

**Report of ACEJMC Evaluation**  
**Undergraduate program**  
2025–2026

Name of Institution: Abilene Christian University

Name and Title of Chief Executive Officer: Phil Schubert, president

Name of Unit: Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

Name and Title of Administrator: Kenneth Pybus, chair

Date of 2025-2026 Accrediting Visit: Nov. 16-19, 2025

Date of the previous accrediting visit: Nov. 4-7, 2018

Recommendation of the previous site visit team: Reaccreditation

Previous decision of the Accrediting Council: Reaccreditation

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

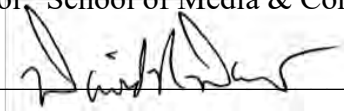
*Prepared and submitted by:*

**Team Chair**

Name and Title: David R. Davies, professor

Organization/School: School of Media & Communication, University of Southern Mississippi

*Signature* \_\_\_\_\_



**Team Member**

Name and Title: Aaron Chimbél, dean and professor

Organization/School: Jandoli School of Communication, St. Bonaventure University

*Signature* \_\_\_\_\_



**Team Member**

Name and Title: Brad Rawlins, professor and associate dean

Organization/School: Graduate School, Arkansas State University

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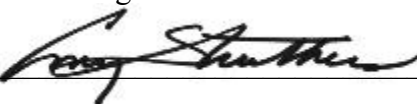


**Team Member**

Name and Title: Amy Struthers, professor emerita

Organization/School: College of Journalism & Mass Communications, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

*Signature* \_\_\_\_\_



## PART I: General information

### Part I: General Information

Name of Institution: Abilene Christian University

Name of Unit: Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

Year of Visit: 2025-26

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.

- Abilene Christian University's Articles of Incorporation
- Texas Legislature. (2011, June 17). House Joint Resolution No. 130, 82nd Legislature, Regular Session. (Most recently updated state authorization to operate educational programs beyond secondary education)

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:

Nov. 4-7, 2018

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

May 2001

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

“Our mission is to engage students in critical and creative thinking in the classroom, in the laboratory and through mentoring relationships, leading them to become exceptional, ethical and agile communicators in a rapidly changing media environment, embracing technology, valuing global diversity and embodying Christ-centered service.”

- Adopted by the faculty January 13, 2012; reaffirmed 2018, reaffirmed 2022.

7. What are the type and length of terms?

Number of weeks in a semester: 15 weeks

Number of weeks in a quarter: Not Applicable

Number of weeks in summer sessions: 3-6 weeks

Number of weeks in intersessions: Not Applicable

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

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

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 Science in three majors:

- Journalism
- Advertising and Public Relations
- Multimedia (with concentrations in film and media ministry)

Bachelor of Arts in one major:

- Journalism

The unit also collaborates with the School of Education for a BSED in journalism/multimedia with teacher certification, a degree that is not submitted for review. And it collaborates with the Department of Art and Design for a degree in graphic design/advertising, a degree that is not submitted for review.

10. Credit hours required by the university for an undergraduate degree:  
(Specify semester-hour or quarter-hour credit.)

128

11. Give the number of credit hours students may earn for internship experience.  
(Specify semester-hour or quarter-hour credit.)

A one-semester-hour internship is required of all JMC majors. Effective in the 2018-19 catalog, students may repeat the internship for credit once.

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	Person in Charge
Journalism	Kenneth Pybus, J.D., Ph.D.
Advertising and Public Relations	Karley Adrion, M.F.A.
Multimedia	Hutton Harris, M.A., (Ph.D. in progress) Cade White, M.S.

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

Undergraduate	5229	(Abilene	3358	Dallas	1870)
Graduate	2302	(Abilene	337	Dallas	1964)

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.

Name of Sequence or Specialty	Undergraduate majors*
Journalism	30
Advertising and Public Relations	38
Multimedia	62
Pre-majors	N/A
Total	130

\*As of September 10, 2025

In addition, the graphic design/advertising degree taught with the Department of Art and Design not submitted for review has 20 majors. The journalism/multimedia with teacher certification degree offered in conjunction with the School of Education not submitted for review has 0 majors.

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 and update the list as needed for spring 2026 visits. 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.)

(See full chart on next page.)

COURSE	Spring 2025	Fall 2025
JMC 111 Sports Announcing	N/A	N/A
JMC 165.01 Media Maker I	12	15
JMC 165.02 Media Maker I	11	14
JMC 165.03 Media Maker I	N/A	14
JMC 166.01 Media Maker II	14	N/A
JMC 166.02 Media Maker II	10	N/A

JMC 224.01 Media Writing	14	14
JMC 224.02 Media Writing	N/A	11
JMC 233 Photography	16	16
JMC 261 Television Production	14	12
JMC 265 Film Production	N/A	15
JMC 324 Advanced Reporting	11	N/A
JMC 338 Broadcast News and Sports	N/A	17
JMC 342 Communication Design	14	17
JMC 351 Web Publishing	13	13
JMC 352 Advanced Web Publishing	N/A	N/A
JMC 361 Advanced Media Production	9	N/A
JMC 365 Film Practicum	N/A	N/A
JMC 389 Public Relations Writing	12	N/A
JMC 390 Advertising Creativity and Copy Writing	6	14
JMC 421 Promotional Video Practicum	N/A	N/A
JMC 441 Topics in Journalism	N/A	N/A
JMC 449 Opinion Writing	N/A	13
JMC 450 Feature Writing	N/A	N/A
JMC 465 Documentary Practicum	12	N/A

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

Operating budgets and salaries in the JMC budget lines	\$935,219
Capital equipment (based on endowment proceeds)	\$13,000
Fee money (estimate based on a three-year average)	\$11,978
Scholarships	\$13,656
*TOTAL	\$973,853

\*Does not include professional development funds that may be awarded through the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and Presidential Fund application during FY26.

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

The university is expected to spend \$378,852 on full-time faculty salaries in the unit this year, which is a decrease of \$20,899 (5%) from the year of the last site team visit.

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.

- Dr. Kenneth Pybus, J.D., professor and chair
- Dr. Douglas Mendenhall, professor  
(Dr. Mendenhall has been granted a Faculty Renewal Leave for the spring of 2026.)
- Dr. Jessica Smith, professor and assistant vice president for academic affairs  
(Dr. Smith did not teach in the unit during the self-study period because of her administrative responsibilities in the Office of the Provost. She is scheduled to teach JMC 341 Editing and Content Management in the spring of 2026.)
- Dr. Susan Lewis, associate professor, provost and vice president for academic affairs  
(Dr. Lewis did not teach in the unit during the self-study period because of her administrative responsibilities in the Office of the Provost.)

- Karley Adrion, assistant professor
- Cade White, college professor
- Hutton Harris, assistant college professor

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. (If your school has its accreditation visit in spring 2026, also provide the spring 2026 adjunct list in the updated information.)

Fall 2025

- Jason Craddock JMC 342.01 Communication Design
- Matthew Maxwell JMC 233.01 Photography
- Marlow Davis Rogers JMC 351.W1 Web Publishing
- Emily Shafer Rose JMC 165.03 Media Maker I
- Brittany Coons Sartain JMC 367.W1 Social Media

Spring 2025

- Dominique Garza Anderson JMC 465.01 Documentary Storytelling
- Wendy Waller Kilmer JMC 389.01 Public Relations Writing
- Matthew Maxwell JMC 233.01 Photography
- Marlow Davis Rogers JMC 351.W1 Web Publishing
- Brittany Coons Sartain JMC 367.W1 Social Media
- Jonathan Smith JMC 441 Topics in Journalism (Sports Journalism)

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

Year	Total Graduates
2024-25 academic year	27
2023-24 academic year	32

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

Abilene Christian University is a private college 150 miles west of Dallas-Fort Worth, affiliated with the Churches of Christ. The university has 5,230 undergraduate students and 2,300 graduate students, including those in its growing online campus based in Dallas. It also has a presence in Leipzig, Germany, and Oxford, England to house study-abroad programs.

The Department of Journalism and Mass Communication was established in 1986, and since then the Department has had only three department chairs. The current chair is Dr. Kenneth Pybus, who has served since 2018 and is in his third three-year term. The unit offers majors in Journalism, Advertising/Public relations, and Multimedia, with all of these programs offered solely on the Abilene campus. Since the last accrediting visit, the unit has emphasized recruiting, increasing student enrollment to about 130, reversing enrollment declines of the 2010s.

The Department has an unusually prominent place on the university campus, given that its students produce more than 80 sports programs a year in cooperation with the athletic department as well as numerous other broadcasts and programs featuring university administrators, chapel services, and campus events. Students have the opportunity to work in ACU student media, including an NPR affiliate radio station, television facilities, a student advertising/PR agency, and the student newspaper (which distributes email newsletters, publishes online news, a newscast and a printed edition four times a year).

The unit has just five faculty members, including the department chair. (Two other faculty members are in full-time administrative positions across campus, one as provost and the other as assistant vice president.)

Given its staffing, the department is stretched thin to cover classes, as most faculty have course releases to advise student media or for other service commitments. Almost all core classes are taught by full-time faculty, though the department employs adjuncts for some upper-division courses.

### **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.**

The Department is one of nine units in the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. Its 2024-2029 strategic plan, updated after the previous site team visit, outlines goals in five categories -- curriculum and pedagogy, co-curriculum and student services, faculty and scholarship, fundraising and diversity. Progress towards the plan's goals are reviewed twice annually at faculty retreats and meetings.

**(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 unit has an energetic department chair who is known for mentoring and empowering faculty and for advocating for faculty and students. Students report that he is readily available to advise and to help them in their projects, and college and university administrators laud him as a positive force in advancing the department's goals and in dealing with alumni and donors. Colleagues from across campus praise him for building partnerships with other units. Working with his faculty, he has led

efforts to refine the curricula to meet industry trends and student interests.

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

The unit's data is up to date and is posted on the ACEJMC 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.**

The mission statement for the Department, its strategic plan, and enrollment and retention data are all posted on its website.

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

Policies for faculty governance are set forth in the ACU faculty handbook. For governance within the department, the five faculty members in the department serve as a committee as a whole for most topics. The department has two-member committees to oversee the curriculum of each of its three degrees. Ad hoc committees are formed for other matters. Faculty members reported that they met regularly to discuss curricula and other department business. Two faculty members now serve on the Faculty Senate, and the unit administrator served a term as Faculty Senate chair in 2018-2019.

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

Department chairs are selected by the college dean and approved by the provost in consultation with the faculty. Chairs serve three-year terms and are evaluated yearly by faculty and staff. The dean evaluates chairs in their third year in determining whether to re-appoint the administrator.

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

The department has a formal complaint policy in which students can take complaints about any matter to the department chair. The policy is posted on a bulletin board near the department office and on the department website. However, no students have requested to file a complaint under the policy since the previous site study.

**SUMMARY:**

The Department of Journalism and Mass Communication has a well-thought-out mission and strong leadership to carry it out. It has appropriate policies for faculty governance as well as a forward-thinking strategic plan.

**Overall evaluation compliance/non-compliance:**

**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.**

Students are required to complete 128 credits for graduation. All students are required to complete the 54-credit general education curriculum that includes 15 hours in Bible and theology, nine hours in written and spoken communication, nine hours in the humanities, three hours in cultural literacy, six hours in life and physical sciences, and three hours in social and behavioral sciences.

The unit offers a B.A. and a B.S. in journalism, a B.S. in Advertising/Public Relations and a B.S. in Multimedia. Both journalism degrees require 37 credits within the major; the B.A. requires an intermediary level in language arts, for a total of 48 credits. The Advertising/Public Relations degree requires 43 credits within the unit and 15 credits outside for a total of 58 credits. The Multimedia degree requires 43 credits within the major and 9 credits outside for a total of 52 credits.

The unit also offers an interdisciplinary degree in conjunction with the School of Education in Journalism/Multimedia with Teacher Certification. Currently there are no students enrolled in this program.

The introductory course, JMC 100 Media Issues, counts toward the social and behavioral sciences requirement in general education.

The students are not required to complete a minor but must complete 15 hours in a support field outside of the unit.

**(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.**

The curriculum has gone through several program and course-level changes since the last accreditation. Some of these changes have been to keep up with industry trends, while others have been to address the unit's shortage in teaching capacity. While enrollments have increased 27% since the last visit and have remained steady at around 130, the number of full-time faculty has been reduced by three positions, and the teaching capacity of full-time faculty is 9% lower. To accommodate this reduction, one course, Media Maker II, was moved from the core to the Multimedia sequence, and the introductory sequence writing courses were merged into one Media Writing course.

The students in the three majors take the following courses in the 22-credit core:

- 1) JMC 100 Media Issues (Credit Hours: 3)
- 2) JMC 224 Media Writing (Credit Hours: 3)

- 3) JMC 302 Introduction to Race and Media (Credit Hours: 1) \*
- 4) JMC 303 Colloquium in Race and Media (Credit Hours: 1) (twice) \*
- 5) JMC 488 Communication Law (Credit Hours: 3) (writing-intensive & capstone course) \*
- 6) JMC 165 Media Maker I (Credit Hours: 3) \*\*\*
- 7) JMC 342 Communication Design (Credit Hours: 3) \*\*\*
- 8) JMC 351 Web Publishing (Credit Hours: 3) \*\*\*
- 9) JMC 495 JMC Internship (Credit Hours: 1) (capstone course)\*\*

\* Identified as theoretical/conceptual

\*\* Identified as skills

\*\*\* Identified as skills and theory

While not articulated in the core requirements, all students are required to complete one semester (Multimedia) or two semesters (Journalism and Advertising/Public Relations) in the student media lab pertaining to their major: The Optimist student news agency, Morris+Mitchell Ad/PR agency, ACUTV or KACU-FM. This course, JMC 321, carries no credit hours.

The core curriculum provides a balance between conceptual and skills courses. The curriculum shifts more toward skills courses in the degree requirements and electives. The Advertising/Public Relations degree requires a principles course that adds theory and concepts to its program, while the program requirements in Journalism and Multimedia have more skill applications. The self-study reports that several of the skills courses, such as Photography, Advanced Reporting, Communication Design, the Media Maker classes, and others, include skills and theory.

The core courses are designed to meet the ACEJMC values and competencies. Understanding the principles and laws of free speech and press are addressed in the Communication Law course. Understanding a multicultural history of the communication industries are introduced in the Media Issues course and reinforced in several courses throughout the majors. The Introduction to Race and Media and the Colloquia in Race and Media address the need for culturally proficient communication and the understanding and inclusion of diverse voices. The Media Maker I course is designed to create a foundation for visual literacy and effective communication that is reinforced in the Communication Design and Web Publishing courses. Students are required to meet grammar, punctuation and spelling benchmarks before enrolling in the Media Writing course, which requires all students to learn the basic principles and practices for media writing. Writing assignments are found in nearly every upper-level required course and elective.

There isn't an ethics course in the curriculum, but students are introduced to ethical principles in the Media Issues course and are reinforced in several program courses, such as Television Production, Advanced Reporting and Principles of Strategic Communication. Students reported that they discuss the ethical aspects of much of their work in class and in the student media organizations. There also isn't a required research course, but students conduct research projects in Media Issues that are regularly presented in the university's Undergraduate Research, Creativity and Innovation Festival. Numerical literacy is taught in the Advanced Reporting class and the Ad/PR students are required to take a communication research course.

Writing and creative works are regularly critiqued through peer-evaluation in several courses. Additionally, students must provide a self-evaluation of the work they produce in the Student Media Lab. There are ample opportunities to learn the tools and technologies of the media professions, starting

with the Media Maker class and continuing throughout the programs. Students learn to use the appropriate hardware and software necessary for audio, photo, video, multimedia and digital platforms.

**Advertising/Public Relations, (Credit Hours: 37)**

- 1) JMC 321 Student Media Lab (Credit Hours: 0) (2 semesters required at Morris+Mitchell)
- 2) JMC 349 Principles of Strategic Communication (Credit Hours: 3)
- 3) JMC 367 Social Media (Credit Hours: 3)
- 4) JMC 389 Public Relations Writing (Credit Hours: 3)
- 5) JMC 492 Ad/PR Campaigns (Credit Hours: 3)
- 6) Six (6) hours from the following menu:
  - a) JMC 166 Media Maker II (Credit Hours: 3)
  - b) JMC 390 Advertising Creativity and Copy Writing (Credit Hours: 3)
  - c) JMC 391 Ad/PR Media Planning (Credit Hours: 3)
  - d) JMC Elective (JMC 100-499) (Credit Hours: 3)

**Required outside of the accredited unit**

- 1) PSYC 120 Introduction to Psychology (Credit Hours: 3)
- 2) MKTG 320 Principles of Marketing (Credit Hours: 3)
- 3) MGMT 330 Management and Organizational Behavior (Credit Hours: 3)
- 4) MKTG 388 Digital Marketing (Credit Hours: 3)
- 5) COMM 291 Survey Research Methods (Credit Hours: 3)

The courses that comprise the Advertising/Public Relations degree include both theory and practice, with plenty of hands-on opportunities, an aspect students especially appreciated. Students were able to describe the ways in which ethics and cultural differences were woven into their curriculum. The faculty member in the major is current and up to date in the use of industry trends, digital concepts, social media and technology. Guest speakers add to the currency of the curriculum and to the opportunity for diversity of ideas as well. The student-run ad/PR firm, Morris+Mitchell, gives students leadership opportunities and interaction with clients, as does the campaigns capstone class. Final presentations are evaluated by clients as well as by the professor using a rubric that would be a logical addition to the assessment toolbox.

**Journalism (Credit Hours: 24 [BA] 27 [BS])**

- 1) JMC 321 Student Media Lab (Credit Hours: 0) (two semesters required on departmental co-curricular news staff)
- 2) JMC 324 Advanced Reporting (Credit Hours: 3)
- 3) JMC 338 Broadcast News and Sports (Credit Hours: 3)
- 4) JMC 341 Editing and Content Management (Credit Hours: 3)
- 5) JMC 441 Topics in Journalism (Credit Hours: 3)
- 6) JMC 449 Opinion Writing (Credit Hours: 3)
- 7) Nine (9) (for BA) or Twelve (12) (for BS) hours from the following menu:
  - a) JMC 111 Sports Announcing (Credit Hours: 3)
  - b) JMC 166 Media Maker II (Credit Hours: 3)
  - c) JMC 233 Photography (Credit Hours: 3)
  - d) JMC 261 Television Production (Credit Hours: 3)
  - e) JMC 265 Film Production (Credit Hours: 3)

- f) JMC 364 Media and Religion (Credit Hours: 3)
- g) JMC 367 Social Media (Credit Hours: 3)
- h) JMC 441 Topics in Journalism (Credit Hours: 3)
- i) JMC 450 Feature Writing (Credit Hours: 3)
- j) JMC 465 Documentary Practicum (Credit Hours: 3)

**Required outside of the accredited unit**

- 1) GOVT 225 National Government (Credit Hours: 3) or GOVT 226 States and Federal System (Credit Hours: 3)

Journalism is the historic core of the unit. It has evolved both its curriculum and its primary student media outlet, the Optimist, to reflect a digital focus. Major courses focus on a mix of conceptual and skills classes. Required major electives offer a broad range of mostly skills courses across platforms.

Students are required to do two semesters of the Student Media Lab at the Optimist. Students praised the hands-on experience and close faculty mentorship, but would prefer more course offerings.

**Multimedia (Credit Hours: 27)**

- 1) JMC 233 Photography (Credit Hours: 3)
- 2) JMC 261 Television Production (Credit Hours: 3)
- 3) JMC 265 Film Production (Credit Hours: 3)
- 4) JMC 321 Student Media Lab (Credit Hours: 0) (one semester required)
- 5) JMC 361 Advanced Media Production (Credit Hours: 3)
- 6) JMC 421 Promotional Video Practicum (Credit Hours: 3)
- 7) Twelve (12) hours from the following menu:
  - a) JMC 338 Broadcast News and Sports (Credit Hours: 3)
  - b) JMC 352 Advanced Web Publishing (Credit Hours: 3)
  - c) JMC 355 Media Technology (Credit Hours: 3)
  - d) JMC 364 Media and Religion (Credit Hours: 3)
  - e) JMC 365 Film Practicum (Credit Hours: 3)
  - f) JMC 367 Social Media (Credit Hours: 3)
  - g) JMC 390 Advertising Creativity and Copy Writing (Credit Hours: 3)
  - h) JMC 405 Visual Portfolio (Credit Hours: 3)
  - i) JMC 465 Documentary Practicum (Credit Hours: 3)

**Required outside of the accredited unit**

- 1) PSYC 120 Introduction to Psychology (Credit Hours: 3)

The Multimedia degree program focuses on preparing students primarily for sports media and film and broadcast production. Requirements include six specific courses and 12 hours of electives from a menu. The required courses include foundational courses such as Photography and Television Production. Advanced courses focus on specialized areas, such as film production and promotional videos. Students are required to do one semester of the Student Media Lab through ACUTV or another experiential learning outlet. Major electives overwhelmingly include skills classes.

While cultural proficiency is addressed through the core class required of all students in the unit, most Multimedia syllabi did not clearly address such topics. One major elective, Media and Religion, does.

Multimedia students work in a dynamic environment with exceptional learning opportunities and an array of modern technology and equipment that students have easy access to. Students praised their faculty and experience but wanted additional course options, particularly around the areas of sports media and film. The department has developed plans to separate the major into those areas. A lack of faculty limits what the unit can do in these areas now.

**(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.**

The unit maintains three Apple computer labs, a Student Media News Lab, a 2,088 square foot broadcast studio, an FM radio station, podcast production suites and an equipment room that issues cameras, A/V equipment, lenses, microphones, light kits and other media production equipment. The labs and faculty have Microsoft Office, Adobe Creative Cloud, various Google services and LinkedIn Learning at their disposal to teach the latest applications of digital media production.

Students reported the experiential learning requirements, both in class and in the student media, is one of the program's greatest strengths. Students, alumni and external providers described the level of preparation to be extremely competitive with much larger programs. Several students commented on their excellent level of preparation for their internships and how their immediate access to equipment, studios and student media in their freshman year has given them an advantage over students from other programs. The software, equipment and instruction is current and keeping with trends in the industry..

**(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.**

The unit encourages faculty to maintain and helps pay for memberships in professional media organizations, and faculty report being members of the Society of Professional Journalists, Religion Newswriters Association, Society for News Design, Associated Collegiate Press, Public Relations Society of America, National Press Photographers Association, Broadcast Education Association, College Media Advisers and several AEJMC divisions and interest groups.

One faculty member wrote a weekly religion column for the local paper, and another continues to participate in college sports productions. The unit has close relationships with the local television stations and accommodated one station for six weeks in its facilities after a 90-mph microburst destroyed its building and transmitter tower.

**(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 self-study identified 27 sections of skills courses for spring and fall 2025, and enrollments ranged between 6-17 students, meeting the expectation of this standard.

**(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.**

As mentioned earlier, students are required to complete one or two semesters of participation in a student media organization, depending on their major. To pass this requirement, the students are required to attend staff meetings and complete weekly assignments by deadline. Grading for the course is pass/fail and some of the positions are paid.

All students complete a 120-hour internship and the 1-credit JMC 495 Internship course. Students have primary responsibility to find a qualifying internship with assistance from a staff internship coordinator, faculty and the ACU Career Development Office. A faculty member oversees the course, approves the internship and ensures that it meets the appropriate qualifications, such as working in a mass communication organization or position, being supervised by someone with expertise in the field, and providing experiential learning opportunities. The internship can be repeated one time.

Recent internship locations include the office of U.S. Rep. Jodey Arrington (R-TX), the Community Foundation of Abilene, Director's Investment Group, The Well News, Walmart Stores Inc. corporate office, Texas Country Reporter, Becker Vineyards, Imaginuity and KSAT-TV in San Antonio.

To meet the requirements of the course, students must submit an online portfolio with samples of work, daily work journal, and written reflection of the experience. Internship providers sign a contract and submit midterm and final performance evaluations. At the end of the semester, students must give an oral presentation of their experience to a panel of JMC department faculty.

#### **SUMMARY:**

The program offers three degrees with a common core that is rigorous, up-to-date, replete with experiential learning and has been praised for preparing students for success in their internships and jobs. Courses taught current practices and content, such as 2025 cases in the law course, and there were multiple touchpoints with professionals who brought expertise and currency to the programs. In addition to the required experiential learning in student media and the internship, we witnessed multiple instances of hands-on learning in the classroom as well. For a program with limited teaching power, it has found a way to deliver an excellent curriculum to all its students.

#### **Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance:**

#### **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 unit has a written assessment plan that is new since the last site team visit in 2018. While the previous plan had been in place for a dozen years with an update in 2015, the current plan was adopted in September 2022 and data collection has encountered some hiccups since then. The plan is up to date, and there is plentiful course-specific data gathered. Contemporary curricular issues are up to date, beginning with the required Media Maker coursework and continuing with required student experiences in ACU-TV, the unit's news outlet The Optimist and a strong digital focus in the student ad/PR agency.

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

The plan is available near the bottom of the "Accreditation" page from a link on the main departmental website. It is not as easy to find as it could be, but is available.

**(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.)**

The department defines the goals for learning, with the following five student learning outcomes, covering all ACEJMC Professional Values and Competencies, guiding their assessment process:

- 1) Writing and editing clearly and concisely
- 2) Understanding historical and legal underpinnings of mass media and their impact on society
- 3) Communicating effectively across cultural and global contexts
- 4) Applying appropriate technologies to present information and images
- 5) Demonstrating critical thinking and ethical decision-making in journalism and related professions

A sample of syllabi found many that delineated course objectives and outcomes as well as which assignments would be used for assessment. Although not consistent across all syllabi reviewed, those for foundational courses such as Media Maker also included the following statement:

As a part of Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and Accrediting Council for Education of Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC), learning outcomes are assessed and recorded. All of the outcomes listed previously in this syllabus are assessed as part of the students' individual learning. The following outcomes are assessed collectively:

(Example) Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information

Only a handful of the syllabi included the program-level learning outcomes and connected course outcomes to those. As this is the primary avenue for sharing the program outcomes, it is not apparent how the students would be aware of them.

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

The unit's plan uses multiple measures, both direct and indirect measures, to gauge student learning.

Direct measures include structured assignments, portfolios, evaluations from internship supervisors, research papers, exams and projects across the core curriculum.

Indirect measures include student evaluations, surveys, awards and competitions, surveys of internship supervisors, and visiting committees/advisory boards.

The measures are used primarily to assess course pedagogy and are not used in a systematic way to assess whether program-level outcomes are achieved by students. It is admirable that the program is systematically evaluating course artifacts to improve student outcomes within those courses, but there is no evidence that these artifacts are evaluated at the program level.

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

Internship supervisors, many of whom are alumni, complete evaluations of students that provide feedback on student readiness. The evaluation used for this asks supervisors to rate them on the ACEJMC values and competencies and other professional behaviors, and the data collected would be a valuable addition to assessment materials. The faculty member with primary assessment responsibilities said that the instrument has not been used much for program assessment because the evaluations are overwhelmingly positive.

Visiting committees and student media advisory boards have the opportunity to provide feedback, but a visiting committee has not met since before the COVID pandemic.

**(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 unit makes use of rubrics to grade key assignments within courses, with results detailed in annual reports which satisfy the university's definition and requirements, as evidenced by the documented favorable feedback from Academic Affairs. The dean of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences confirmed that the unit's assessment work met or exceeded her assessment expectations. However, the activities reported are largely course-based, allowing instructors to adjust assignments for each class, and not program-based.

The work of "closing the loop" at a programmatic level is not conducted nor documented to the same degree. Conversations with each of the members of the small faculty made clear that they are constantly evaluating and trying to improve the course content. Faculty meeting agendas from the review period regularly list assessment and outcomes topics. The unit acknowledges that the first few years of their newest assessment plan faced difficulties in its implementation. To remedy this, data-gathering activities have been scheduled for a calendar year rather than an academic year. This is helping the unit move toward using the data collected in a more thoughtful way.

However, actually "closing the loop" isn't happening at the program level. The unit is very close, having instruments already developed and data that is regularly collected. The next step is to analyze the results

in a way that moves from individual course considerations to looking at the program in its entirety vis-à-vis the student learning outcomes. An example of this could be using the student presentations to the faculty following internship experiences or in the campaigns capstone presentation as data sets. The instruments for these presentations have been developed and tested. Such “final products” could serve as a post-test type of programmatic assessment.

**SUMMARY:**

A careful and thorough plan, producing detailed annual reports that are focused on each individual class, encourages continuous improvement by each instructor in each class. A pared-down curriculum results in the core classes being the focus of the assessment plan. These reports flow into the step of “closing the loop” which is poorly documented and incomplete. The topic of assessment shows up in agendas from faculty meetings and is reportedly discussed informally on a continuous basis among the small faculty. But a more formal process and documentation of this final critical step of assessment would help the unit connect course assessment to programmatic changes and curricular improvement.

**Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance:**

**NON-COMPLIANCE**

**OPTION 2 for schools using the new Standard 4 language adopted in 2025:**

**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.

**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 unit’s diversity plan is found on its website under a tab labeled “Accreditation,” alongside its strategic plan, assessment plan, and the reporting of its enrollments, retention rates and graduation rates. The plan was first developed in 1998 and was updated in February 2000, November 2005, and March 2013. The plan had a major overhaul in 2014 as part of its preparation for a site revisit after it received provisional reaccreditation in 2012. The provisional status followed three previous reaccreditation cycles where the unit was found out of compliance with the Diversity and Inclusiveness standard. The revised plan helped the unit gain full reaccreditation in 2014 and this standard was found in compliance in the last visit in 2018. The plan was most recently updated and approved in August 2025.

The plan begins with a definition of diversity that is authentic to the mission of the institution: “Understanding and respecting individuals who are different from one’s self, whether in race, ethnicity, gender, ideology or religion, is a natural outcome of understanding the vast diversity of God’s creation.” The purpose of the plan is to help the unit “challenge students to understand and interact with individuals of different backgrounds and viewpoints so that as they create media messages they will be effective, sensitive communicators.”

The plan has 8 goals:

- 1) To maintain a four-year graduation rate among diverse students that exceeds the university’s rate for diverse students
- 2) To maintain ethnic minority student enrollment at 35 percent
- 3) To assertively seek faculty and staff hires from underrepresented populations
- 4) To include cultural proficiency in course content across the curriculum
- 5) To require a course and two colloquia on race and media
- 6) To seek guest speakers with diverse backgrounds
- 7) To seek student staff members with diverse backgrounds for co-curricular media labs and student organizations
- 8) To sponsor a study abroad experience for JMC students every three years

Each goal has a performance measurement in place, and the achievement of these goals will be addressed in the indicators below.

**(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.**

A central component of the unit's plan is the required Race and Media course found in the core and the subsequent Race and Media Colloquia that students take twice as one-credit weekend courses. The Race and Media course touches on topics such as critical race theory and the 1619 project

The Race and Media colloquium is offered once per semester and consists of a weekend of Friday evening and all day Saturday and Sunday afternoon. Students are required to register for two colloquia. A visiting professional/academic of color chooses the theme of the colloquium and delivers the course in person, providing a safe space for open and respectful discussions of issues pertaining to race, ethnicity and JMC-related professional environments. Travel and honoraria for the guests are covered by an endowed gift from a JMC alumna, helping the unit attract well-known and distinguished experts in the JMC field. The guest list includes the following:

- Vann Newkirk II, multimedia journalist, Atlantic magazine
- Bria Purdiman, senior account executive, Burrell Communications,
- Dr. George Daniels, journalism professor, University of Alabama
- Diana Jimenez, associate media director at the Austin creative agency Third Ear
- Dr. Keonte Coleman, assistant professor, Syracuse
- Dr. Iliia Rodriguez Nazario, University of New Mexico
- Dr. Dorothy Bland, professor and former dean, University of North Texas
- Dr. Maria de Moya, endowed professor, University of Tennessee
- Dr. Juan Mundel, Arizona State University
- Dr. Vanessa Bravo, Elon University
- David Person, a longtime Alabama newspaper journalist and recent podcaster

The unit also collaborated with other academic entities on campus to bring John Quiñones, the long-time ABC correspondent and host, to the campus as a guest speaker.

Cultural awareness is also taught across the curriculum, with the intention of leading students to be more sensitive, responsible and better communicators. The introductory course, JMC 100 Media Issues, requires an assignment for students to study and compare the media environment of one of 30 nations. The course also has a unit on current and historical issues related to portrayal of underrepresented groups in mass media.

Students described multiple experiences where cultural awareness was taught in courses across the curriculum. Writing assignments, strategic plans, and productions have built in requirements to understand different perspectives and ensure representation of different voices and cultures.

**(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.**

The unit has historically had a difficult time recruiting and retaining faculty from underrepresented populations, which has been one of the primary reasons for being out of compliance with this standard in the past. The faculty handbook states that “all full-time undergraduate-faculty members must be active, involved members of a local congregation of the Churches of Christ.” Exceptions are made when hiring a nonmember is the only way to meet the academic expertise needed in the program. The JMC department has been awarded 3 exceptions that it has used to help maintain the gender diversity of its faculty.

The unit has sought to recruit women and minorities using personal and mass recruitment strategies. The self-study reports that vacant positions have been advertised nationally, including on the job boards of the Hispanic American Journalists Association and the National Association of Black Journalists. They also attempt to “grow our own” by encouraging diverse students to pursue advanced degrees and keeping in touch with them throughout their careers.

Through these efforts, the unit was able to hire a Hispanic male (who departed in 2022), maintain a healthy female to male ratio (40/60), and offered a position to an African American female, who declined. Two of their female faculty are in the office of Academic Affairs, currently serving as the provost and vice president for academic affairs, and are not teaching courses in the unit. Among the active teaching faculty, there is one female and four males and the unit has interest from another Hispanic female, who has taught as an adjunct, if a position is approved.

**(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.**

Recruiting is primarily the responsibility of the university’s Office of Admissions. Increasing enrollment of underrepresented populations has been a concern for the university, and there are university initiatives in place to “better serve first-generation and Spanish-speaking Hispanic families, addressing specific yield challenges within these populations.” This involves enhanced outreach, tailored communication and support resources for both students and families throughout the recruitment process. Starting this year, the recruiting staff is collecting family language preferences and tailoring written communications accordingly. The university is actively recruiting in cities with higher minority populations—San Antonio, Houston, Dallas/Fort Worth— and is recruiting in more non-denominational churches, which expands their access to underrepresented groups. Currently, only about 25% of the students at ACU are members of the Churches of Christ.

The unit also is actively engaged in recruiting students and has been successful with increasing enrollment in the JMC programs. To achieve these ends, the department shares a staff member with the Department of Art and Design, to recruit and retain students. An important part of the unit’s recruiting plan is attending the Texas Association of Journalism Educators Fall Fiesta in San Antonio, which has a much greater Hispanic population than the West Texas region. The fiesta gathers several hundred high school students, where the unit showcases its programs, excellent facilities and meets with high school media advisers.

Currently, the percentage of ethnic minority students is at 39%, which is above the diversity plans’ goal. There have been modest increases in this percentage in recent years, but it has ranged between 35-39% over the last six years. Although the unit is no longer required to complete the table on student

demographics for this standard, the chair shared the data with the site team and showed that currently about 8% of their students are African American and 22% are Hispanic.

Retention efforts that especially benefit first-generation students include regular communications efforts from the chair and shared recruiting and retention director, peer-to-peer student mentoring with experienced upper-class students, and directing them for help with tutoring, counseling and financial needs that cannot be met by the department.

The graduation rate in spring 2025 for ACU overall was 56% and for minority students it was 42%. The reported graduation rates for JMC were 76% overall, and 67% for minority students, meeting the goal of their diversity plan to have a higher ethnic minority graduation rate than the university.

**(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.**

**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.**

Interviews with students, faculty, administrators and individuals outside the unit confirmed that the JMC department has a strong reputation for promoting a climate of belonging and cross-cultural understanding. One student expressed that her major “has really opened me up to different viewpoints” and compared that to some of her friends in different majors where that wasn’t happening. The student media organizations often push the students to cover topics, audiences, issues and communities that are outside their comfort zone. One faculty member noted that they often discuss with students about how they need to get out of the “ACU bubble” to understand different points of view, cultural backgrounds, and audience behaviors.

In student meetings, where several students from underrepresented groups were in attendance, they acknowledged that the faculty were not very representative of the student population, but the consensus was that the unit was making deliberate attempts to provide an inclusive environment.

## **SUMMARY:**

The department has taken authentic steps to address the need for culturally proficient students and works hard to overcome some of the challenges it has in recruiting and retaining diverse faculty and students. The additional efforts within the curriculum, such as three touchpoints with a Race and Media course, are admirable. It is meeting the goals of its diversity plan and students could point to multiple times in which they had been challenged to improve their cross-cultural proficiency.

## **Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance:**

### **COMPLIANCE**

## **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.**

There are seven faculty members with appointments in the unit, but two are senior university administrators, including the campus provost, who do not teach regularly.

Of the five faculty members full-time in the unit, all but one has a reduction for service and/or advising experiential learning programs.

There is a strain on the full-time faculty, particularly in the growing Multimedia major and in Advertising/Public Relations. The last two site-team reports (in 2012-13 and 2018-19) both noted a “stretched full-time faculty” of five. That hasn’t changed. However, full-time faculty members still teach the vast majority of courses in the program, particularly core classes.

The faculty operates as a committee of the whole for most departmental and curricular matters. Two faculty members serve on committees to consider curriculum changes for each major.

ACU is a teaching-focused institution, although it recently ascended to R2 status after being R3 just since 2021. Tenured and tenure-track faculty teach a 4/4 load and are expected to spend 10% of their time on scholarly and/or creative activities and another 10% on service. Non-tenurable full-time faculty (“college professors” in ACU parlance) carry an equivalent of a 5/5 teaching load and no expectation of scholarly or creative activity and a 10% time commitment to service.

A professional staff member supports internships and the university utilizes professional advisers for academic advising, with an adviser splitting time with JMC and another department. These positions provide important support for faculty and students.

#### **(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.**

The faculty have a variety of advanced degrees (Ph.D., M.F.A., J.D., M.A., M.S.) and professional experience. They actively engage with scholarly, professional and creative activities, outside professionals and major scholarly associations, including AEJMC and BEA.

The department creatively uses a diverse group of visiting speakers for its Colloquium in Race and Media to augment its full-time and adjunct faculty.

The unit is constrained some in faculty hiring by university policy, aligned with its Churches of Christ mission.

From the Faculty Handbook:

All full-time undergraduate-faculty members must be active, involved members of a local congregation of the Churches of Christ. Any exception to this expectation will be articulated in the initial letter of appointment and serves as the University's official communication of church membership expectations as it relates to matters of promotion and tenure.

For a candidate to be considered for a full-time position, the candidate's portfolio must include the following:

- a vita
- at least two letters of recommendation (one academic, one from a church leader)
- a statement of philosophy of teaching and learning and the role of scholarship in teaching and learning
- a statement about the relationship of faith and Christian worldview to teaching and learning
- a statement concerning the candidate's personal spiritual journey
- official transcripts of all academic work
- selected copies of papers and publications

The university has made exceptions for hiring faculty outside of Churches of Christ members to include prospective faculty members who attend adjacent non-denominational churches, Baptist churches, and others. Those faculty members must be granted an exception by the provost's office. Three of the five faculty members in the unit have received these exceptions.

Adjunct faculty must be active Christians, but do not have to be Churches of Christ members.

The department has worked to grow its own in advancing to faculty positions. All current faculty are alumni of ACU, including one the university is supporting in obtaining a Ph.D. to move into a tenure-track position.

Students and alumni speak highly of their experience in the program and the relevance of the instruction.

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

Faculty have numerous ways to seek support for scholarly, professional and creative activities: departmental budget, departmental gift funds, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences funds and multiple university programs.

The department said it funds "at least one event per faculty member each year, and for any conference to which a faculty member's work is accepted for presentation."

The Faculty Handbook and departmental guidelines offer clear guidance for tenure and promotion with the JMC "Expansion of Criteria and Examples for Tenure and Promotion" document providing expectations appropriate for its mission following the Boyer model.

As an institution with a religious mission, the Faculty Handbook specifically identifies "fit" as a key component of awarding tenure: "Tenure at ACU encompasses these criteria, but also implies a 'goodness of fit.' This 'goodness of fit' is measured by an individual's commitment to the mission of the university, by meeting the applicable Board of Trustees Christian faith expectations, and by his or her accomplishments in teaching, scholarly activity, service, and collegiality."

Since the last self-study when there were no full professors, three faculty members have been promoted to full professor (this includes one professor who no longer regularly teaches in the department due to a senior university role).

**(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.**

Of the five current full-time teaching faculty in the department, three tenure line faculty have scholarly/creative activity expectations.

The major scholarly work listed by the unit are conference papers or panel participation, particularly at the annual AEJMC conference.

Most of the professional activity reported includes 215 news columns or stories. For a teaching institution, this professional work connects directly to the daily teaching of the faculty members.

There were no articles in refereed journals, books, book chapters or monographs produced by the unit during the review period, which represents a significant decline from 10 in these areas from the previous self-study.

The faculty was productive in its teaching-focused context during the self-study period but may need additional support and evaluation of its teaching loads with the university's elevation to R2 status.

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

Unit faculty members have been leaders across the ACU campus for many years. The university's provost came up from the department, as did an assistant vice president for academic affairs.

Two faculty members serve on the Faculty Senate, including one who served three years in leadership and as Senate chair.

Other university service during the self-study period from the unit includes:

- Teacher Education Committee
- Social and Behavioral Sciences Criteria Team
- College of Arts and Sciences Advisory Council
- Law School Scholarship Committee
- Suspension Review Board
- Disciplinary Review Board (chair)
- Staff Senate

The faculty is well-respected by administrators and faculty peers across campus for the quality of their programs, students and service.

"They're a department that's easy to go to," said one colleague. Another said, "They're on the forefront." While the dean said, "I feel like JMC faculty are everywhere."

**SUMMARY:**

The department has a small and stretched full-time teaching faculty of five, but it is creative in its use of professional staff, adjunct faculty and guest speakers to support the curriculum and students. Potential growth is limited by the faculty size.

The scholarly output does not match the university’s recent ascent to R2 status.

Faculty are respected and engaged across campus, in professional organizations and the broader community.

**Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance:**

**COMPLIANCE**

Scholarship, Research, Creative and Professional Activities	Total from Unit*	Individuals					Totals (7)
		Full Professors (3†)	Associate Professors (1°)	Assistant Professors (1)	Other Faculty** (2)		
Awards and Honors	7	7					7
Grants Received Internal	12	9	1	1	1		12
Grants Received External							
Scholarly Books, Sole- or Co-authored							
Textbooks, Sole- or Co-authored							
Books Edited							
Book Chapters							
Monographs							
Articles in Refereed Journals							
Refereed Conference Papers	9	8		1			9
Invited Academic Papers	1	1					1
Encyclopedia Entries							
Book Reviews							
Articles in Non-refereed Publications	215*	215•					215*

<b>Juried Creative Works</b>							
<b>Non-juried Creative Works</b>							
<b>Other (please specify)</b>							
<b>Invited national conference presentation</b>							
<b>Regional conference presentation</b>							
<b>Invited professional webinar</b>							
<b>Consulting</b>	3	3					3
<b>Invited professional presentation</b>	1			1			1

\*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.

†Dr. Jessica Smith, who is a full professor, holds a full-time administrative appointment in the Office of the Provost and does not teach in the department. †Dr. Susan Lewis holds a full-time administrative appointment in the Office of the Provost and does not teach in the department.  
 • Includes 201 newspaper columns published from the start of 2018 to Nov. 2021 by Dr. Mendenhall and 14 news stories authored by Dr. Pybus.

## **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 small nature of the university and department and numerous experiential learning outlets creates a personal and supportive environment where students have significant access to faculty and professional staff to achieve their academic goals.

Internships, departmental events, student organizations and travel programs provide a rich mix of learning opportunities for students that foster bonds among students and faculty alike.

Faculty are required to have seven hours of office hours per week but are generally available much more than that with an open-door policy. Students said faculty are readily available and spend significant one-on-one time with them. The faculty also work closely with students in the required experiential learning programs that several faculty members oversee as part of their course loads.

In a departmental survey, students reported an 87% satisfaction rate with the accessibility of faculty, and 93% said they developed a relationship with a faculty member that helped prepare them for their career.

The faculty has made some curricular changes and occasionally used substitutions to ensure students can complete their degree requirements, despite the small faculty and limitations to course offerings.

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

ACU uses a centralized advising model with professional staff advisers. The adviser assigned to the JMC program also supports the Department of Art and Design. She is the fourth adviser for JMC during the self-study period and has been in the position since 2024. The department noted this turnover has been a source of concern for students and a challenge for the department as it seeks to continually update its offerings. The chair says he regularly works with the adviser to ensure alignment and support at-risk students.

Incoming students meet with the adviser during orientation or prior to enrollment for transfer students and all majors meet with the adviser at least once each semester. Students must sign an advising agreement to document their adviser meetings, which provides accountability to help ensure students are on the path to graduation.

Students praised the current adviser as accessible and responsive and, likewise, said the chair and faculty helped them meticulously plan out their course of study.

A staff position was adjusted in 2022 to provide staff support for the internship program, while ultimate oversight of internships remains with the faculty through the required JMC Internship course (JMC 495).

Additionally, faculty provide extensive mentoring and informal course advising and career advice.

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

The university uses two software programs to aid in advising and monitoring students progress, Slate Success and DegreeWorks.

The adviser uses Slate Success to:

- Log all student appointments
- Communicate with students via email and text message
- View student progress toward degree
- Store all advising agreements and any document specific to a student's degree progress
- View holds on student accounts
- Schedule meetings with students
- See student's academic milestones
- Consider overall academic health of student, identifying students at risk of academic probation or struggling academically and connecting them to student resources

DegreeWorks is a secondary software used to run degree audits and help students assess their progress towards their degree, which students said they found helpful.

A regular internship newsletter to students details internship opportunities. Local businesses and media outlets frequently visit campus to meet with students for initial discussions of internships.

**(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 unit, particularly considering its size and small faculty, provides an impressive array of experiential learning opportunities for students. This includes the required JMC 321 Student Media Lab, a 0 credit course. Depending on a student's degree, they will complete this pre-professional experience through the student media operation, an ad/PR agency, the streaming broadcast program or at the NPR-affiliate radio station – all with significant faculty and/or professional staff supervision.

The Optimist student newspaper has been in existence since 1912. It now focuses on its digital platforms and a twice-weekly newsletter emailed to the campus. Print editions are reserved for special occasions, generally when alumni are returning to campus. The most recent print edition available on campus (Oct. 31) was tied to Homecoming and is impressive with strong visuals, solid writing and reporting, and a nice mix of hard news and feature stories. Its companion newscast is now shared via Instagram, however old newscasts from more than a year ago are still posted prominently on the Optimist website with no indication of the move.

ACUTV provides video production services and live events, including 80 or more NCAA Division I games for ESPN+ annually, commencement, lectures and other activities. Students perform a variety of roles from camera operation, graphics, instant replay, technical directing to producing and on-camera talent duties. The productions feature 4K technology and a professional look.

KACU-FM is Abilene's NPR-affiliate. Students serve as announcers, news anchors and reporters, which account for nearly all the local content. In addition to student staff, the station operates with five full-time staff members.

The Morris+Mitchell student ad/PR agency provides hands-on experience in research, strategy, concept and production. In addition to the required two semesters in the lab, students may apply for paid leadership staff positions. Morris+Mitchell provides a range of services to both paying and pro-bono

clients. Projects include branding, developing media kits, staging and promoting events, survey research, social media management and content development, designing and producing TV, print and radio ads, posters and other collateral materials.

FilmFest is the university-sponsored annual film festival. It's a showcase for the creative talents of students and as a creative outlet for those interested in motion picture and entertainment industries. Productions are judged by a panel of industry professionals.

The L.A Film Experience is a program created by the unit in partnership with Greenhouse Media in Los Angeles. Students in the program travel to California in the summer of even years and participate in a three-week intensive offering of JMC 365 Film Practicum taught by an alum who works at Netflix. Students produce a short film. The most recent one was accepted to the Texas Short Film Festival.

In Spring 2025, the unit began partnering with an alumna who owns video production company in Fort Worth and who recently earned her M.F.A. in filmmaking to teach the unit's JMC 465 Documentary Practicum course as a January short course that extended throughout the spring semester with regular weekend consultations. Students produced a documentary about Abilene's chapter of Habitat for Humanity. One student project won Best Documentary at the PrairieFest Film Showcase in Grand Prairie (a suburb of Dallas) and was screened at the Abilene Frontier Film Festival.

The unit partners with the Halbert Center for Missions in the College of Biblical Studies and other departments to produce a series of short-form documentaries illustrating the vocational mission work of ACU students and faculty around the world that explores the intersection of vocation, faith and worship. Eleven JMC students have produced documentaries that chronicle the efforts of students and their faculty mentors on these trips to Kenya, Uganda, Nicaragua, Rwanda and Cambodia.

The unit has had several chapters of student organizations but has had to scale back some.

Since 1986, the department has maintained a Kappa Tau Alpha chapter. The honor society recognizes academic excellence and promotes scholarship in journalism and mass communication.

The unit has a chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists despite difficulty in maintaining the 10-member requirement to stay in "good standing" with the national SPJ organization.

The unit is active in the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association, which is the largest statewide student press organization. The unit's chair is a past president of the organization, and 10-15 students participate each year in the TIPA competition.

Faculty turnover has led to the dissolution of the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) and National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) chapters. The local Ad Club's ceasing operation led to the unit's AAF chapter disbanding.

Students raved about the opportunities and experiences at the school with one saying they have, "Big school resources at a small school."

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

The university and unit track retention and graduation data, but the unit appears to have only recently focused on this data as part of the self-study process. While some changes are being considered, the self-study did not include any specific action items.

**SUMMARY:**

This is a student-focused program with numerous experiential learning opportunities for its majors.

A professional adviser works closely with the department to ensure students stay on path to graduation and the department restructured a staff position to include internship support.

The department has not consistently used its retention and graduation data to make changes but indicates it plans to after identifying it as a need during the self-study process.

Students have high praise for the unit, the availability of hands-on experiences from the time they set foot on campus and the support they receive.

**Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance:**

**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 unit has a detailed budget that is more than adequate to meet its goals outlined in its strategic plan. It includes separate budgets for the department, the student newspaper, the student advertising/PR agency, the student radio station, and the student television operation. The unit's total operating budget in 2024-25 was \$1.03 million, just four percent higher than the previous year. Separate budgets for equipment and faculty development supplement these funds.

While university operating budgets for the department have been relatively flat throughout most of the self-study period, the unit has multiple income streams to meet department needs. For example, course fees earmarked for maintaining and replacing cameras and other specialized equipment average about \$12,500 annually. A technology endowment generates another \$12,000 to \$13,000 annually, and a university wide technology replacement program provided more than \$100,000 in the recent replacement cycle. Fundraising through the Advancement Office has financed recent capital improvements to the student-run advertising/PR agency and to the television facilities.

**(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 chair reports that the budget is adequate for its needs with the exception of personnel, but he also reports that the department is short at least one faculty member. Upper-level administrators say that the department is funded fairly in comparison to other units. In fact, the unit typically receives one of the largest technology replacement allocations of any on-campus units.

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

The department's facilities are impressive. The unit occupies three floors of the Don Morris Center plus extensive radio and television facilities. It maintains Apple-based teaching labs, a 72-seat lecture hall, smart-classroom technology, Wi-Fi, and networked printers. Student media operations are housed in a dedicated newsroom for *The Optimist*, KACU-FM's 59,000-watt NPR affiliate studios, two podcast production suites, and the Morris+Mitchell student-run agency office. ACUTV operates out of a 2,088-square-foot broadcast center equipped with 4K cameras, a modular set, and adjacent control, audio, and server rooms as well as a garage for mobile production. The department also oversees an equipment checkout room stocked with a wide array of photo, video, and audio gear for student use. Faculty offices and individual computers are located on the third floor to enhance collegiality. The university's main library is located near the Don Morris Center and includes ample information resources, meeting rooms, and the like.

Students report that they are extremely proud of the department's facilities and the access they have to them even as freshmen.

**(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.**

The department operates an equipment room that is overseen by a faculty member and staffed by part-time students. Students may check out equipment according to what classes they have completed. Students report that they get up to speed on operating professional equipment early in their college careers and that faculty are readily available to help them with any issues they might have.

**SUMMARY:**

A variety of revenue streams has provided the unit with adequate funding to maintain and replace gear despite flat operating budgets. Successful fundraising has financed major capital improvements such as adding two podcast suites, replacing aging ACUTV equipment, and renovating the student-run agency. The result is a professional environment with adequate gear for student use.

**Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance:**

**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 unit maintains strong connections with alumni in a number of ways, including newsletters, social media, advisory boards, Ad/PR agency trips, alumni panels, campaigns classes (as clients) and classroom guest speakers. The annual Gutenberg Celebration recognizes distinguished achievement and brings alumni back to campus for panels and networking. The unit stays in regular contact with the university's Office of Alumni Relations and the Office of the President, participating in selection of board members and university award honorees. Alumni and professionals served on the unit's visiting committee, a program that evaluated and critiqued the unit's curriculum, programs and operations and provided feedback. Once required, this program ceased after a final visit in 2020, but reports from these visits indicate vibrant conversations around industry best practices and the impact on curriculum.

Faculty regularly engage with professionals and belong to professional, scholarly and teaching associations. Student comments reinforce the currency of the curriculum.

**(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.**

Faculty members review conference papers and edit newsletters for AEJMC and other organizations, contribute columns for publication, and judge high school journalism contests. They participate in summer programming for high school students.

**(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.**

The unit nurtures strong relationships with the local professional community, such as welcoming a local television station into the ACUTV facilities for weeks after the local station was destroyed during a storm. The student ad agency works with multiple pro bono clients each year and student media covers many community events.

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

The unit consistently provides judging services for journalism contests involving public and private high school students as well as a summer high school student program.

### **SUMMARY:**

The small faculty contribute widely to professional and public service through conference leadership, contest judging, reviewing scholarly work, consulting and community service. Regular communication with alumni is maintained through newsletters, award ceremonies, advisory boards and active social

media platforms. These efforts ensure the unit's teaching and service remain relevant, outward facing, and deeply connected to professional practice.

**Overall evaluation, compliance/non-compliance:**

**COMPLIANCE**

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

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

##### **STRENGTHS**

- A small but dedicated faculty committed to giving personal attention to students
- Strong emphasis on experiential learning available to students as early as their freshman year
- Excellent, professional-level facilities
- Strong leadership that emphasizes collaboration with on- and off-campus units
- Engaged students committed to the program's professional mission

##### **WEAKNESSES**

- An assessment plan focused more on course-centered outcomes rather than program-level assessment, resulting in a failure to close the loop
- A small faculty -- just five full-time teachers -- so stretched in teaching responsibilities that they don't have the resources to meet potential enrollment growth
- Teaching and service responsibilities provide little time for faculty scholarship, potentially putting the unit out of step with the university's commitment to retaining its R2 status

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

##### **STANDARD THREE - ASSESSMENT**

#### **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.**

##### **STANDARD THREE - ASSESSMENT**

- In practice, the unit now assesses only its courses, but it should engage in rigorous, data-driven program-level assessment, as specified (but not implemented) in its current assessment plan, to close the loop.
- While the unit already gathers considerable data to evaluate its programs (internship evaluations, external assessment of student advertising/PR campaigns), they along with other tools should be used to incorporate external professionals in the evaluation of its programs.
- Increase effort to inform students of program-level outcomes through syllabi and other channels.

#### **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.**

The 2018 report fully reaccredited the unit with no standards out of compliance. But, it cited an “unbalanced faculty” with no full professors and only one female professor and one full-time professor for the Ad/PR major. The faculty imbalance has been somewhat addressed among the faculty teaching within the unit, as it now has two full professors, an assistant professor and two non-tenure track instructors. But, it still has just one female professor, who is the one teacher for the Ad/PR major.

**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 was a product of the efforts of all five faculty members, so involvement was high, but it lacked a singular voice. It was comprehensive and organized, but at 175 pages perhaps included an excess of background and context.



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December 5, 2025

Dr. Susan Walton  
Executive Director  
Accrediting Council on Education  
in Journalism and Mass Communications  
susan.walton@acejmc.org

Dear Dr. Walton,

I'm writing to offer a brief response to the recent site team visit and report related to our request for reaccreditation by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications. Thank you for this opportunity.

The faculty in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at ACU commend the site team's professionalism and collegiality during their visit to Abilene in November, and we express our gratitude for diligent work. We already have begun making progress on addressing the opportunities for improvement the team identified in their assessment process. We have identified data collected as part of our internship program and are developing a process to use it to better assess the broader program goals and outcomes. In addition, we already have begun taking steps to reinvigorate our visiting committee system and more effectively utilize members of that group and their expertise in our regular program assessment.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity and thank you to the team for a truly beneficial visit.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Pybus', written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Kenneth R. Pybus  
Professor and Chair  
Department of Journalism and Mass Communication  
Abilene Christian University