 1              | 3  |
| JRSM 2121-M50 | Media Writing 2              | 19 |
| JRSM 3905-M50 | Graphics for Strategic Media | 20 |
| JRSM 3905-M51 | Graphics for Strategic Media | 18 |
| STRM 3213-M50 | Social Media Writing         | 16 |

**Fall 2025**

| <b>Course-Section</b> | <b>Title</b>                    | <b>Enrollment</b> |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| CRMM 4140-001         | Publication Design              | 15                |
| CRMM 4500-001         | Web Publish 1: html/css         | 4                 |
| CRMM 4920-001         | Information Design              | 6                 |
| JOUR 3526-001         | Multimedia Storytelling         | 11                |
| JOUR 3526-002         | Multimedia Storytelling         | 10                |
| JOUR 3629-001         | Broadcast Reporting 1           | 12                |
| JOUR 4150-001         | Sports Writing/Reporting        | 11                |
| JOUR 4160-001         | Food Writing/Reporting          | 7                 |
| JOUR 4180-001         | Public Issues Writing/Reporting | 7                 |
| JOUR 4540-001         | Podcasting                      | 16                |
| JOUR 4998-001         | Multimedia News Lab             | 10                |
| JRSM 1750-001         | Media Writing 1                 | 20                |
| JRSM 1800-001         | Intro to Radio                  | 12                |
| JRSM 2121-001         | Media Writing 2                 | 7                 |
| JRSM 2121-002         | Media Writing 2                 | 16                |
| JRSM 3900-001         | Visual Media                    | 16                |
| JRSM 3900-002         | Visual Media                    | 19                |
| JRSM 3905-001         | Graphics for Strategic Media    | 15                |
| STRM 3210-001         | Intro to Strategic Writing      | 20                |

*Online courses*

|               |                 |                             |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| JOUR 3120-M50 | Reporting       | 19                          |
| JRSM 1750-M50 | Media Writing 1 | 31 (counts as two sections) |

|               |                              |    |
|---------------|------------------------------|----|
| JRSM 2121-M50 | Media Writing 2              | 18 |
| JRSM 3900-M50 | Visual Media                 | 18 |
| JRSM 3905-M50 | Graphics for Strategic Media | 20 |
| JRSM 3905-M90 | Graphics for Strategic Media | 13 |
| STRM 3210-M50 | Intro to Strategic Writing   | 20 |
| STRM 3210-M90 | Intro to Strategic Writing   | 11 |
| STRM 3212-M90 | Public Relations Writing     | 9  |
| STRM 4210-M50 | Social Media Planning/Mgmt.  | 10 |

**16. Total expenditures planned by the accredited unit for the 2025–2026 academic year:**

\$1,642,084.99

**Amount expected to be spent this year on full-time faculty salaries:**

\$1,278,144.87

**17. List name and rank of all full-time faculty in the accredited unit. (Full-time faculty refers to those defined as such by the university.) Identify those not teaching because of leaves, sabbaticals, etc.**

|                                    |                                 |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Taylor Ackerman, APR               | Assistant professor of practice |
| Meghnad Bose                       | Assistant professor of practice |
| Robby Byrd, Ph.D.                  | Associate professor             |
| Tori Cliff                         | Associate professor of practice |
| Jasper Fessmann, Ph.D.             | Assistant professor             |
| Matthew J. Haught, Ph.D.           | Professor                       |
| Joe Hayden, Ph.D.                  | Professor                       |
| Casey Hilder                       | Assistant professor of teaching |
| Tom Hrach, Ph.D.                   | Professor                       |
| Terris King                        | Associate professor of teaching |
| J. Chalise Macklin, Ph.D.          | Assistant professor             |
| Kim Marks Malone, APR, Fellow PRSA | Associate professor of practice |
| Joel Nichols                       | Assistant professor             |
| Michael Robinson                   | Associate professor of teaching |
| Claire Rounkles, Ph.D.             | Assistant professor             |
| Ruoxu Wang, Ph.D.                  | Associate professor             |
| Tonyaa Weathersbee                 | Professor                       |
| Jin Yang, Ph.D.                    | Professor                       |

No faculty are on leave in Fall 2025.

**18. List names of part-time/adjunct faculty teaching at least one course in fall 2025. Also list names of part-time faculty teaching spring 2025.**

**Fall 2025**

Ashley Craig

Audrey Firrone

Oakley Weddle

**Spring 2025**

Dana Albright

Laura Kebede-Twumasi

Oakley Weddle

Malory Williams

**19. For each of the last two academic years, please give the total number of graduates from the unit.**

2024-25 academic year: 65

2023-24 academic year: 74



## **PART II — Standard 1: Mission, Governance and Administration**

**BACKGROUND ON UNIT:** The Department of Journalism and Strategic Media at the University of Memphis self-identifies as a proud, determined, challenged and resilient urban program.

It will celebrate 70 years as an academic unit in 2026. The department has maintained accreditation for nearly 55 of those years, most recently earning ACEJMC approval in 2019 with all standards in compliance.

As of fall 2025, the unit offered two bachelor's degrees, in Journalism and in Strategic Media, each with concentrations and online-only options. It employed 18 full-time faculty members, three adjuncts and two staff members. It enrolled 237 undergraduate students. The 2025-26 budget is \$1.6 million.

Journalism and Strategic Media is one of six academic units reporting to the College of Communication and Fine Arts, which is one of 14 colleges or college-level schools at the university.

The University of Memphis traces its origins to 1912, when West Tennessee Normal School began offering classes for educators. As its academic scope evolved over the years, so did its name. In 1994, Memphis State University became the University of Memphis. Its annual operations budget totaled \$478 million as of fall 2025. It employed 2,500 people, more than 1,000 full-time faculty.

Tennessee created a stand-alone University of Memphis Board of Trustees in 2016, intended to streamline the layers of oversight. This 10-member board replaced the multiple-college Board of Regents that had been in place the previous 44 years. The governor appoints eight of the nine voting members on the Board of Trustees.

The university is viewed as a powerhouse in Memphis, a crossroads city of culture, music, civil rights legacy and Mid-South lore, plus an intense mix of problems and promise. By some assessments, the University of Memphis shares a local triumvirate with the FedEx corporate headquarters and St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

The self-study's dominant narrative on the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media applauds progress despite the challenges. Curriculum revisions and innovations, including early-adopter attention to generative artificial intelligence, helped the program keep pace with an evolving world of media. Momentum included a long-envisioned doctoral program launched in 2025, an interdisciplinary move compatible with the university's R1 status.

The self-study also acknowledges disruptions and transitions during the six-year+ cycle under reaccreditation review. The pandemic upended everything. Leadership changes within the unit and more prevalently among upper administrators, reset priorities. The unit experienced dramatic declines in student enrollment, while a new funding formula required adjustments in budgeting.

Notably in May 2025, two bills approved by the Tennessee Legislature and signed by the governor mandated ending diversity, equity and inclusion in state and local government offices and institutions, including all public universities.

The provost and the dean said the University of Memphis responded by complying with the law, including closure of the campus' high-profile Office of Multicultural Affairs.

Both administrators noted that the impact of the prohibitions on curriculum and instruction were negligible, aside from some skittish uncertainty about boundaries.

The University of Memphis' online statement explaining its administrative and operational adherence to the new laws stipulated that academic freedoms remain protected: *"The law specifically states that it*

*does not infringe on academic freedom and free speech in the classroom. The law does not impact the faculty's ability to freely engage in the dissemination of knowledge and lead robust, respectful debate in the classroom."*

For purposes of reaccreditation, how the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media has reframed diversity within the unit is discussed in Standard 4 of this site team report.

By the time the team arrived on campus during the second week in November, the unit was counting down the final weeks of fall 2025. The department was engaged in the kinds of daily demands spelled out in the self-study, while also glancing ahead, devoting increased energies to accelerating growth and upgrading functional but outdated facilities.

The Journalism and Strategic Media Department maintains a strong legacy of support from alumni, while building bonds with current students. Most current majors participating in site team meetings praised the department, including one breakout session that turned rhapsodic when students were asked to share their views of the chair.

Administrators, department leaders, faculty and students were asked for overall impressions, as were more than 20 alumni, campus representatives and professional observers. Most by far were favorable in assessing outcomes of the current reaccreditation period and hopeful about the road ahead.

#### **Unit performance with regard to indicators:**

**(a) The unit has a written mission statement and a written strategic long-range plan that provides vision and direction for its future, meaningful short-term measurements, identifies needs and resources for its mission and goals and is supported by university administration outside the unit.**

Student preparation for the workforce is the starting point for the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media's 26-word mission statement:

*"We produce career-ready graduates for ever-changing media professions. We produce industry-relevant research and engage in profession-driven public service for the benefit of our communities and industries."*

The unit approved a 2025-2030 Strategic Plan in January 2025. The document outlines seven goals that match the strategic objectives of the College of Communication and Fine Arts, the department's administrative home. The college had in turn developed its plan after the University of Memphis announced a campuswide strategic plan in 2023.

The unit's plan is commendable in setting an aspirational tone with a cohesive sense of direction. What the department described as a work-in-progress is not overflowing with specific timelines and measurable outcomes at this time. The self-study describes pandemic pressures, leadership changes and a rocky 2024 among the factors affecting the pace and depth of planning. But it also claims substantial progress, based on both the new plan and the previous strategic plan that was in place for most of the review period.

The provost and the dean of the College of Communication and Fine Arts both said they supported the department. Both cited the value that the unit adds to the college and to the campus more broadly.

**The unit posts its mission statement and strategic plan in a prominent, easy-to-find place on its website.**

The mission statement and strategic plan do not appear on the opening screen of the department's website. But they are quickly visible after clicking the "About" tab. Statements on Mission, Vision and Values appear, along with a link to the Strategic Plan.

**Describe in detail how the mission statement/strategic plan is implemented, plays into the daily life of the unit and its effectiveness in driving progress. Who has responsibility for keeping the plan updated? Is it revised regularly to deal with rapidly changing issues of instruction and technology?**

Mission statement themes on student readiness for work and unit responsiveness to fast-evolving changes in media are apparent throughout the self-study, curriculum and other department material.

The current strategic plan is relatively new, in place just since January 2025 following faculty approval. Preparing it, the self-study explains, was a sluggish process, slowed as the department conducted an internal search for a new chair and as new university and college administrators established new priorities.

Eventually, faculty task forces developed details and department leaders collaborated in revising the plan, based on the same seven objectives used in the university's 2023 strategic plans and in the College of Communication and Fine Arts' 2025 plan.

1. Aggressively provide access.
2. Create opportunities to succeed
3. Outcomes-focused academics
4. Strengthen research enterprise
5. Recruit, retain, reward and recognize our people
6. Exemplify operational excellence
7. Generate and steward financial resources.

### **STRATEGIC PLAN, 2018**

As for the previous plan in place through 2024, enrollment growth rates were among strategic objectives not fulfilled. But the plan is associated with several successes, in full or at least in part.

#### **Among the highest priorities showing progress, the unit:**

- Updated professional knowledge and skills as part of classroom instruction.
- Welcomed and nurtured learning and mentorship for a diverse student body.
- Helped students increase mastery of critical thinking, media literacy, multimedia, professionalism and writing.

#### **Among values sustained from 2018 strategic plan, the unit:**

- Advised and mentored the department's students.
- Encouraged global perspectives through student participation in study-abroad programs and by hosting international media professionals and exchange students.
- Sustained a collegial work and learning environment that supports cultural diversity, encouraging a richness of academic expression.

#### **Strategic plan actions completed or ongoing:**

- Launched department's interdisciplinary Ph.D. program.
- Hired a professional coordinator in response to the need to help students applying for internships and graduates preparing for jobs.
- Devoted additional funds to encourage participation in study-abroad programs.
- Launched a Sports Media concentration.

- Endowed more scholarships and student travel funds.
- Won approval and launched a Creative Mass Media concentration.
- Hosted undergraduate recruitment events each fall and spring.
- Started an advertising campaign for online public relations, undergraduate and graduate.
- Renovated the lobby and replaced an outdated elevator in Meeman Journalism Building.

The chair leads development and oversight of the strategic plan, involving other faculty contributors. As a work-in-progress, the document is subject to ongoing updates.

**(b) 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 chair had completed 18 months in the top job at the time of the site visit. Nearly every individual asked by the team to summarize his chairmanship concluded he was highly effective.

The provost and dean praised his management of the department. Some local media managers described the chair as an exceptional steward of the program. Other media leaders were not yet familiar with the chair first-hand.

The chair received a rating of excellent in the one annual performance evaluation since his May 2024 appointment. The dean's positive observations and impressions match faculty members' more specific sentiments. "Anything I've asked, he's delivered," said one. Another: "I don't see a lot of leaders that care about (a worker's) personal life."

**Characterize in depth the leadership of the unit as an agent for progress, advocate for the unit's fields of study within the university and aggressive connector with alumni. What significant achievements can be attributed to the leader? Has the leader built partnerships within the university? Is the leader seen as a strong advocate for equitable opportunities and broad participation? Is faculty and student representation of persons with limited representation in the field of journalism and media communication improving? Do scholars and professionals work collaboratively? Is creativity in curriculum, teaching and research sought and rewarded? Is the leader driving forward the curriculum (while respecting faculty governance and required process) to keep up with a rapidly changing media world?**

Eighteen months on the job may not be enough for declaring a thorough assessment of leadership depth for the chair. But the record so far is impressive.

Before the appointment, he served on the faculty for 12 years, including five as assistant chair. Faculty members said they valued his institutional knowledge, breadth of knowledge and his service disposition. "He listens," one professor noted. "Then takes action." Another described him as "kind and fair."

The faculty almost uniformly pointed to recent progress within the department in one form or another. Several described a problem-solving, detail-oriented, forward-thinking leader inclined to seek ideas and feedback. One faculty member questioned spending priorities, suggesting much more could be done for student media. Just one person with otherwise favorable comments longed for fewer faculty meetings.

University of Memphis administrators cited the chair's willingness to collaborate and his knack for engaging with those reporting to him. "He understands where faculty is going."

During a team lunch discussion, alumni, university colleagues and local professionals described the unit as deeply engaged in the community. “They have really good leadership,” said one person. “I don’t get the sense of dysfunction.”

Most current students participating in site team meetings praised the department. One breakout session turned rhapsodic when students were asked about the chair. Several recalled his accessibility and compassion as their instructor in previous semesters. Others mentioned the chair’s weekly newsletter or pleasant encounters in the hallways.

One editor who occasionally participates in programs on campus likewise referred to the chair as accessible and responsive. Information provided on students and graduates as prospects for internships and jobs was especially helpful.

The chair “cares passionately about the business and about the department,” said one community figure with experience in journalism education and local media. “He’s the right guy, right now.”

Among accomplishments:

- Accelerated and concentrated student recruitment activities with promising early results.
- Implemented a new strategic plan aligned with college and university plans.
- Instituted procedures for quicker job searches.
- Launched the department’s portion of an interdisciplinary doctoral program intended to strengthen the unit’s research profile and elevate its brand.
- Restructured the leadership team, creating an associate chair and a council for undergraduate studies and repeating the same for graduate studies.
- Exceeded recent past \$30,000 fundraising effort with \$150,000 in new donations.
- Provided administrative oversight involving the Institute for Public Service Reporting’s open-source project and a \$300,000 award by the Scripps Howard Foundation to the University of Memphis.

**(c) The unit annually updates its data on the ACEJMC searchable database website (<https://lookup.acejmc.org>).**

By the time the November site visit started, the department had posted 2025 data on the website.

**(d) The unit gathers, maintains and analyzes enrollment, retention and graduation data and posts them annually in a prominent, easy-to-find place on its websites.**

Enrollment erosion is an abiding preoccupation for the university and perhaps even more so for the department. Growth is the No. 1 long-term strategic goal for both.

Total university enrollment peaked in 2020, at 22,205. The undergraduate high mark was in 2017, with 17,394 enrolled. By fall 2025, the total figure dropped 11.5%, to 19,652. Undergraduate enrollment declined by 10.7%, to 15,531,

The Department of Journalism and Strategic Media’s enrollment decline is a more dramatic 36%. During the 2019 site visit, the unit reported 371 journalism undergraduates. As of fall 2025, the total was 237.

In response, the self-study described heightened attention focused on reversing the declines. Actions

included more direct outreach to high schools, more involvement with scholastic press associations, more promotional advertising, and hiring of a recruiter by the college. The chair pointed to promising indicators of success in recent daily data on applications and acceptances.

Getting to the details on the unit's website requires a bit of navigation: Click "About." Then click "Public Accountability." This leads to enrollment figures. Clicking another link leads to retention and graduation rates. Information is up to date and easy to read.

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

Faculty engagement appeared to be ample. Faculty members are extensively involved in committee activities and curriculum development. They described having a voice in unit policy. Some cited the chair's excellent listening skills as beneficial to faculty governance.

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

Records indicate that the university followed established procedures both for hiring a new chair in 2024 and completing his first evaluation a year later, a highly favorable review.

**(g) Faculty, staff and students have avenues to express concerns and have them addressed.**

Generally acceptable policies and practices are in place.

**SUMMARY:**

The department navigated a tumultuous period while maintaining administrative and structural strengths. The new chair, selected through an internal search, reconstructed the leadership team. He earned accolades from faculty, administrators and outside observers for collaborative, rational and forward-looking management. He implemented a new strategic plan aligned with the university's and the college's short- and long-term aspirations. He launched the unit's share of an interdisciplinary doctoral program intended to embolden the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media's profile and value on campus and beyond.

**COMPLIANCE**

## **PART II — Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction**

### **Unit performance with regard to indicators:**

Discussions of indicators b, c and f should describe and evaluate individual academic sequences in the unit.

**(a) Students in the unit complete academic requirements for a baccalaureate degree that meet the liberal arts and sciences/general education requirements of the institution. Programs may identify classes within the unit that contribute to a liberal arts and social sciences perspective for graduates from the unit.**

The Department of Journalism and Strategic Media at the University of Memphis offers two undergraduate majors: Journalism and Strategic Media. Students who major in journalism choose between four areas of concentration: Journalism, Broadcast Journalism, Sports Media and Creative Mass Media. Those who major in strategic media choose between three areas of concentration: Advertising, Public Relations and Integrated Social Media.

To meet the university's general education and B.A. degree requirements, students in the unit must complete at least 41 hours of liberal arts and science courses in communication, math, humanities/fine arts, social and behavioral science, natural science and history. Requirements also include six hours of 2000-level foreign language coursework. To be eligible for the 2000-level courses, most of the unit's students also must complete six hours of 1000-level foreign language classes.

The unit's seven conceptual courses contribute to students' liberal arts education. These are: JRSM 4702 Media, Diversity and Society, JRSM 4704 Issues in Sports & Media, JRSM 4708 Media Ethics, JRSM 4710 Social Media & Society, JRSM 4716 Media History, JRSM 4720 Presidents and the Press and STRM 4706 PR Ethics and Advocacy.

Students in all journalism concentrations are required to select two of those courses while those in the public relations and integrated social media concentrations must take JRSM 4706 PR Ethics and Advocacy and JRSM 4710 Social Media and Society. Those in advertising also must take JRSM 4710 Social Media and Society. They may choose their second theoretical elective from among the department's conceptual offerings.

The department also offers a handful of conceptual courses that are available to students across the university. These are JRSM 1700 Intro to Media, JRSM 4700 Media Law and STRM 3200 Intro to Strategic Media.

**(b) The unit provides a balance between theoretical and conceptual courses, professional skills courses, and courses that integrate theory and skills to achieve the range of student values and competencies listed by the Council.**

Students in both of the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media's majors and in each of its concentrations take a mix of theoretical/conceptual and skills courses. Both types of classes are spread throughout the curriculum, ensuring that students at each level get a mix of each. A review of the department's syllabuses also indicates that within skills courses, students are exposed to the principles behind those skills, and in theoretical courses attention is paid to how theory can be applied.

There is a lead instructor for each multi-section course who coordinates “the production of class materials and the development of course modules to ensure that all sections of the course have identical outcomes. This coordination includes on-campus, online and Lambuth Campus sections.”

All students take a 16-hour set of core classes. These are: JRSM 1700 Intro to Media, JRSM 1750 Media Writing I, JRSM 2121 Media Writing II, JRSM 4700 Media Law, JRSM 4950 Professional Development (1 credit) and either JRSM 4930 Media Internship or JRSM 4940 Student Media Practicum.

Journalism and Broadcast Journalism require 36 hours of coursework beyond the core; each of the unit’s other concentrations have a 45-hour requirement. When asked about the difference, the department chair said students in the other five programs have a prescribed nine hours of outside classes that mesh with their academic program while those in Journalism and Broadcast Journalism do not, in order to leave space for students to complete a minor or take non-departmental electives that correspond to their individual interests.

### **Journalism**

Students who choose this major are required to take JOUR 3526 Multimedia Storytelling and JOUR 3900 Visual Media. As noted above, they must take two of the unit’s seven conceptual courses, which include JRSM 4702 Media, Diversity & Society and JRSM 4708 Media Ethics.

Students in the major who do not choose a concentration take 24 hours of required skills classes. These are: JOUR 3120 Reporting, JOUR 4998 Multimedia News Lab, two classes from a list of nine writing/reporting classes such as JOUR 4160 Food Writing/Reporting, JOUR 4165 Feature Writing/Reporting, JOUR 4180 Public Issues Writing/Reporting and JOUR 4183 Open-Source Investigative Reporting and two classes from a list of nine options that include JOUR 4540 Podcasting, JRSM 3800 Radio Production, CRMM 4140 Publication Design and CRMM 4600 Creative Social Video. Students complete their degree requirements by taking two departmental elective courses.

### **Broadcast Journalism**

Students who choose this concentration also take 24 hours of required skills classes: JRSM 1800 Intro to Radio, JOUR 3629 Broadcast Reporting I, JOUR 4629 Broadcast Reporting II, JOUR 4639 TV News Producing and JOUR 4998 Multimedia News Lab. They then select one course from the list of nine specialized writing reporting classes including those noted in the journalism concentration, one from a list of nine that includes JOUR 4530 Innovative Storytelling Techniques, CRMM 4500 Web Publish I: html/CSS, CRMM 4550 Web Publish II: html/CSS and CRMM 4526 Photojournalism and one departmental elective.

### **Creative Mass Media Concentration**

Creative Mass Media students take 33 hours of required skills classes: STRM 3210 Intro to Strategic Writing, STRM 4221 Ad Creative Strategy, CRMM 4500 Web Publish I: html/CSS and CRMM 4900 Creative Media Lab; four from a list of eight that includes several of those also listed under Journalism and Broadcast Journalism as well as CRMM 4220 Print Communication Design and STRM 4295 Campaigns Implementation & Evaluation. Rounding out the requirements are nine hours of classes taken through the Art Department; either a graphic design or photography focus.



### **Sports Media Concentration**

Like those in the Creative Mass Media concentration, students who choose Sports Media take 33 hours of required skills courses: JOUR 3120 Reporting or JOUR 3629 Broadcast Reporting I and COMM 2030 Smart Phone Video Production, JOUR 4150 Sports Writing/Reporting, JOUR 4155 Multimedia Sports Reporting, JOUR 4535 Social Media Journalism, STRM 3200 Intro to Strategic Media and STRM 3210 Intro to Strategic Writing, two departmental electives and six hours of courses from the Sport and Leisure Management program. Options include SLS 3105 Sport/Leisure as Pop Culture, SLS 3204 Organizational Analysis Sport/Leisure, SLS 3650 Promotions in Sport & Leisure, SLS 4135 Sport/Culture Global Perspectives, SLS 4500 Sport/Leisure Marketing and SLC Fan Behavior/Rivalry.

### **Strategic Media Major**

Students in this major choose between three concentrations: Advertising, Public Relations and Integrated Social Media. All of these students take 21 hours of a mix of conceptual and skills-based required courses in the department plus nine hours of marketing courses. Departmental courses are: STRM 3200 Intro to Strategic Media, STRM 3210 Intro to Strategic Writing, STRM 3520 Audience & Analytics, STRM 4290 Campaign Research & Planning, STRM 4295 Campaign Implementation & Evaluation, JRSM 3905 Graphics for Strategic Media and JRSM 4710 Social Media & Society.

On the marketing side, students select three of the following offerings: MKTG 3010 Principles of Marketing, MKTG 3140 Integrated Marketing Communications, MKTG 3340 Principles of Social Media Marketing and MKTG 4630 Social Communication Strategy.

### **Advertising Concentration**

Besides the overall requirements of their major, students who choose this concentration must take STRM 3211 Ad Copywriting, STRM 4220 Branding & Strategic Media, STRM 4221 Ad Creative Strategy, STRM 4222 Account Planning & Management as well as one of the department's conceptual offerings.

### **Public Relations Concentration**

Like advertising students, those in the public relations concentration take a mix of conceptual and skills classes. These are: STRM 3210 Public Relations Writing, STRM 4706 PR Ethics & Advocacy; two from a list that includes STRM 4230 Event Planning for PR, STRM 4231 Crisis Communication, STRM 4232 Entertainment PR, STRM 4234 Nonprofit PR and either STRM 4220 Branding & Strategic Media, STRM 4222 Account Planning & Management, JOUR 3526 Multimedia Storytelling or JOUR 4540 Podcasting.

### **Integrated Social Media Concentration**

As is the case with advertising and public relations students, those in the integrated social media concentration have specific requirements beyond those of the major. In this case the requirements are: STRM 3213 Social Media Writing, STRM 4706 PR Ethics and Advocacy, STRM 4210 Social Media Planning & Management, two classes from a list that includes CRMM 4600 Creative Social Video, CRMM 4920 Information Design and JOUR 4540 Podcasting.

Students said the media writing classes are particularly strong and appreciate the opportunities they have to practice what they learn through hands-on assignments.

**(c) Instruction, whether on-site or online, synchronous or asynchronous, is demanding and current, and is responsive to professional expectations of digital and technological media competencies.**

Members of the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media's full-time faculty have, on average, 13 years of professional experience that they draw on in their classes. Many are active in local and professional organizations such as the American Advertising Federation, the Public Relations Society of America, the Society of Professional Journalists, the National Association of Black Journalists, Investigative Reporters and Editors and others. Many take advantage of the university's location in a mid-sized media market to invite industry professionals to their classes as guest speakers and use LinkedIn Learning tutorials to teach software and other skills in both on-campus and online classes.

The 10 ACEJMC professional values and competencies are introduced in JRSM 1700 Intro to Media and JRSM 1750 Media Writing I and are reinforced throughout the curriculum. Syllabuses for every course taught by the department in a given semester are publicly available on the unit's website. Syllabuses for previous semesters also are available. Each syllabus has a list of which values and competencies will be addressed in the course and how those values and competencies will be met.

For example, JOUR 3120 Reporting syllabus lists six values and competencies including "Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;" "Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;" and "Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work."

The syllabus then states students will meet those values and competencies in the following ways: "Present more meaningful context in stories through various forms of research and reporting;" "Learn the nuances of interviewing expert local and national sources;" "Balance views in stories to achieve fairness and accuracy;" "Study alternative story-telling techniques."

Capstone courses in both of the department's majors and all of its concentrations have a portfolio requirement. The portfolios are assessed by outside reviewers and shared with industry professionals at the unit's annual ProDay event. Several syllabuses note that requirement and remind students to add their best assignments to their folders.

In our meetings with them, students talked about the portfolios, reinforced what was in the self-study and said they found the portfolios good to have when looking for internships and jobs.

**(d) The unit demonstrates efforts to connect faculty and administrators to the professions they represent, with a specific understanding of the changing skills needed to be successful in the workplace.**

About one-half of the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media's faculty are on the professional or non-tenure track while the rest are tenured or on the tenure track. As noted above, they stay connected to their respective industries through their participation in, and often leadership of, their professional associations.

The unit's annual ProDay is a department-wide event. The self-study states, "faculty bring industry

leaders and experts to campus to meet one-on-one with graduating students to review their resumes, portfolios and broadcast reels. Students receive individual feedback during their meetings, but professionals also provide feedback to the department on areas of strength and areas for improvement in the work. The day also features a keynote speaker whose role is to share insights on the job market, professionalism and personal branding techniques. The goal of the event is twofold: one, to connect students to the industry as they enter the job market, and two, to keep the department connected to industry professionals.”

**(e) Student-faculty classroom ratios facilitate effective teaching and learning in all courses. Except for campaigns courses, the ratio in skills and laboratory sections, whether on-site or online, should not exceed 20-1.**

The student-faculty ratio in each of the unit’s skills and lab courses is 20-1 or less.

**(f) 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. Units may award academic credit for internships in fields related to journalism and mass communications, but credit should not exceed six semester credits (or nine quarter hours).**

When students take courses for internship credit at appropriate professional organizations, the unit must show ongoing and extensive dual supervision by the unit’s faculty and professionals.

Students may take up to nine semester credits (or their equivalent) at professional media outlets 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.

All Department of Journalism and Strategic Media students must complete at least one three-credit internship or media practicum and may take an additional three hours of internship/practicum for credit. While internships are available in fall, spring and summer, the practicum is only available in the fall and spring semesters.

The department maintains a LinkedIn page where internship opportunities are updated regularly. Students find their internships on their own or with the help of faculty who are actively engaged in industry organizations.

Before they are allowed to register for an internship or practicum, students must complete a Student Internship Agreement form and employers must complete an Employer Internship Agreement Form to outline what the student will do during the internship/practicum. The department’s internship coordinator then certifies that the experience qualifies for credit.

An on-site supervisor assigns tasks and oversees the student’s work and the department’s internship coordinator works with students and employers throughout the semester to ensure the experience is a meaningful one. To receive credit a student must work a minimum of 150 hours across the semester, contribute to their online portfolio and write a detailed report. At the end of the semester the on-site supervisor completes an evaluation of the student that is considered when the internship coordinator assigns a final grade.

Students said they like the internship requirement and complimented the department's faculty and staff for the ways in which they facilitate the internships and practicums.

## **SUMMARY:**

The program's curriculum is a good mix of conceptual and skills classes. The 10 ACEJMC Values and Competencies are introduced early and reinforced often. Students take a core set of classes and are able to tailor the major to their individual interests through electives and courses taken outside of the unit. Students describe the environment as open, welcoming and caring. Alumni report being well-prepared for the field upon graduation.

## **COMPLIANCE**

## **PART II — Standard 3: Assessment of Learning Outcomes**

*The Accrediting Committee and Council seek site-team reports on assessment that are appropriately detailed for a judgment on compliance that is informed, fair and consistent from one team to another.*

### **Unit performance with regard to indicators:**

**(a) The unit has a written assessment plan that has been implemented, is up to date and addresses contemporary curricular issues, including instruction related to the rapidly changing digital media world.**

The department maintains a 13-page assessment plan that clearly outlines programmatic expectations for academic outcomes in core courses and across the curriculum. The self-study cited four updates to the plan since the 2019 ACEJMC visit, the most recent in spring 2025. Assessment plan changes include ample attention to evolving developments in media. Many of these efforts are commendable, with evidence that the unit used the full cycle of assessment to enhance curriculum and instruction.

- After feedback from professionals including alumni identified increasingly overlapping skills in advertising and public relations jobs at various agencies, and after the unit identified redundancies in the two concentrations, they were merged as one Strategic Media major in 2023.
- Outside reviewers working with students noticed a need for additional work on fundamentals. After the unit became aware of concerns, introductory writing courses were reformulated. One course extended emphasis on basic grammar for six weeks, allowing more time for students to grasp language lessons. According to the unit, “The outcome has been stronger writing in more advanced and specialized writing courses across the department.”
- As a response to increased interest and employment opportunities in sports, the unit launched a sports media concentration in fall 2023. This interdisciplinary option “prepares students for jobs across the sports media landscape from traditional sports journalism and sports communication roles to in-house team media positions and online/startup sports information ventures.”

**The unit posts its assessment plan in a prominent, easy-to-find place on its website.**

The plan is posted and easy to find. While it is not housed on the department’s introductory page, it is readily visible after clicking on “Accreditation” or by using the website’s search function.

**(b) The unit defines the goals for learning that students must achieve, including the “Professional Values and Competencies” of the Council. (See Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction.)**

ACEJMC’s Professional Values and Competencies are the foundation of the department’s student learning outcomes. All 10 are at the heart of the assessment plan, fully addressed in evaluations of interns conducted by workplace supervisors and thoroughly represented in the unit’s curriculum map.

The unit defines three layers of student learning criteria associated with assessment – awareness, understanding and application.

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

The assessment plan establishes two direct measures: portfolios and internships.

1. Student portfolios: Capstone courses are the staging ground for all majors to gather highlights from their body of work. The resulting portfolios are graded by faculty and reviewed by outside professionals using a rubric designed with employer expectations in mind. An additional round of portfolio feedback occurs each spring when reviewers visit the campus for Pro Day, sharing critiques with students and overall observations and suggestions with faculty.

2. Internships: Workplace supervisors assess the work of student internships using criteria based on ACEJMC's 10 values and competencies. The department's coordinator of internships and career services in turn aggregates and analyzes the workplace evaluations. External internships are the most frequent choice for mandatory work experience. The self-study describes this direct measure as a steady source of insight for reflecting on the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction.

The plan lists seven indirect measures: 1) Online exit surveys of students in capstone courses each spring. 2) Exit interviews with graduates and student evaluations of their instructors. 3) Student awards and competitions, representing a range of media disciplines. 4) Evaluation of readiness for workplace experiences and other observations covered in required written reports by students after internship and other work experiences. 5) Survey of program graduates every three years, including reflections on quality of educational experiences and current job status. 6) Service projects that involve opportunities for feedback from alumni, professionals, clients and others. 7) Career placement data gathered from graduate surveys and alumni.

**(d) At least one direct and/or indirect measure should include journalism and mass communication professionals engaged in assessment data collection.**

The self-study describes robust engagement of professionals, including many alumni, in assessment activities. A journalism initiative inviting professionals to visit with graduating seniors for individual reviews expanded in 2022 to become departmentwide. It includes consultation with faculty members on observations. Both direct measures and most indirect measures offer similar opportunities for involving professionals.

**(e) The unit collects and reports data from its assessment activities and applies the data to improve curriculum and instruction. There is substantial, concrete evidence of "closing the loop. Multiple examples of "closing the loop" are evident.**

The department describes a diligent, systematic and productive approach to assessment. At the start of each fall semester, faculty members receive a copy of the latest assessment report. Individual disciplines within the unit meet to discuss opportunities to drive changes in curriculum based on the results. Minor recommendations may be implemented soon after. Major ones are reviewed by the Undergraduate Council that monitors assessment. Viable curriculum ideas may be advanced to the college and the university for approval. The unit presents updates on the status of plans at the start of each spring.

## **SUMMARY:**

The Department of Journalism and Strategic Media maintains a vigorous system for fulfilling the assessment standard. Even during periods of disruption, the structure for gathering data, discussing results and considering curricular revisions seems to carry on. The unit has procedures and practices in place for completing the full cycle of assessment processes, including an annual assessment summary.

## **COMPLIANCE**

## **PART II — Standard 4: Advancing a Culturally Proficient Workforce**

*The unit demonstrates it offers a program that fosters equal opportunity, respect for a range of points of view and provides participatory opportunity for all elements of society while educating culturally proficient communicators prepared for a global society. The unit ensures that all individuals are treated fairly and with dignity, emphasizing shared values of professionalism, personal responsibility, and excellence. The unit focuses on empowering all individuals through equal access to opportunities and the promotion of skills, regardless of background or identity.*

### **Context and Legislative Environment**

In spring 2025, ACEJMC revised Standard 4, now titled Advancing a Culturally Proficient Workforce. The fall 2025 site visits are the first conducted under this version. The revision reaffirms ACEJMC's commitment to fairness, equal opportunity and respect while emphasizing measurable outcomes tied to inclusion and professional readiness. ACEJMC applies its standards in compliance with all federal and state laws.

This evaluation takes place amid significant policy changes in Tennessee. House Bill 0923 — known as the “Dismantling DEI Departments Act” — was signed into law on May 9, 2025, and took effect May 15. The law prohibits public colleges and universities from operating offices or programs that grant preferential treatment based on race, sex, ethnicity, or similar traits. Institutions must revise or eliminate programs that conflict with the law, ensuring all initiatives emphasize individual merit and compliance with state definitions of nondiscrimination.

ACEJMC's revision incorporated input from accredited units, the Accrediting Committee and Council members. The council — established by journalism, advertising, public relations and mass communication organizations — includes a majority of members representing professional associations listed at [acejmc.org/about/member-associations](https://acejmc.org/about/member-associations). This composition links the standard directly to workforce expectations and professional practice.

While the language of the standard has evolved, its purpose remains consistent: to promote fairness, opportunity and respect while preparing graduates to be culturally proficient communicators in a global, interconnected world.

The department implemented its Plan for Advancing a Culturally Proficient Workforce in September 2025 to align with ACEJMC's new framework and Tennessee's legal requirements.

### **Indicators:**

**(a) The unit has a written plan, implemented and discussed annually, that promotes a standards-based and inclusive curriculum and fosters a culturally proficient faculty, staff, and student population. The program embraces differences and offers a supportive climate for learning, working, and collaborating, and it assesses progress toward the achievement of the plan. The plan includes the unit's definition of equal opportunity and standards-based success. It identifies current populations and groups with limited representation in the field of journalism and media communication and focuses on identifying opportunities to broaden intellectual and ideological diversity, ensuring all individuals are treated with fairness and dignity.**

The Department of Journalism and Strategic Media has a longstanding record of advancing equity and cultural proficiency in journalism and mass communication education. This legacy was nationally recognized when the department received the 2023 AEJMC Equity & Diversity Award, honoring measurable progress in diversifying faculty, expanding curriculum content related to social justice and



media representation, and creating an inclusive climate for students. The award highlighted faculty leadership in building a program that exemplifies cultural proficiency in both classroom instruction and professional preparation.

For more than a decade, the department has integrated social justice, representation and ethical communication into its teaching and outreach. Its partnerships with the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change and consistent engagement with Memphis' diverse communities have shaped a culture that values inclusion as a professional standard rather than an aspirational goal.

In metropolitan Memphis, about 46% of residents are Black, 40% are white, and 8% are Hispanic/Latino, compared to 16.5% Black, 78.4% white and 7.5% Hispanic/Latino in the state of Tennessee.

#### **Department of Journalism and Strategic Media – Student Demographics 2024–2025**

As reported in the 2025 Self-Study, the department's enrollment reflects the diversity of the community it serves. The student population includes:

- 41% Black/African American
- 43% White
- 8% Hispanic/Latino
- Women comprise 57% of total enrollment

#### **Department of Journalism and Strategic Media – Faculty Demographics 2024–2025**

The 2025 Self-Study reports the following demographic breakdown for full-time faculty:

- 60% women
- 22% Black
- 11% Asian
- 16% international

Compared with the 2018–2019 ACEJMC site visit, when the department reported approximately 25% faculty of color and 45% students identifying as Black/African American, the 2025 data indicate steady progress in maintaining racial and gender diversity consistent with the demographics of the surrounding community. The department continues to demonstrate a strong alignment between its student body and the population it serves, supporting ACEJMC's emphasis on preparing graduates to work and communicate effectively in diverse environments.

The department provides equitable access through Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Faculty provide materials in multiple formats and ensure accessibility compliance. Annual training covers captioning, color contrast and transcription standards. The department audits at least one online course per major each year and monitors UDL adoption.

Currently the unit maintains a written plan and annual review process that meets ACEJMC requirements and ensures compliance with state law.

The department defines equal opportunity as ensuring that every student, faculty and staff member has access to the same high-quality educational and professional experiences regardless of background or identity. Standards-based success is measured through learning outcomes, professional readiness and inclusive practices aligned with ACEJMC competencies.

The Assessment Action Plan (Spring 2025) confirms an annual review cycle that includes faculty analysis each August and documented "closing the loop" reporting. The plan outlines a three-phase

process: (1) identifying student learning outcomes aligned with ACEJMC professional values, (2) collecting data from direct measures such as portfolios and capstone projects each spring, and (3) analyzing findings during the August faculty retreat to determine curricular or pedagogical changes. Defined KPIs include goals such as “students will demonstrate cultural awareness in reporting and strategic communication projects” and “students will apply ethical reasoning in diverse communication contexts.” Outcomes are assessed on a five-level scale ranging from not demonstrated to exceeds expectations, with annual benchmarks for improvement. Faculty document specific action steps based on these assessments to promote continuous improvement.

The 2025 Assessment Action Plan and 2022–2025 DEI reports confirm measurable KPI progress and accountability cycles. Faculty use both direct and indirect measures — senior portfolios, internship evaluations and alumni surveys — to track progress and guide improvements. Curriculum maps link JRSN 4702 Media, Diversity & Society, JRSN 4708 Media Ethics, JRSN 4704 Issues in Sports and Media and 4710 Social Media and Society to ACEJMC outcomes in cultural awareness, fairness and collaboration.

**(b) The unit’s curriculum develops skilled and culturally proficient communicators capable of collaborating through multicultural teams and understanding global perspectives. Curriculum instruction addresses a wide range of issues and viewpoints relevant to media communications in an interconnected world.**

The Plan for Advancing a Culturally Proficient Workforce (revised September 2025) outlines measurable objectives for inclusion and access. Objective One focuses on graduating culturally proficient communicators; Objective Two addresses removing barriers to success.

According to the self-study, the department regularly invites diverse professionals to engage with students. Guest speakers included Daja Henry (The Marshall Project), Johnnie Walker (music executive), Daniel Wilkerson (*FOX 13*), Tyrone Powers (Powers Consulting Group) and Ena Esco (multimedia host). Additional speakers — Brittany Mobley, Keli McAlister and Rachel Lies — represent female leaders across communications fields. These sessions, combined with Pulitzer-winning journalists and nonprofit communicators, reinforce the department’s connection between diversity and professional readiness.

Several core courses explicitly address fairness, representation and global perspectives, which are essential workforce requirements. Assignments and discussions encourage students to apply these principles in reporting, analysis and strategic communication. Curriculum mapping in the 2025 Assessment Plan demonstrates alignment between course outcomes and ACEJMC’s professional values.

**(c) The unit demonstrates effective efforts to strengthen all faculty members’ awareness of the value of social and societal dynamics, plus fairness and accessibility in preparing students to embrace a variety of perspectives. The unit takes proactive steps to recruit and retain faculty and staff who bring professional expertise and varied perspectives, including from groups with limited representation in the fields of journalism and media communication, to enrich the educational experience.**

Faculty development includes annual participation in workshops, conferences and institutional training. The 2023–2024 DEI report indicates that 87% of full-time faculty engaged in professional development activities related to cultural proficiency. Between 2022 and 2025, three new full-time faculty members joined the unit — two from historically underrepresented backgrounds — with expertise in strategic media, multimedia journalism and broadcast production. Recruitment emphasizes professional experience, classroom innovation and cross-platform teaching. The department, pursuant to state law,

said that it does not discriminate based on any protected category under federal or state law and is prohibited from taking actions to increase or promote diversity, equity and inclusion.

**(d) In alignment with the institution's mission, the unit demonstrates efforts to recruit, retain, and graduate students from all backgrounds, reflecting the institution's commitment to preparing individuals for professional success in a global society.**

The University's Office of Multicultural Affairs closed in 2025 following a legal review prompted by new state DEI restrictions. University leaders described the closure as compliance-driven rather than a retreat from inclusion, though faculty and students said communication about the change was unclear and concerns remain.

Student recruitment and retention efforts align directly with the university's mission to serve a diverse population and prepare graduates for success in a global society. The department participates in high school outreach programs, community partnerships and scholarship initiatives designed to attract students from underrepresented backgrounds in the Memphis area. Recruitment activities include campus preview days, journalism workshops for high school students and collaboration with local organizations to build early awareness of media careers. These initiatives support the university's goals while promoting pathways to professional readiness.

**(e) The unit demonstrates it has an inclusive climate of belonging, free of harassment and all forms of discrimination, consistent with applicable laws. The unit accommodates the needs of individuals with disabilities and values the unique contributions of each member of the community, including contributions from historically underrepresented groups, promoting fairness and respect for all.**

Students and faculty consistently described the department as open and inclusive. "Professors were welcoming," one student said. "I felt I could be myself as a nonwhite person." Another added, "They don't make me feel inferior ... they highlight success in my writing." Faculty echoed this sentiment: "Our campus is a minority-majority campus. Our students welcome these conversations." Another faculty member said, "When I got here, this was a very warm and welcoming environment. I've really found my people."

Students cited collaboration and advocacy as key takeaways. "Diversity to me is everyone from different backgrounds coming together to create something beautiful," one student said, referring to The Daily Helmsman.

A faculty member reflected on working within the new legal boundaries: "We may not be able to say the D-word, which feels crazy. But sometimes you don't have to – sometimes you just have to show up and see a student for who they are."

One student summarized it best:

*"I feel like there's going to be disagreements no matter where you go. What matters is how you handle it, and this department shows us how to properly handle it ... You can find disagreements anywhere, but we can still have a civil conversation because we're adults, and that's how it should be handled. This department has been advocating for that for so long. You will find people's different opinions all the time, but that's what makes us special and awesome and cool, and that's what I love about this department."*

Both the dean and provost emphasized transparency and adherence to core values. "We are still doing the work," the dean said. "We want to help students succeed regardless of what they look like or where they come from."

The provost added, “We will comply with state and federal law, but no directive has restricted teaching.”

A member of the faculty added, “We didn’t have to change a word in our Media Diversity & Society class – it already looked big-picture.”

Several faculty noted the unit’s service to students with disabilities. One faculty member launched a weekly radio show on The Roar in partnership with Tiger Life, a campus program serving students with disabilities. The initiative gives these students a platform to share their experiences and perspectives on topics such as dating, campus accessibility and social perceptions. The program demonstrates the unit’s commitment to amplifying underrepresented voices, fostering empathy and cultural proficiency and providing hands-on learning opportunities that strengthen communication skills and community engagement.

The department partners with the Office of Disability Resources and Services to ensure accessibility and inclusive course design.

## **SUMMARY:**

The team found that the department demonstrates a data-informed approach to advancing a culturally proficient workforce. Evidence from faculty, students and institutional records shows measurable goals, accessible instruction and professional engagement consistent with ACEJMC’s updated Standard 4.

## **COMPLIANCE**

*Accreditation site visit teams will apply this standard in compliance with applicable federal and state laws and regulations, as well as the laws of the countries in which non-U.S. institutions are located.*

## **PART II — Standard 5: Faculty**

### **Unit performance with regard to indicators:**

#### **(a) Full-time faculty have primary responsibility for curricula, oversight of courses, research/creative activity and service.**

The Department of Journalism and Strategic Media has both tenure/tenure-track and non-tenure track faculty. The university's faculty handbook states, "non-tenure-track faculty appointments are categorized by their primary academic responsibilities: teaching, research, clinical, practice, adjunct and/or visiting appointments." Further, "full-time, non-tenure-track teaching faculty are hired primarily for teaching and institutional service. They are not generally expected to conduct research, provide public service, or provide disciplinary service as a condition of their employment." While those at the various levels of professor of teaching are hired primarily for teaching and institutional service, those who are professors of practice are "expected to perform professional service in accordance with their appointment."

During the review period eight of the unit's faculty members resigned or retired; all but one was replaced. At the time of the site visit the unit had 18 full-time faculty members. Ten are tenured or on the tenure track, three are assistant professors of teaching, four are professors of practice and one holds the Hardin Chair of Excellence, a non-tenure track position.

The department also hires a handful of part-time faculty each semester depending on its needs. There were three part-time faculty at the time of the site visit.

Faculty workload varies by rank. The Hardin Chair of Excellence teaches two classes per semester as do newly hired tenure-track assistant professors during their first year. Those on the tenure track typically teach three courses per semester and professors of teaching and practice have a 4-4 load.

With the exception of first-year tenure-track assistant professors, all of the unit's faculty members advise students, supervise master's degrees and sit on committees. Faculty are actively engaged in curriculum development, research/creative activity and service.

One faculty member said, "having a 4-4 or even 3-3 load per our tenure-track... is a little bit heavier than other schools and can be challenging at times with some of the extra projects."

Others echoed the sentiment, "... everybody's working really hard and teaching at a very high level . . . but the facilities are old and we're stretched," prompting questions about whether all the committee assignments are necessary.

The percentage of classes taught by full-time faculty in the three years preceding the visit was:

2024-2025 school year: 86%  
2023-2024 school year: 82%  
2022-2023 school year: 83%

#### **(b) The unit's faculty (full- and part-time) are highly qualified and keep their expertise current through professional development opportunities and maintain relationships with professional and scholarly associations.**

All of the department's full-time faculty members have at least a master's degree; half have doctorates. In general, part-time faculty must have at least a master's degree. The department has the option of hiring part-time faculty without a master's degree if the person has at least 10 years of professional experience and the department chair writes a letter verifying professional credentials.

As noted in Standard 2, on average, the department's faculty members have 13 years of professional experience with a handful having more than 25 years of experience. They also are experienced teachers. The average number of years of college teaching is 12.

As noted in Standard 2, many of the unit's faculty members are active in local, regional and national professional and scholarly organizations such as the American Advertising Federation, the Public Relations Society of America, the Society of Professional Journalists, the National Association of Black Journalists, Investigative Reporters and Editors, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, the International Communication Association, the Broadcast Education Association and others. Many take advantage of the university's location in a mid-sized media market to invite industry professionals to their classes as guest speakers and use LinkedIn Learning tutorials to teach software and other skills in both on-campus and online classes.

All new faculty go through a university-level teaching workshop and the department has offered a number of programs and workshops to stimulate and support effective teaching. Three of the unit's faculty members have won top teaching awards at AEJMC.

**(c) The unit requires, supports and rewards faculty research, creative activity and/or professional activity. Expectations for promotion and tenure are clear.**

Since 2021 the University of Memphis has been classified as an R1 institution. As a result, it has increased its focus on academic research and encouraged faculty to pursue external grant funding opportunities. The importance of external funding was reinforced in the site team's conversations with the provost, dean, department chair and several faculty members.

The self-study states, "tenured and tenure-track faculty are expected to prioritize traditional research publications, which include publication of refereed journal articles and books as well as presentations of research at refereed conferences. Applied research activities are also considered valuable; therefore, the unit's faculty has tailored its definition of scholarship/creative activity to the demands of the discipline. Professors engage in community-based scholarship, which applies the skills and knowledge of journalism and strategic media to community concerns."

Non-tenure-track faculty, particularly professors of practice, regularly pursue professional or creative work as freelance public relations consultants and contributors to local media outlets.

The department, college and university support research in a number of ways. The College of Communication and Fine Arts has three grant funding programs: Faculty Research Grants for initiating or expanding activities related to external grant proposals; Faculty Scholarship & Creative Activity Grants that have the potential to raise the college's profile, enhance faculty professional expertise and reputation, support community or industry engagement and partnership building, or lead to external funding; and the Arts & Health Research Team Grant to support interdisciplinary projects.

The department also provides \$2,500 in start-up research funds to new tenure-track faculty members.

Faculty members with at least seven years of service since appointment or a previous leave may apply for a half-year Professional Development Assignment (PDA) at full pay. Those with at least five years

of service since appointment or a previous leave are eligible to apply for a one-year PDA at half pay. During the review period three of the unit's faculty members took advantage of this program to conduct research.

The department also recognizes the importance of conference travel for faculty development and provides up to \$2,500 in funding for each assistant professor and \$2,000 for each associate professor. Other faculty members may spend up to \$1,750 annually on reimbursed conference travel.

Faculty advisers who travel with students to regional and national professional association conferences receive up to \$1,500 in funding.

The university's tenure and promotion guidelines for both track and non-track faculty are detailed in its faculty handbook. The college's guidelines are available on its website. The department's policies and a timeline are clear and readily accessible on the department's website.

Tenure-track and tenured professors said the department does a good job mentoring them both informally and formally. One said the mentoring is "instrumental in preparing you to go through the process."

**(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.**

In addition to being engaged in professional and academic organizations, faculty members regularly communicate their research and creative/professional activity in a variety of ways. During the review period, they published three scholarly books, more than 30 refereed journal articles, more than 60 refereed conference papers and 20 non-refereed articles.

Outlets for their work include American Journalism, Journalism History, Environmental Education Research, Journal of Public Interest Communications, Newspaper Research Journal, Telematics and Infomatics, Journal of Higher Education Management, Howard Journal of Communications, Journal of Communication Technology, Behavior and Information Technology, the Journal of Information Management, published proceedings of the International Communication Association, the Memphis Commercial Appeal, the Institute for Public Service Reporting, Salon and many others.

They participated on numerous panels and gave invited presentations at the International Crisis and Risk Communication Conference, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual and Mid-Winter Conferences and the Broadcast Education Association Annual Convention among others.

**(e) The faculty has respect on campus for its university citizenship, the quality of education and the scholarly contributions the unit provides.**

The dean, provost, alumni and members of the community praise the unit for its leadership and its outreach. Faculty members have established relationships with their colleagues across the university that enable them to collaborate on research projects and to incorporate other department's courses in the unit's curricular offerings.

## SUMMARY:

The Department of Journalism and Strategic Media's faculty is a mix of tenure/tenure-track and non-track faculty with an average of 13 years in the industry and 12 years of university teaching experience. Workloads vary by rank and, coupled with student advising and service obligations, can be, at times, overwhelming. Policies and procedures for promotion and tenure are clear. Mentoring is both formal and informal. The unit supports research and creative activity through funding for conference travel and small research grants.

## COMPLIANCE

| Scholarship, Research, Creative and Professional Activities | Total From Unit | Individuals     |                       |                       |                     | Totals (26*) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------|
|                                                             |                 | Full Profs. (7) | Associate Profs. (7)* | Assistant Profs. (9)* | Other Faculty**(3*) |              |
| Awards and Honors                                           | 29              | 5               | 25                    | 1                     |                     | 31           |
| Grants Received Internal                                    | 27              | 7               | 16                    | 4                     |                     | 27           |
| Grants Received External                                    | 4               |                 | 3                     | 1                     |                     | 4            |
| Scholarly Books, Sole- or Co-authored                       | 3               | 2               | 1                     |                       |                     | 3            |
| Textbooks, Sole- or Co-authored                             | 1               |                 | 1                     |                       |                     | 1            |
| Books Edited                                                | 0               |                 |                       | 0                     |                     | 0            |
| Book Chapters                                               | 9               |                 | 4                     | 6                     |                     | 10           |
| Monographs                                                  | 0               |                 |                       |                       |                     | 0            |
| Articles in Refereed Journals                               | 32              | 18              | 21                    | 5                     |                     | 44           |
| Refereed Conference Papers                                  | 61              | 20              | 42                    | 13                    |                     | 75           |
| Invited Academic Papers                                     | 0               |                 |                       |                       |                     | 0            |
| Encyclopedia Entries                                        | 2               | 2               |                       |                       |                     | 2            |
| Book Reviews                                                | 6               | 5               | 1                     |                       |                     | 6            |
| Articles in Non-refereed Publications                       | 20              | 20              |                       |                       |                     | 20           |
| Juried Creative Works                                       | 0               |                 |                       |                       |                     | 0            |



|                                           |           |           |           |          |          |           |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| <b>Non-juried Creative Works</b>          | <b>0</b>  |           |           |          |          | <b>0</b>  |
| <b>Invited Presentations &amp; Panels</b> | <b>32</b> | <b>19</b> | <b>11</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>32</b> |
| <b>Journal Guest Editor</b>               | <b>1</b>  | <b>1</b>  |           |          |          | <b>1</b>  |

\* Including Professors of Practice & Teaching

\*Co-authored work should be counted as a single publication in the unit totals. However, if, for example, two members of the faculty are co-authors on the same journal article, it would be reported as a publication for both authors. \*\*Includes all full-time faculty who do not hold listed ranks, such as instructors and others on term appointments. Many faculty in this category may hold teaching appointments without significant scholarship, research or creative requirements.

## **PART II — Standard 6: Student Services**

### **Unit performance with regard to indicators:**

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

The department demonstrates a comprehensive system of student support designed to foster learning and on-time graduation. Advising is mandatory each semester and tracked through UMdegree and Navigate360, ensuring students clearly understand degree requirements and progress toward graduation. Professional advisers handle first-year and transfer students, while faculty assume primary advising roles beginning in the junior year, maintaining active communication through email, office hours and advising sessions.

Retention and graduation data confirm effectiveness. The department's four-year graduation rate (53.9%) and six-year rate (58.6%) both exceed university averages (32.3% and 50.8%). Faculty and students emphasized that advising extends beyond scheduling to mentorship, career coaching and personal support. Advising awards and recognition — such as the D. Mike Pennington Outstanding Mentorship Award — underscore faculty excellence in this area.

In addition to advising, students receive academic and professional development support through departmental scholarships totaling approximately \$50,000 annually and through co-curricular opportunities like The Daily Helmsman, The ROAR Radio, Meeman 901 Strategies, ProDay and professional organization partnerships (PRSSA, NABJ, AAF, SPJ). These experiences integrate applied learning with career readiness, reflecting a sustained institutional commitment to student success and timely degree completion.

The department continues to find creative ways to support students' basic and professional needs. This year, the department addresses food and hygiene insecurity through initiatives like the Tiger Pantry, CCFA CARES Pantry and the new "Meeman Essentials" program. To help students transition into the workforce, the department connects them with resources such as professional headshots, free career clothing events and a dedicated career specialist. These efforts are reinforced by a required professional development course, resume and interview workshops and ongoing mentoring and networking opportunities.

#### **(b) Professional advisers, and faculty where appropriate, provide students with academic and career advice.**

Advising begins at the college level and transitions to faculty advisers by the junior year. First-year students meet with the CCFA adviser, while transfer students work with the unit's Student Services coordinator. Faculty advise 20-30 students each; the student services coordinator and the associate chair for undergraduate studies manage about 50 each. Advising is required before registration and tracked through UMdegree and Navigate360.

Prior to each semester's advising period, the student services coordinator prepares an advising guide summarizing changes relevant to the upcoming term, as well as general instructions about advising.

All faculty advisers are supported by the student services coordinator with onboarding, training and problem-solving. The student services coordinator works in regular consultation with the CCFA graduation analyst, the associate chair for undergraduate studies and the department chair to ensure advising success and timely graduation.

Department policy requires faculty members to schedule at least five office hours each week. Additionally, all professors are available for appointments outside of their scheduled office hours and can be contacted to arrange a meeting. Faculty are expected to respond to student questions within 24-48 hours.

The college requires graduating seniors to complete an anonymous survey about their advising experiences. The survey, which the graduation analyst of the college administers, measures the accuracy and student opinion of advising. Students have consistently rated Journalism and Strategic Media faculty members high in advising success. Data are maintained at the college level and qualitative insights are shared with the department chair as needed.

Faculty and students highlighted personalized advising and mentorship. “It’s not just advising — it’s mentorship,” one faculty member said. A student added, “Professors help us network and build portfolios.” A partnership with PRSA Memphis offers small-group mentoring dinners, providing direct engagement with working professionals.

Seven faculty members have earned college-level advising awards, including four first-place honors. The department’s Mike Pennington Outstanding Mentorship Award recognizes advising excellence, with nine recent recipients.

The faculty’s careful advising has led the department to be one of the most effective programs on campus in student graduation rates. The department was the most productive in the college, awarding 74 degrees from summer 2023 to spring 2024, with graduation rates that year of 34.8% (four-year) and 61.5% (six-year), surpassing the college and university rates. The department ranks third among the university’s 18 B.A. programs.

**(c) The unit keeps students informed about its policies, activities and requirements.**

Students receive written summaries after advising sessions. Faculty complete FERPA training and maintain at least five office hours weekly, responding to student inquiries within 24–48 hours.

The department utilizes transparent communication channels to ensure students are fully informed about policies, requirements and opportunities. Advising materials, student handbooks and degree planning tools are distributed through UMdegree, Navigate360 and the department website. Faculty share updates about curriculum changes, deadlines, scholarships and student organization activities through course management systems and department-wide email announcements. The department chair also holds information sessions each semester to review academic policies, graduation requirements and internship expectations.

Student newsletters, social media, flyers and bulletin boards in the Meeman Journalism Building highlight workshops, professional development events and guest lectures. These ongoing communications ensure students understand both the academic and professional expectations of the program while connecting them to extracurricular and applied learning opportunities.

Students praised accessibility but noted occasional communication gaps about events and clubs.

Overall, students note, “Our adviser keeps us updated every week. She sends reminders about deadlines, internships and scholarships.” “Advising meetings are helpful because we actually talk about jobs, not just classes.” “If I’m struggling or confused, faculty respond quickly. I don’t have to wait for advising week to ask questions.”

**(d) The unit and institution provide extra-curricular activities and opportunities relevant to the curriculum and that help develop the students' professional and intellectual abilities and interests.**

The department and university provide extensive extracurricular activities and applied learning opportunities that reinforce the curriculum and develop students' professional and intellectual abilities.

The Daily Helmsman has been a student publication since 1931, offering paid editorial experience and earning recognition from SPJ and the Tennessee Press Association.

Meeman 901 Strategies is a student-run strategic media firm founded in 2013. Students manage real clients like OUTMemphis and STS Enterprise, gaining professional experience for course credit.

Tiger News is a weekly student newscast aired on Comcast and YouTube, where students produce, anchor and edit content.

The ROAR Radio rebranded in 2020 and provides hands-on broadcast experience through live programming and campus event coverage.

**Student Professional Organizations**

The Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) partners with PRSA Memphis for mentorship and networking, hosting national ICON conferences in 2020 and 2023.

The Student Advertising Federation (AdFed) competes in AAF's National Student Advertising Competition.

The National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) and Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) host panels, workshops and professional networking events.

Alpha Delta Sigma honors top advertising students each spring, while Kappa Tau Alpha recognizes the top 10% of journalism and mass communication students for academic excellence.

**Other Opportunities**

The German Exchange Program with Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz offers summer and semester-long study and internships with German broadcaster ZDF. It resumed in 2021 and celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2023.

Department events like the Meeman Mocktail Mixer and Launch and Pro Day connect students with professionals for networking, portfolio review and career development.

ProDay is the department's signature professional development event that connects students directly with local and regional employers. The daylong event features portfolio reviews, mock interviews and networking sessions that match students with industry professionals in journalism, advertising and public relations. Many students secure internships or job offers as a direct result of their participation. Faculty coordinate the event in collaboration with alumni and professional partners, reinforcing the department's commitment to career readiness and experiential learning.

**(e) The unit uses retention and graduation data to improve student services, such as advising, and to reduce barriers to student success.**

Retention and graduation data inform advising improvements. Seniors complete advising satisfaction surveys annually and faculty use results to guide improvements. Public accountability data are posted at [memphis.edu/jrsm/about/accountability.php](http://memphis.edu/jrsm/about/accountability.php).

Since 2018–2019, the advising model has evolved from a centralized to a blended system combining professional and faculty advising. UMdegree and Navigate360 have improved consistency and data tracking.

Faculty note, “retention rates are higher than the college and the university and our graduation rates have even peaked over some of our other colleagues. Our students are all on the right path and very successful.”

**SUMMARY:**

The team found that the department operates a well-structured advising system that ensures students clearly understand academic progress, graduation requirements and degree timelines. The system integrates advising, career development and applied learning, providing both academic guidance and professional mentoring throughout their programs. The unit offers extensive examples of applied learning and industry engagement through internships, student media and events such as Pro Day, fully meeting Standard 6. Overall, student services reflect continuous improvement, responsiveness to enrollment shifts and a genuine commitment to student success.

**COMPLIANCE**

## **PART II — Standard 7: Resources, 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 University of Memphis has transitioned to a Responsibility Centered Management (RCM) budget model, which became fully operational in fiscal year 2026. Under this decentralized system, budgets are centered at the college level, with colleges assessed charges for central administration and facilities, while retaining operational control over remaining funds. While the model is in its early stages, it represents a significant shift in institutional resource allocation.

Within this environment, the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media remains a financially sound and efficient income producer for the College of Communication and Fine Arts (CCFA). However, the college continues to face budgetary pressures due to the high costs of its fine arts programs. The department's revenue contributes to offsetting these costs, though every college currently requires some level of institutional subvention to achieve balanced budgets.

The department follows a detailed annual budget process aligned with its strategic plan. The strategic plan emphasizes investment in research, enrollment, student outcomes/experiences and facilities. It should also be noted that to support the research priority, funding has been realigned from master's-level graduate assistantships to doctoral-level assistantships, reflecting the university's shift in priorities following its achievement of Carnegie R1 status in 2021. This designation has resulted in heightened emphasis on doctoral education and grant-funded research across the institution.

#### **(b) Resources provided by the institution are adequate to achieve the unit's mission and are fair in relation to those provided to other units.**

The Department of Journalism and Strategic Media continues to demonstrate exceptional productivity and efficiency, functioning as a strong revenue generator for the College of Communication and Fine Arts. Under the university's RCM budget model, the department benefits from favorable tuition revenue-sharing arrangements and retains 100% of course and program fee revenue. The department charges a \$25 per credit hour fee to most undergraduate courses, which supports technology purchases, student travel, programming and facilities improvements. These fee revenues, combined with prudent budget management, enable the department to maintain operations and pursue strategic initiatives.

The department benefits from external support, including more than \$4 million in endowment funding for student scholarships, student and faculty awards, travel, a public relations faculty fellowship and the chair of excellence salary. Grant funding from the Scripps Howard Foundation supports a new master's program in open-source investigative reporting. These resources demonstrate strong external confidence in the program and provide critical support beyond institutional allocations. Obtaining support from other external constituencies and alumni is a designated priority for the department and CCFA.

Faculty compensation presents a significant challenge. While Journalism and Strategic Media faculty are among the highest-paid in the college and comparable to the university's liberal arts faculty, they lag behind peer and aspirational journalism programs nationwide. Assistant professors typically start at approximately \$70,000, compared to starting salaries exceeding \$100,000 in programs like business, engineering and mathematics at the university and at journalism programs elsewhere. This salary

disparity creates ongoing difficulties in recruiting and retaining top faculty talent in an increasingly competitive market.

The university's transition to Carnegie R1 status has fundamentally shifted budget priorities toward doctoral education and research. Graduate assistantship funding has been redirected primarily toward doctoral students, with the college investing in doctoral stipends for Journalism and Strategic Media. While this aligns with institutional strategic goals, it has created a critical funding gap for master's students. The department is actively pursuing donor funding to address this shortfall and maintain robust support for its entire graduate program.

Overall, the unit perceives itself as treated fairly by the institution and operates efficiently within available resources. However, the ongoing pressure to offset high-cost fine arts programs within the college, combined with competitive salary disadvantages and graduate funding challenges, require continued attention to maintain the department's ability to attract top faculty and students while sustaining program quality and growth.

**(c) The unit's facilities and information resources enable and promote effective scholarship, teaching and learning.**

Most classes and all faculty offices are in the Meeman Journalism Building, which is now more than 50 years old. The facilities are adequate but showing their age, particularly in common areas and general-purpose spaces. A faculty and staff survey conducted between December 2024 and February 2025 revealed mixed satisfaction; most indicated they have adequate resources to do their jobs effectively, while some expressed dissatisfaction. When asked to rate the overall condition of facilities on a scale of 1 to 5, the average rating was 3.4 (median 3.0), indicating a facility that meets basic needs but requires significant improvements.

All regularly used classrooms are smart classrooms with full audio/video and internet capabilities. The second-floor houses four computer lab classrooms seating 16-20 students, each equipped with Apple computers running Adobe Creative Cloud. A notable improvement is the Obsidian Public Relations Social Media Lab (MJ 108), a donor-funded flexible space that opened in November 2022 and serves as a classroom, club room, meeting area, teleconferencing site and research center. The building also includes MJ 209, a dedicated podcasting room and audio editing suite.

However, significant facility deficiencies require attention. The 140-seat lecture hall (MJ 100) is the most urgent concern, with a noisy, outdated HVAC system that impedes class discussion and instruction. This auditorium, while equipped with teleconferencing capabilities for distance learning with the Lambuth campus, requires improvement. More broadly, corridors, bathrooms and general-purpose spaces throughout the building are in dire need of modernization. At times, the building HVAC system struggles to keep up on colder days and students have noted that the classrooms can feel chilly. Some areas have seen no updates in the building's 50+ year existence, creating cosmetic and functional deficiencies that detract from the learning environment and may negatively impact recruitment.

The television facilities require renovation or replacement. The TV News Producing class is taught in the Communication and Fine Arts Building, where the studio features professional lighting, three Sony cameras and a control room with digital switching and audio equipment. However, the current setup is somewhat dysfunctional, with the studio located on one level and the control room on another, making production coordination challenging. While operations are functional, faculty and students have expressed a clear need for updated television facilities to enhance recruitment, improve student training

and meet current industry standards.

Students report adequate access to facilities, with open lab access available two nights per week and Fridays when classrooms are not in use for instruction. Students can also access Adobe Creative Cloud through multiple campus locations and the UMApps platform. Classes taught at the Lambuth campus in Jackson, Tennessee, utilize appropriate lecture spaces and a Mac lab for skills-based instruction, with teleconferencing capabilities connecting to the main campus.

Students and faculty continue to express satisfaction with the library and information resources available to them. The McWherter Library on the main campus provides adequate resources to support the department's instructional and research mission.

**(d) The institution and the unit provide faculty and students with equipment, or access to equipment, and technical assistance needed to support student learning, curriculum and the research, creative and professional activities of the faculty**

All faculty have desktop computers and printers in offices on the third floor of the Meeman Journalism Building. The department's executive suite, which includes offices for the chair, associate chairs, student services coordinator and administrative associates, was updated in 2024 and includes a conference room, copier, breakroom and other necessary facilities. Faculty continue to receive adequate conference support when presenting at regional or national conferences.

The equipment checkout room (MJ 331) houses 26 SLR or mirrorless digital cameras, 32 HD video cameras, lights, microphones, lenses, tripods and other accessories available for student checkout at no charge. Students typically can check out cameras for 48 hours, with many using weekend time strategically for projects. Students and faculty report generally adequate access to equipment for completing projects, though some identified needs for camera upgrades, new lenses, lights and tripods, a digital check-out system to replace the current manual process and expanded hours of operation.

The program provides dedicated spaces for the student media operations. The Daily Helmsman student newspaper transitioned to a digital-only edition commencing with the fall 2025 semester. The strategic plan includes renovation of the current newsroom (MJ 210) into a multimedia news lab with new video studio spaces. ROAR Radio, the university's streaming station, operates from a first-floor office suite with more than 15 shows involving approximately 30 students. Tiger News produces weekly television programming each spring semester. The student-run strategic communication agency, Meeman 901 Strategies, operates in the Obsidian Public Relations Social Media Lab. A dedicated podcasting room (MJ 209) provides audio editing capabilities with sound-blocking glass and professional recording equipment.

The College of Communication and Fine Arts is transitioning to a laptop requirement for all students, enabling the discontinuation of traditional computer labs and freeing substantial funding for reallocation. The department plans to use newly available funds to provide students with enhanced photo and video equipment, outfit lab spaces with docking stations and monitors and fund a planned multimedia news lab space. Technology support is provided by two technicians shared across six CCFA units, supplemented by a 24-7 IT helpdesk, though this shared arrangement continues to present challenges for responsive technical support.



## **SUMMARY:**

The Department of Journalism and Strategic Media continues to demonstrate exceptional productivity and efficiency as a strong financial performer within the College of Communication and Fine Arts. The unit has successfully adapted to the university's Responsibility Centered Management budget model and strategically realigned resources to emphasize doctoral education and research following the institution's Carnegie R1 designation. The department benefits from endowment funding, grant support and student fee revenue that enable investments in technology, student experiences and facilities. Faculty and students have adequate equipment and technology, with strong student media operations and adequate funding for faculty conference and professional development support.

However, critical resource challenges require institutional attention. The 50+ year-old Meeman Journalism Building suffers from significant deferred maintenance, particularly in the lecture hall (MJ 100), common areas, corridors and bathrooms that detract from the learning environment and recruitment efforts. Television facilities need renovation or replacement to meet current industry standards. Faculty salaries lag behind peer institutions by more than \$30,000 at entry level, creating recruitment and retention challenges. The institutional shift toward doctoral education has created a funding gap for master's students that requires donor support to address. While the department demonstrates resourceful management and forward-thinking strategic planning, timely investment in facility updates, competitive faculty compensation and graduate student support is essential to maintain program quality and competitive positioning.

## **COMPLIANCE**

## **PART II — Standard 8: Professional and Public Service**

### **Unit performance with regard to indicators:**

**(a) The unit consults and communicates regularly with its alumni, and actively engages with them, other professionals and professional associations to keep curriculum and teaching current and to promote the exchange of ideas.**

The Journalism and Strategic Media Alumni Association remains actively engaged with the program and serves as a vital resource for guidance, fundraising and professional connections. The alumni board meets monthly with regular participation from the department chair, who consults the board on major programmatic changes. This board functions effectively as an advisory resource for the department, comprising a diverse cross-section of alumni from across communications disciplines.

Notable accomplishments of the alumni association include hosting an annual awards dinner that serves as both a recognition event and significant fundraiser for the department. Two alumni have made space-naming gifts during the review period — the Obsidian PR Social Media Lab and the Wilson PR Student Engagement Zone — demonstrating substantial financial support based on collaborative ideas to enhance student experience and learning.

The department maintains robust engagement with professionals through its annual ProDay event, which brings approximately 20 alumni and professionals to campus for portfolio critiques, mock interviews and career preparation conversations with students. Participants provide valuable feedback that informs the department's assessment and curriculum development processes. Guest speakers from Memphis' professional community regularly visit classes, representing organizations including all four local network television affiliates, WKNO, The Commercial Appeal, The Daily Memphian, Memphis magazine, ALSAC/St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, FedEx, AutoZone, International Paper and numerous advertising and public relations firms.

The department maintains strong relationships with multiple professional organizations. Faculty serve in leadership positions including the department chair as 2025-26 AEJMC vice president. Others held similar positions on the National Education Executive Committee of the American Advertising Federation and the Universal Accreditation Board representing PRSA. Faculty members actively participate in local chapters of PRSA Memphis, Memphis Advertising Federation and the Memphis Association of Black Journalists.

Student chapters of professional organizations remain active, including the Society of Professional Journalists, American Advertising Federation, National Association of Black Journalists and Public Relations Student Society of America, with faculty serving as advisers and facilitating meaningful connections between students and professionals.

The department communicates with alumni and stakeholders through multiple digital channels including a quarterly email newsletter reaching approximately 3,500 alumni (resumed in 2024 after pandemic dormancy), active LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook presence, a regularly updated blog, the college's annual Voices magazine and The University of Memphis Magazine with circulation of approximately 60,000.

**(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 Department demonstrates sustained commitment to high standards of professional practice and ethics through signature programs that address issues of public consequence. The Freedom of Information Congress, a four-decade partnership with the Society of Professional Journalists, continues to bring nationally recognized journalists to campus for public lectures focused on First Amendment issues, with speakers engaging students in both classroom settings and informal conversations. The Norm Brewer First Amendment Lecture Series, established in 2011, continues to feature distinguished speakers addressing free speech and free press issues. The department provides continuing education through hosting events such as the Poynter Institute's Journalists Guide to Covering Jails seminar and the Tennessee High School Press Association workshop, which offers continuing education hours for journalism educators.

The department's Institute for Public Service Reporting has emerged as a powerful force for civic-minded investigative journalism, promoting democratic values and serving underserved communities in greater Memphis. While editorially and financially independent, the Institute's activities intersect meaningfully with the department, creating professional engagement opportunities for faculty and students. The institute's impact includes reporting that led to congressional action, presentations to professional legal organizations, hosting national and international journalist roundtables, leading media coalitions on public records access and producing award-winning exhibitions addressing civil rights history.

International exchange programs continue with Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany, with the department sending four to six students annually since 2019 and hosting three German students each semester. Faculty lead these exchanges and German faculty visit Memphis annually for workshops and guest lectures, fostering global understanding of media issues and professional practice.

**(c) The unit contributes to its communities through unit-based service projects and events, service learning of its students and civic engagement of its faculty.**

Students and faculty remain actively engaged in community projects across Memphis and within professional communities. Student-run media outlets continue to provide valuable service including The Daily Helmsman student newspaper (recognized by William Randolph Hearst Foundation, SPJ, Investigative Reporters and Editors Association and Southeast Journalism Conference), Tiger News campus television program aired on metropolitan Memphis cable, WUMR FM student-produced radio and Meeman 901 Strategies, a cross-disciplinary student-run strategic media firm serving campus and community clients.

Service-learning projects span disciplines with students engaging in advertising, journalism and public relations work for community organizations. Faculty partnerships facilitate meaningful student engagement with organizations including area food banks and various nonprofit organizations.

Faculty demonstrate substantial civic engagement serving on boards and in leadership positions including the Rotary Club, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Women of Achievement, Southern Foodways Alliance and multiple religious organizations. Faculty also provide professional consulting services to local businesses, nonprofits and startups, contributing expertise to the broader Memphis community.

The Institute for Public Service Reporting serves as a vital community resource, hosting UofM journalism students as interns while producing investigative journalism that promotes democratic engagement and serves underserved communities.

**(d) The unit supports scholastic journalism.**

The department has significantly strengthened its support for scholastic journalism since the 2019 review, particularly through its partnership with the Tennessee High School Press Association. Since 2021, the department has served as a participating partner in THSPA's West Tennessee workshop, with faculty teaching sessions and the department hosting the annual fall event on campus beginning in 2022. Attendance has grown substantially, demonstrating increasing impact and reach. The department has expanded its scholastic journalism support regionally, sponsoring state press association conventions and providing faculty engagement for student feedback and recruitment.

The department leverages the university's campus-based high school and dual-enrollment program to engage with high school students. The Institute for Public Service Reporting has provided journalism instruction to campus high school students and the department regularly offers introductory media courses to high schools across the region through dual enrollment. The department hosts workshops during the university's annual dual enrollment events and participates in career awareness programs that reach thousands of high school students across the Memphis metropolitan area.

**SUMMARY:**

The department successfully demonstrates exceptional commitment to professional and public service through extensive faculty leadership in national professional and academic associations, robust alumni engagement that provides both financial support and professional connections, ongoing communication with stakeholders through multiple digital channels, expanding support for scholastic journalism through workshops and dual enrollment programs and the transformative impact of the Institute for Public Service Reporting. The result is a collaborative culture connecting those who teach, those who practice and those who aspire to enter the profession, while serving the broader Memphis community through meaningful civic engagement and investigative journalism that addresses issues of public consequence.

**COMPLIANCE**

### **PART III: Summary by site visit team of the undergraduate program**

#### **1) Summarize the strengths and areas for improvement.**

- Strengths:
  - Caring and dedicated faculty and department leadership
  - A strong assessment plan
  - A deep-rooted commitment to advancing cultural proficiency while navigating political headwinds
  - Robust student services
- Areas for Improvement
  - Ongoing student enrollment challenges
  - Significant deferred maintenance and facility constraints
  - Limited budget
  - Some faculty fatigue stemming from sustained workloads and external pressures

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

NA

#### **3) In the case of a recommendation for accreditation or reaccreditation, with standard(s) not in compliance, list the deficiencies that need to be addressed.**

NA

#### **4) In the case of a recommendation for provisional accreditation, list the deficient standard(s) that should be addressed before the provisional status can be removed.**

NA

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

NA

#### **6) If the unit was previously accredited, summarize noncompliances and significant deficiencies noted in the previous report and subsequent actions.**

NA

#### **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 self-study overall was good. Information in most of the standards was presented clearly and appendices were easily accessible. There were a few omissions in Standard 2 Curriculum that were quickly corrected by the department chair when asked.