

## **Report of ACEJMC Evaluation**

**Undergraduate program  
2025-2026**

**Name of Institution:** Savannah State University

**Name and Title of Chief Executive Officer:** Dr. Jermaine Whirl, President

**Name of Unit:** Department of Journalism and Mass Communications

**Name and Title of Administrator:** Dr. Juliana Maria Trammel, Chair

**Date of 2025-2026 Accrediting Visit:** January 25-28, 2026

**Date of the previous accrediting visit:** February 13-16, 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:** Dr. Shirley S. Carter, Distinguished Professor Emerita and former Associate Dean

**Organization/School:** College of Information & Communications/University of South Carolina

**Signature** 

**Team Member**

**Name and Title:** Dr. Michel M. Haigh, Professor

**Organization/School:** School of Journalism & Mass Communications/Texas State University

**Signature** 

**Team Member**

**Name and Title:** Will Sutton, Columnist/Editorial Writer

**Organization/School:** Times-Picayune, The Advocate, NOLA.com

**Signature**



## PART I: General information

**Name of Institution:** Savannah State University

**Name of Unit:** Department of Journalism and Mass Communications

**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: N/A*

**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 institution affirms its legal authority to provide education beyond the secondary level based on the following legal frameworks:

- **Georgia Constitution:** The governance, control, and management of the University System of Georgia (USG) and its institutions are exclusively granted to the Board of Regents. This authority is established in Article VIII, Section IV of the Georgia Constitution, which formally created the Board of Regents.
- **Official Code of Georgia Annotated (OCGA):** Further clarifying this governance, Section 20-3-20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated outlines the statutory provisions that empower the Board of Regents to oversee the operations and educational mandates of USG institutions.

These legislative acts and state statutes confirm the institution's authority to offer higher education programs in Georgia.

[Board of Regents Policy Manual](#)

**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:** February 13-16, 2019

**5. When was the unit or sequences within the unit first accredited by ACEJMC?** 2007

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

**Mission:**

The mission of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications is to prepare students for careers in media, film, journalism, and strategic communications through a comprehensive liberal arts education and hands-on experience.

*Revised and adopted in September 2025.*

- [Mission statement on the SSU website](#)

**Goal Statement:**

The overarching goals of the curriculum of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications are to teach and mentor students in journalism and mass communications to embrace the field as a:

- **Job:** We seek to teach and mentor students for a *career* in journalism and mass communications that requires the performance of specific tasks and duties in exchange for compensation and benefits.
- **Craft:** We aim to teach and mentor our students to view journalism and mass communications as a *craft* that demands the mastery of specific skills and competencies.
- **Career:** We aim to educate and mentor our students for a *career* in journalism and mass communications, a field that requires ongoing learning and development throughout their lives.
- **Profession:** We seek to teach and mentor our students in journalism and mass communications, embracing the profession as a *vocation* that requires mastery of a body of knowledge and adherence to a code of conduct and ethics, for which they are accountable to citizens, the profession, themselves, and their employer.

**Values of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications:** diversity | legacy | innovation | integrity | resilience.

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

- **Number of weeks in a semester:** 15 weeks
- **Number of weeks in a quarter:** N/A
- **Number of weeks in summer sessions:** 6 weeks and 4 weeks
- **Number of weeks in intersessions:** N/A

**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.**

BA in Mass Communications

**10. Credit hours required by the university for an undergraduate degree:  
(Specify semester-hour or quarter-hour credit.)** 122 (semester hours)

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

**(Specify semester-hour or quarter-hour credit.)** The BA in mass communications offers a professional media internship course, COMM 4902: professional media internship, which is worth three semester hours of credit. In this course, students may earn a maximum of three semester hours of internship credit for completing at least 50 work hours per course credit hour. The internship is required for all students.

**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.**

BA in Mass Communications

Person in charge - Dr. Juliana Maria Trammel, department chair

Embedded certificates:

1. [Social Media](#)
2. [Public Relations & Public Affairs](#)
3. [Film](#)
4. [Community Journalism](#)
5. The Georgia Film Academy (professional certification)
  - a. [Film & Television production](#)
  - b. [Film & Television postproduction](#)
  - c. [Live Production, Streaming & Esports](#)

Some students remain enrolled under the concentration model and are completing their programs through the teach-out plan. Beginning with the fall 2022 cohort, however, students no longer pursue a concentration. Instead, they may select a certificate/certification pathway aligned with their interests. Declaring a pathway is optional.

**Note:** As outlined in Standard 2, #4, the curriculum is now in its third year of transition from the concentration model to a micro credentialing/certificate framework. For advisement purposes, students who choose to declare a certificate/certification must do so formally with the university's registrar, and the declaration is recorded in Banner. In practice, certificates/certifications function much like concentrations in the advisement process.

The overall structure of the degree program remains consistent across these variations. The key difference is that a rigid concentration is no longer required. Instead, students complete coursework across the three fields of study—journalism, multimedia and digital communication, and public relations/strategic communications—and then have the flexibility to select a certificate, certification, minor, or general electives pathway based on their professional interests. The credit-hour requirements remain unchanged, and these options occupy the same place in the degree plan as concentrations did previously.

**13. Number of full-time students enrolled in the institution: 2,843 (Spring 2026)**

**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.**

SSU is now in the early stages of allowing the students to declare concentrations and students will start declaring in the upcoming advisement cycle.

CONCENTRATION	TOTAL (SPRING 2026)
Public Relations and Strategic Communication	3
Journalism	7
Multimedia & Digital Communications	13
Non-Track Students	102

BA in Mass Communications with Certificates

CERTIFICATES	
Film Certificate	4
Social Media	4
Public Relations & Public Affairs	6
Community Journalism	1
GFA – Postproduction	1
GFA - Production	1

SECTION	FALL 2022		SPRING 2023	FALL 2023		SPRING 2024	FALL 2024		SPRING 2025		FALL 2025		SPRING 2026	
	01	02		01	02		01	02	01	02	01	02	01	02
COMM 2101: Writing for Multimedia	20	19	20	18	18	19	20	19	18	14	17	20	15	
COMM 2108: Strategic Communication Lab				12							20		20	
COMM 2109: Audio Video Lab						19	11				20		19	
COMM 2110: Media Writing Lab				6			20	18			18	16	3	18
COMM 2113: Intro Multimedia & Comm Tech				4		15	13	18	15	16	12	19	14	20
COMM 2114: Intro to Layout and Design						9	10	17			20			
COMM 2115: Intro to Media Arts & Design														18

Report of evaluation of undergraduate programs for 2025-2026 site visits

COMM 3101: Media Arts and Design	18	15						
COMM 3102: Photography for Multimedia								19
COMM 3104: Sports Communication			15		13		11	
COMM 3105: News Writing and Reporting		20		15		19		
COMM 3108: Multimedia Computer APP				3   7	2   3	2   7		
COMM 3110: Layout & Design   COMM 2114	19	20	16	8	3	3	20	
COMM 3112: Podcast Production and Management								15
COMM 3201: Feature Reporting and Writing	1		19		12		19	
COMM 3202: Community Journalism and Reporting								16
COMM 3301: Intro to Multimedia Production	10	19	13		14		16	
COMM 3303: Scriptwriting for Multimedia	9	11	18		9		19	
COMM 3401: Intro to PR & Strategic Communication		14		14		14		17
COMM 3601: Emerging Technology				7				
COMM 4101: Strategic Comm Writing (online)	4		10		12		20	
COMM 4105: Opinion and Editorial Writing		9				7		11
COMM 4106: Comm Practicum				20	17	16	12	18
COMM 4106: Comm Practicum (MDC)	10		5					
COMM 4106: Comm Practicum (PR & Jour)	14	20	20					
COMM 4107: Adv Video & Postproduction	7	17		20		20		18
COMM 4110: Audio Prod & Sound Design	14	9	11	1	18	1	17	
COMM 4170: Advanced Journalism	5	1		19		6		12
COMM 4201: Copy Editing		8				11		8
COMM 4402: Strategic Campaign Principles	6			12		12		
COMM 4406: Strategic Campaign Production - Online	6	10	3	12		8		16
COMM 4815: The Documentary	9		17	13		9	3	
COMM 4950: Sp. Topics Aerial Drone Footage				10				
COMM 4952: Special Topics: Feat. Film Prod	7						10	
COMM 4953: Special Topics: Onset Film		1						
COMM 4952: Sp. Topics Investigate Journalism					9			

16. Total expenditures planned by the accredited unit for the 2025–2026 academic year: **\$763,496.00**

FISCAL YEAR	TOTAL BUDGET EXPENDITURES	PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN THREE YEARS	FULL-TIME FACULTY SALARIES
2026	\$763,496.00	0%	\$738,600.00

Amount expected to be spent this year on full-time faculty salaries: \$738,600.00

17. List names 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.

NAME	RANK
Dr. Serajul Bhuiyan	Professor
Reginald Franklin (on Leave)	Associate Professor
William Martin	Lecturer
Dr. David Marshall	Professor
Rachael Shanner	Lecturer
Dr. Juliana Trammel	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.)

SPRING 2025	FALL 2025	SPRING 2026
Dr. Vicki Brown	Dean Chambers	Dean Chambers
Dean Chambers	Adam Brimmer	Givanni Fabietti
William Martin	Givanni Fabietti	Joey Lamar
Margaret Williams	Joey Lamar	Tiara Luten
	Tiara Luten	Dr. Angela Mathis
	Dr. Angela Mathis	Margaret Williams
	Margaret Williams	Marius Davis

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

YEAR	NUMBER OF GRADUATES
2023-2024 AY	31
2024-2025 AY	32
December 2025	13

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

Savannah State University was established November 26, 1890, as the state's first historically black college and university (HBCU) and is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SAC). Savannah State is also the oldest institution of higher learning in Savannah. The university affirms its legal authority by the Georgia Constitution through the University System of Georgia through the Board of Regents, and the Official Code of Georgia Annotated. The university is a comprehensive public university that emphasizes workforce-ready education, community engagement, and regional impact. The university offers 30 academic programs across five colleges and a network of over 30,000 alumni leading in business, science, technology, education, and media arts.

The Department of Mass Communications and Journalism was formed in August 2002, offering degree concentrations in audio and video, journalism, and public relations/advertising. The unit evolved as a minor within the Department of Humanities in 1971, and major program a decade later, and is now housed in the College of Media, Arts and Communications. The Department received its initial ACEJMC accreditation in 2007 and is one of the top five majors at the university and is among the university's seven departments with specialized accreditation or certification at the university, and fourth in degrees conferred among academic programs. The Department's fall 2025 enrollment was 159 students. The current department chair was appointed in 2021 after serving as interim chair for three years.

One of the Department's strengths is its outreach to journalism education through the renowned Southern Regional Press Institute (SRPI) held on campus. Now in its 75<sup>th</sup> year, SRPI is a two-day mass-media conference that convenes industry professionals, faculty, and students. In addition to college students, the conference provides secondary education outreach from elementary to high school students engaged in student media, augmenting the Department's community engagement and pipeline development.

### **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 mission of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications is to prepare students for careers in media, film, journalism, and strategic communications through a comprehensive liberal arts education and hands-on experience. The mission statement was revised October 8, 2018, and 2025 according to the self-study. The Department's overarching curriculum goals are to teach and mentor students in journalism and mass communications to embrace the field as follows:

- Job: Skills set to perform specific tasks and duties in exchange for compensation and benefits.
- Craft: View the field as a craft that demands the mastery of specific skills and competencies.
- Career: Preparation for ongoing learning and development.
- Profession: Embrace the field as a vocation that requires mastery of a body of knowledge and adherence to a code of conduct and ethics, for accountability to citizens, the profession, themselves, and their employer.

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

The mission statement is prominently posted on the unit's website page devoted to ACEJMC for affirmation of accreditation and required postings. The department's strategic plan, adopted on November 18, 2025, aligns with the college and university strategic plan and is also posted on the department's website.

**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?**

The unit's comprehensive mission statement/strategic plan aligns with the university's current strategic plan, #The Uproar 2030: Shaping the Future of Savannah State University, that focuses on academic excellence, student success, and community empowerment, and sets a clear, collective vision for strengthening every aspect of campus life.

The first phase of the unit's strategic plan was drafted by faculty and staff and led by the chair with input from the unit's advisory council. According to the unit, although the plan aligns with the university's, they are currently sending it to students, alumni, and the advisory council for input on the enabling strategies. The unit uses an Excel spreadsheet to track implementation progress. In addition to goal statements, the plan embraces the following values:

- Teaching: Personalized, hands-on learning experiences for majors and non-majors.
- Research: Research and creative endeavors that address real-world community problems.
- Service and Public Engagement: Savannah and regional connections are a necessary link to experiential learning and a special responsibility to help address Georgia's workforce needs.

The plan also outlines five strategic priorities: student success, employee excellence, brand strength, infrastructure innovation, and community impact.

The timeline for achieving mission and strategic plan goals, as well as the responsible parties for strategies and tactics, is documented in an Excel file. The department chair is responsible for updating the plan in collaboration with faculty and staff. As reported in the self-study, effectiveness is monitored through regular meetings, student surveys, alumni feedback, and performance benchmarks.

**(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 department chair provides effective leadership within the unit and effectively represents it in dealings with university administration outside the unit and constituencies external to the university. She is held in high regard by students, faculty and staff within the unit, the college dean, and external constituents such as alumni, media professionals who have hosted current students as interns and hired the program's graduates, advisory board members, and faculty and administrators outside the college.

**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?**

The department chair, working with faculty and the Southern Regional Press Institute, (SRPI), has led the development of a portfolio-driven, hands-on curriculum enhanced by the addition of certificates or professional certifications ensuring graduates are career-ready. In the face of stringent budget cuts the past two years, the chair has hired a multicultural faculty who provide hands-on experience and opportunities for students to gain practical experience in student media outlets, a campus broadcast studio and The Tiger's Roar, the university's award-winning independent student newspaper. Students, faculty, and others praised the department's community engagement, outreach, and the SRPI. The department hosts a two-day mass media conference that convenes industry professionals, faculty and students, and high school, middle school and elementary students involved in student media. This type of engagement provides mentoring and career enhancement for its majors and serves as a pipeline and bridge program for prospective students. This outreach also reinforces the department's commitment to recruit multicultural students and expose students to media professionals. Other examples include students joining the production team of ESPN's First Take show.

The Tiger's Roar and the department received a \$22,000 grant from the Center for Journalism and Democracy at Howard University and \$7,500 from the Southern Journalism Network. Students, alumni and media professionals commented on the department's quality of instruction and students' workforce readiness. They also lauded the department chair's servant leadership style, and leadership by example.

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

The unit updates its data on the ACEJMC searchable database 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 unit's retention and graduation rates are prominently displayed on their website under the heading "Public Accountability," and includes retention rates from fall-to-fall first-year students from 2016-2017 to 2024-2025. The unit's highest retention rate was 96.15% in 2024-2025, and lowest in 2020-2021 at 27.14%. The unit average is 71.24%. The graduation rates average 31.25% from 2010-2016 to 2019-2025 (40%).

**On indicators (e), (f) and (g) the site team should make sure the unit operates within accepted academic norms and need only report in detail on extraordinary situations, cases or variances from policy.**

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

The department has policies and procedures for substantive faculty governance that ensure faculty oversight of educational policy and curriculum as stipulated in the university faculty handbook. Department faculty also have served on the faculty senate the past six years, and on committees that allow them to advocate for departmental needs and perspectives. Moreover, faculty are actively engaged in curriculum development with frequent input from industry professionals and students. A departmental curriculum committee shepherds curricula changes and recommendations through a university-wide New Programs and Curriculum Committee, and for new programs that require board approval, the Board of Regents.

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

The dean of the College of Media, Arts and Communications directs the selection and evaluation process of the department head, appoints the search committee which makes the recommendations to the dean, who appoints the chair. The chair reports to the dean of the college, who reports to the provost and vice president of academic affairs, who reports to the president. The dean, provost and vice president for academic affairs, are selected by a university search committee comprising faculty and staff.

The department adheres to faculty handbook policy for evaluating senior administrators. Senior administrators are evaluated by their subordinates at least once every five years on a performance management system that includes leadership qualities, management style, planning and organizing capacities, effective communication skills, accountability for diversity efforts and results, and success at meeting goals and objectives. The evaluation results inform the senior administrator's development plan.

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

The department has a process in place to address faculty, staff and student concerns equitably and promptly through the university's Title IX office and sexual misconduct policy. Both emphasize a zero-tolerance stance on issues such as sexual assault and harassment while providing clear guidelines for reporting incidents. The university also provides support and resources to victims, ensuring fair treatment throughout the investigation. The faculty handbook outlines policies and procedures for addressing complaints and concerns expressed by faculty, staff, and students. Notably, the university implemented Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) to address and resolve disputes at the lowest level, and mediation, a conciliatory model, using a neutral third party to facilitate communication and self-determination.

The department and university are committed to a policy of fair treatment of their students in all relationships, including those with fellow students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Students are encouraged to seek an informal resolution directly with the faculty or individuals involved or file a grievance through a grievance complaint form when all other conciliatory efforts fail.

**SUMMARY:**

Since its last accreditation visit in 2019 that found the department out of compliance on Standard 1, much progress has been made in stabilizing the department with the hire of a new chair in 2021. The

department has garnered campus, local, state and national recognition for its students and faculty; achieved curriculum enhancement with the addition of certificates and certifications that complement the major concentrations; and strengthened community engagement. Its focus on student career preparation has resulted in improved course offerings and hands-on experience for students. Recently, the department was among three other units to receive a \$1.2 million grant from the university provost to further program enhancement. Given the student enthusiasm, college and university support, strong community engagement with local media facilities and civic organizations, the department is among the top programs in the university.

**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.**

The department offers a Bachelor of Arts degree in Mass Communications. They also offer five undergraduate certificates (Film, Community Journalism & Reporting, Social Media, and Public Relations & Public Affairs). The unit is also part of the Georgia Film Academy, a statewide initiative between other universities and technical colleges in the state. Through this collaboration, the partners are developing a professional training program to build a skilled workforce for the state's growing film industry. Students can choose this certification instead of a minor.

Students must complete at least 122 credit hours to earn a bachelor's degree. Students take 42 credits in the Savannah State core curriculum/general education. They take 54 credits in the unit. Eighteen (18) credits are core courses including Writing for Multimedia, Mass Media & Society, Intro to Multimedia & Communication Technology, and Intro to Communication Research. Students select one course from the following: African Americans, Women in the Media, and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Communication. They then select to take either Intro to Layout & Design or Intro to Media Arts & Design.

All students must also take the following courses: Strategic Communication Lab, Audio & Video Lab, Media Writing Lab, Ethics & Professional Communication, Introduction to Communications Theory, Communications Practicum, Media Ethics and the Law, and Professional Internship. They then select 6 credits from courses at the 3000-4000 level in the area of Multimedia & Digital Communications, 6 credits from courses at the 3000-4000 level in the area of PR & Strategic Communication, 6 credits from courses at the 3000-4000 level in the area of Journalism, and 3 credits in Speech and Communication Competency. The certificates/certifications are not required, but they allow students to focus on their elective hours. Some choose to take a minor outside of the department rather than a program.

The unit is phasing out concentrations to add more flexibility in course scheduling for students, being able to add more special topics courses to address industry changes, and to address students' abilities when they enter the program.

**(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 unit offers numerous courses. The core courses for the major include theoretical and conceptual courses and skills courses. They map the courses to the ACEJMC values and competencies to make sure students are exposed to them throughout the curriculum.

**(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.**

Students were enthusiastic about the courses they were taking, the faculty they were interacting with, and the opportunities to apply course concepts to the “real world.” Students noted they felt prepared for internships and the practicum and portfolio course. The syllabi are reviewed by advisory board members and other external stakeholders to make sure courses are kept up-to-date and current. Students note that the technology they check out for courses is current, and it’s an easy transition to using technology in industry. Multiple students discussed the Adobe suite of programs and the benefit of having free access to the program through university licensing. Students noted their responsibility to ethics when telling a story.

A review of course syllabi indicates courses cover necessary topics, include assignments addressing a variety of skills, and students are learning about AI (OpenAI, Google Gemini, and ChatGPT), its efficacy, and how to use it ethically.

**(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 school engages with alumni and industry professionals in a variety of ways. They have a very active advisory board and alumni who review course syllabi. They have a robust internship program tying them to working professionals in various industries.

The Southern Regional Press Institute is a two-day conference held on campus that brings together industry professionals, faculty, administrators, and students. Over 30 industry professionals speak in concurrent panel sessions. The unit also organizes shadow days and trips to various media outlets (e.g., Atlanta News First, Blue Scorpion Reputation Management, WTOG, WSAV).

The self-study noted the unit has a number of lunch-and-learn events, classroom visits, and presentations from industry professionals. Speakers came from WSAV/Savannah Morning News; The Karson Institute for Race, Peace & Social Justice; Blue Scorpion Reputation Management; Savannah Ghost Pirates; ESPN; and various other media outlets.

Students commented on the ties full and part-time faculty have to industry and the experiences they’ve gained from the SRPI, internships, guest speakers, and other opportunities. The unit has also offered several study abroad opportunities to Panama and Japan. This summer they will be going to Curacao.

**(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.**

When reviewing the information provided in the self-study, skills classes had an enrollment as low as 1 or as high as 20. The courses that had one student were run as independent studies with a specific course curriculum so the students could graduate on time.

**(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 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.**

Internships are required. Once students obtain an internship, they are enrolled in the Professional Media Internship course and have a syllabus that explains the internship policies, the course requirements, and all documents that must be submitted by both the intern and the supervisor. An agreement is signed between the faculty member, the internship supervisor, and the student.

Students turn in weekly journals and the supervisor completes a weekly evaluation. There is also a final evaluation of the intern. Students complete 150 hours per semester (12.5 hours/week over ten weeks, or 25 hours/week over six weeks). The final evaluation consists of the supervisor's evaluation and the student's confidential evaluation of the internship. Any grade below a B is considered extremely poor for the internship.

**SUMMARY:**

The unit has a vibrant, evolving curriculum that is updated as industry changes. The students felt prepared for their internships and were happy with the course offerings. Numerous alumni and industry professionals are involved with the students and help keep the curriculum updated.

**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 and a course matrix that aligns ACEJMC values and competencies taught in the curriculum and identifies the methods of assessment. The plan was developed in 2006-2007. It has been consistently revised 2012-2013, 2017- 2018, 2023, and again in 2025.

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

The unit posts its assessment plan on its website under a tab with other accreditation information.

**(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 unit has clearly defined goals for student learning objectives. They are aligned with ACEJMC’s Professional Values and Competencies. The self-study lists ten program student learning outcomes. It is easy to see they align with the ACEJMC professional values and competencies.

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

The unit includes multiple direct measures and indirect measures in its assessment plan. Direct measures include senior exit exams and senior portfolios that are embedded into the senior capstone project class. The unit expects an average of 70 percent or higher for the senior portfolio. The senior exit exam comprises 50 questions that assess fundamental concepts related to the ACEJMC professional values and competencies. The department expects an average of 70 percent or higher on the exit exam. Indirect measures include internship evaluations. The baseline for internship evaluations is 80 percent.

In addition, a course-level assessment tool is used yearly. This data is turned in for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), but it is not included in the ACEJMC assessment information. However, the course matrix clearly indicates the course level assessment is measuring ACEJMC professional values and competencies.

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

The indirect measure includes using journalism and mass communications professionals in assessment data. Industry professionals review the portfolio and project that are part of the senior capstone course. The advisory board and other industry professionals also review syllabi.

**(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 most significant change that indicates the unit “closed the loop” is the phasing out of concentrations. The unit reviewed data from the 2018-2019 cycle and identified that students needed to be more technically prepared and have a variety of mass media skills. The core courses found in Standard 2 show students are now exposed to video, writing, and strategic communication before they move into specific elective courses.

Another example of “closing the loop” is seen in the overall score on senior projects increasing. There is also a new rubric being developed to be implemented across all studio-based courses for consistency in evaluation.

**SUMMARY:**

The unit has an assessment plan that is constantly being reviewed and revised when needed. They collect course-level assessment data each year. The program student learning objectives in the course matrix are tied to the ACEJMC professional values and competencies. Courses are evaluated each year so problems can be identified early on prior to students reaching the capstone course. The unit has several direct measures and indirect measures. Alumni and industry professionals are involved in the assessment process in a variety of places.

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

**COMPLIANCE**

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

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

**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 Mass Communications has a written diversity plan which it describes as the Accessibility and Advancement Plan, and is reviewed at least annually by faculty, staff, and students. Recently, as the political and social climate changed in Georgia, the unit has made changes in its plan to be synchronous with state law. In accordance with ACEJMC’s new Standard 4’s culturally proficient language, the unit is empowering faculty, staff and students to provide a global approach to journalism and mass communications. As a result, the unit is adhering to Georgia and Savannah State University changes while continuing to include diversity by expanding what diversity means.

The Accessibility and Advancement plan is prominently placed on the unit’s ACEJMC website page that also includes its strategic plan and other ACEJMC compliance documents.

**(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 promotes an inclusive curriculum and fosters a culturally proficient faculty, staff, and student population. According to the plan, the department defines equal opportunity and standards-based success as a commitment to fairness, inclusivity, and excellence in education. The unit ensures that all individuals — regardless of background, socioeconomic status, ability, or cultural identity — have equal access to learning and professional growth opportunities. The plan emphasizes respect for diverse viewpoints and fosters participatory engagement across all segments of society. Success is measured not only by academic achievement but also by adherence to shared values of professionalism, responsibility, respect, and excellence. The plan states that by preparing culturally proficient communicators for a global society, the unit demonstrates that equal opportunity and high standards are inseparable foundations for student development and institutional impact.

The plan includes key performance indicators (KPIs) that monitor progress across various dimensions, including activity outputs and impacts on students and culture to measure effectiveness in achieving the set goals and guide necessary strategy adjustments. The plan also extends its scope internationally, as applicable, addressing the needs and contributions of international groups within the university community. The plan has four diversity priorities:

- Priority 1 – Diverse Curriculum: A continuous effort to ensure that multiculturalism and global perspectives are included in the studies of journalism and mass communications.
- Priority 2 – Cultural Understanding and Sensitivity: A continuous effort to foster an understanding of issues and perspectives that are inclusive.

- Priority 3 – Accessible work environment for all members of society: A continuous effort to recruit faculty from various backgrounds.
- Priority 4 – Supportive climate for working and learning, free of harassment and discrimination. A working and learning environment that is inclusive, respectful, and free from harassment and discrimination, promoting safety, dignity, and collaborative growth for all members of the university community. The unit also promotes a study abroad opportunity for cultural immersion in communications.

**(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 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. In interviews with faculty, students and external stakeholders, it is clear that this compliance shows up in the curriculum, the new certificate and certification options, and student performance in in internship and job placement. The unit proactively recruits and retains faculty and staff by complying with university search procedures and strategic outreach to attract, recruit and retain faculty, staff, and students who may not be represented in the program.

**(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 department employs a number of creative strategies to achieve this objective, including its advisory council, alumni, outreach to K-12, community engagement, and partnerships such as the Southern Regional Press Institute, the Georgia Film Academy, and a bridge program with a local high school. The department has also participated in the Center for Journalism & Democracy at Howard University for both students and faculty. This commitment is also reflected in the department's inclusive curriculum.

**(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.**

The unit is committed to fostering a climate that is free of harassment and discrimination, while also accommodating the needs of individuals with disabilities and valuing all forms of diversity. As an affirmatively active environment, the University System of Georgia prohibits discrimination based on age, disability, gender, national origin, race, religion, or veteran status. Allegations of discrimination are handled through the designated complaint and investigation procedures outlined in the personnel handbook. The policies are systematic across the university, and all faculty are required to attend training sessions and workshops offered during the academic year.

**SUMMARY:**

The Department of Journalism and Mass Communications has impressively embraced the new Standard 4: Advancing A Culturally Proficient Workforce, as evident in both the university and department mission and strategic plan, the department's curriculum, its recruitment and retention strategies for faculty and students, and their engagement with other units on campus, media professionals, alumni and prospective students. The department is committed to a multicultural environment that fosters access, respects diverse viewpoints, and prepares culturally proficient communicators for a global context. This was evident throughout the site visit in meeting with faculty, students, administrators and external constituents.

**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.**

Faculty can choose between the teaching track, the scholarship track, and the service track. The type of track one is on influences the percentage of time spent on teaching, research, and service.

The self-study notes that all faculty are involved in curriculum and oversight of courses. A normal teaching load for full-time faculty is an average of 12 hours per semester (roughly 4 courses). Faculty members can be assigned a course overload and compensated when needed. They can also receive a course release for special projects or duties.

Overall, the full-time faculty are primarily responsible for teaching the core and required courses as demonstrated by the reported averages between the fall and spring semesters. Averages of full-time faculty teaching courses range from 65% to 100% depending on the semester. The average was 77% of course sections taught by full-time faculty for the last three years.

- 2024-2025: 68% (Fall 65%, Spring 72%)
- 2023-2024: 68% (Fall 67%, Spring 69%)
- 2022-2023: 94% (Fall 88%, Spring 100%)

#### **(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 full-time faculty includes three full professors, one associate professor, and two lecturers. Three members have doctorates and three members have master's degrees. They have seven part-time faculty for the 2024-2025 academic year. One has a bachelor's degree, two have master's degrees, two have MFAs, one has an MPA, and one has an Ed.D.

The university has the Center for Professional Excellence. This exists to support faculty and staff in adopting best practices for professional development. The center offers workshops, trainings, and certificates including the Quality Matters certificates for online teaching and blended learning. One full-time faculty member completed two of the QM certificates. Several part-time faculty completed QM certificates as well. All faculty were required to take a course and pass an exam for the program Transparency in Learning and Teaching. One full-time faculty member completed Drone Certification, and a part-time faculty member completed The Apple Teacher Training. Several full-time and part-time faculty attended various trainings at The Center for Journalism & Democracy at Howard University and Investigative Reporters and Editors.

The part-time faculty are working professionals with strong ties to various industry associations. The full-time faculty are not as active in scholarly organizations as they may have been in the past because of budget constraints at the university level.

Students noted that the full and part-time faculty were experts in their fields and were available at all hours to mentor and support them on projects that were class related. Students noted faculty are very engaged with them offering support on projects not related to class but things they are working on independently.

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

The unit provides travel funding when possible, to support scholarship and professional activity. The university cut travel funding by 50 percent in 2023. One of the first initiatives from the president was to increase travel funding. This academic year, every full-time faculty member received \$1,000 to be spent on professional development (e.g., travel to a conference, membership fees, etc.).

During the time under review, faculty traveled to conferences including the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) annual meeting and the AEJMC Mid-Winter Conference, the International Association of Communication and Sport, the Popular Culture Association conference, and the Georgia Communication Conference.

Expectations for tenure and promotion are clear. There were no tenure-track faculty to ask about expectations at the time. Two post-tenure reviews were completed during the time under review. Faculty are reviewed each year in the areas of teaching, research, and service.

**(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.**

From the productivity chart of the last six years, the unit reports nearly 56 scholarships, creative and professional activities. This includes 11 peer-reviewed articles, 10 book chapters, 19 refereed conference papers, two encyclopedia entries, and two external grants. There were three non-juried creative works and five invited speeches. Faculty presented papers at the AEJMC Southeast Colloquium and AEJMC.

One recent example of creative work from a full-time faculty member was his production work on a series called “Street Somm” from a film by Tastemade.

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

At the luncheon with various stakeholders, members noted full-time and part-time faculty are preparing competent, intelligent students who are prepared for the workforce. Several full-time faculty have served on the Faculty Senate. It was noted that the unit being in the new college will bring more awareness to the faculty and students and the impact they have on the city of Savannah.

**SUMMARY:**

The unit has productive faculty with high teaching loads. All faculty regardless of title or rank take part in professional development opportunities. Limited funds for travel and association memberships have dampened recent participation in some conferences such as AEJMC. Faculty interviews indicated they are excited to see the new administration restoring the budgets to allow them to take part in more association meetings for professional development.

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

**COMPLIANCE**

Report of evaluation of undergraduate programs for 2025-2026 site visits

SCHOLARSHIP, RESEARCH, CREATIVE AND PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES	Total from Unit*	INDIVIDUALS				Totals (7)
		Full Professors (2)	Associate Professors (1)	Assistant Professors (3)	Lecturer (1)	
Awards and Honors	4	4				4
Grants Received Internal						
Grants Received External	2	2				2
Scholarly Books, Sole- or Co- authored						
Textbooks, Sole- or Co-authored						
Books Edited				1		
Book Chapters	10	7		3		10
Monographs						
Articles in Refereed Journals	11	5		6		11
Refereed Conference Papers	19	9		9		19
Invited Academic Papers						
Encyclopedia Entries	2	2				2
Book Reviews						
Articles in Non-refereed Publications						
Juried Creative Works						
Non-juried Creative Works	3		2		1	3
Other (please specify)						
Invited Speech (research)	5	5				5

## **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 supports and services its undergraduate students with a data-driven approach to help faculty advisors understand what students need as the students advance toward meeting unit and university requirements. The faculty uses curriculum-focused metrics, using syllabus audits and curriculum changes and updates to keep students on track. In addition, indirect indicators such as internship supervisor and student surveys are used to assess student performance. Faculty document student progress in a shared advisement system or EAB navigate. With faculty regularly discussing student progress, it is easier to identify students who are behind so they can identify intervention options.

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

Regular unit faculty advising is supported by professional advisors and faculty mentors. Structured academic matriculation mapping with progress reports is a part of keeping students informed about degree requirements. The Center for Student Success and Retention hosts bi-weekly, at-risk meetings with freshmen. The center uses student academic and placement files to keep students up-to-date and to provide information about jobs and graduate school options. The unit has a Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) chapter, The Tiger's Roar campus newspaper and a radio station, each exposing unit students to career exposure, experience and opportunities.

The department coordinates student advising with faculty and the university's Center for Student Success and Retention. Professional university advisors focus on all university course options and requirements for graduation. Department faculty focus on helping students identify degree requirements and the steps that will move them toward degree completion with selected degree programs and program tracks. Students can use the university catalogues and degree maps to learn about and to follow unit and university requirements. The CSSR provides students with personal advising, peer mentoring, tutorials, and testing to ensure that students have development opportunities from enrollment to completion. That advising is based on student classification, academic standing, academic needs and graduation requirements, using academic maps prepared by the unit chair, based in part on course progression. There are step-by-step academic maps online.

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

Unit faculty members and university student services staffers keep students informed about unit and university academic policies, activities and requirements. They use student-specific advisement systems to keep students, faculty and staff in the loop about academic progress meeting unit and university requirements. The unit has a robust number of academic and professional activities to help student development and career opportunities.

#### **(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 provides a number of unit curriculum-related activities and opportunities to help students learn film, journalism, reporting, writing, producing and interviewing with hands-on experience. The Tiger's Roar and WTRT-TV are two of the most high-profile opportunities that students have the opportunity to participate in to gain experience, to develop critical thinking and to get a taste of what it might be like to work in this industry. The Tiger's Roar has a student editor and a student co-editor on staff with paid positions of up to 19 hours per week. Sometimes the news outlet has had four or more paid student workers, sometimes with work study assignments.

Generally, the Tiger's Roar has had support from the unit, the college and the university.

There have been instances in recent years when university leaders have challenged and questioned news coverage of campus news, including drainage, flooding, and a snowstorm. The new university president, the new college dean and the unit chair all support the unit's development of students with curiosity, inquisitiveness and their intellectual growth as they develop journalism skills. It is important that the administration support unit journalism and discuss any concerns with the dean and the unit chair without interference.

WTRT-TV is a student-run television production studio. The studio provides students with hands-on experience with camera operation, video recording and editing, programming and production experience. The studio has become a source of pride for the department and the unit's students, who help community and university clients and stakeholders produce high-quality marketing, news, promotion and other content.

The university promotes The Tiger's Roar and WTRT as places where students can learn to be news media professionals. "Whether you're passionate about uncovering the truth, sharing compelling stories, or mastering the art of video production, our Student Media programs offer you the platform to hone your skills and amplify your impact," the university says online. "Here, you won't just learn about media—you'll create it. From writing breaking news and producing captivating features to broadcasting live shows and editing video content, you'll be part of a creative, collaborative team that's shaping the voice of SSU. Join us and turn your passion for media into a powerful career." We find that the unit leadership and faculty believe and support that goal.

The department is doing well with available resources. It can do more with a welcome infusion of \$1.2 million. Additional faculty and/or staff would help the university's bold goal for the unit to become a center for producing job-ready communications graduates.

It was good to see the Savannah State University president state in his October 2025 State of Our University address that "bold storytelling" is a part of what he wants. The president specifically talked about the university's desire to firmly establish film as an important part of the unit's emphasis and an important part of the institution's brand. With the new multidiscipline bachelor's degree, there are several tracks. Four of the seven certificates/certifications offered in the unit are film-related: a BA in Mass Communication with a film certificate, a Georgia Film Academy film production certification, a film postproduction certification offered online, and an eSports certification. The university administers the academic certificates, whereas the Georgia Film Academy issues certifications.

The university radio station, WHCJ-FM, celebrated 50 years on the air as "a non-commercial, educational, public radio station facility under the auspices of Savannah State College and the University System of Georgia," according to the radio station's website. Started as a 10-watt radio station, it is a campus-based media outlet that reports to academic affairs. It is not a part of the unit.

Periodically, there are university conversations about the possibility of the station being a part of the department, including discussions that happened in 2025. As of this writing in January, the unit, college and university leaders are comfortable with the relationship between the unit and the station. One of the primary reasons for the existing relationship is because the station sets aside time for department students to learn about the station and train for station opportunities. In addition, a unit audio course has had the cooperation and support of station leadership.

Savannah State University's Department of Journalism and Mass Communications is one of only nine HBCUs participating in Howard University's Center for Journalism & Democracy program. The HBCU consortium includes Howard University, Morehouse College, North Carolina A&T University, North Carolina Central University, Texas Southern University, the University of the District of Columbia, Florida A&M University and Morgan State University. The center program trains HBCU journalists to cover, protect, and defend a multiracial democracy with an emphasis on inequality. The center's goal includes strengthening campus newsrooms with investigative journalism and democracy journalism. The center supports students participating in a virtual course taught by Center creator Nikole Hannah-Jones, a Knight professor at Howard and a Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times journalist, and faculty and student support to attend an annual conference at Howard annually. Hannah-Jones said Savannah State University was chosen to participate in the program because the JMC unit is a "small but burgeoning journalism program". She said the program has been "a good partner" and faculty and staff have taken advantage of center resources available.

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

The unit works with professional university advisors and unit JMC mentors to guide students toward degree completion and graduation. Data mapping helps keep students on a matriculation path that leads to commencement. Students who have potential barriers, including disabilities, are supported so potential barriers can be identified and overcome, or so existing barriers can be assessed so they can be removed. With a new university director of mentoring appointed in 2025, the institution has established a deeper commitment to SSU mentoring for faculty, staff, students and alumni, JMC mentors are likely to experience more assistance and deeper connections for individual university stakeholders.

**SUMMARY:**

The unit has strong advising and mentoring programs in place as a starting place for students to learn specifics about matriculation with a graduation goal. The unit does not recruit students directly; that's the university's responsibility and role. Once students are enrolled in the department, students are assigned to full-time faculty members who double as official JMC mentors. Other faculty and staff members, unit alumni, advisory council and professional stakeholders provide unofficial mentoring from time to time. Student-specific data and mapping aids students and JMC mentors as they navigate academic requirements and pathway options.

**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 annual budget approved by university leaders. It is tied to overall institution goals and budget priorities, and the unit advocates for a department-specific budget tied to the university's and the unit's long-range and strategic plans. Other than proposing a budget based on unit budget history, unit changes, unit needs and university budget guidelines, the unit has limited say about the final budget approved for the department. In recent years, the unit's faculty and staff have decreased as the unit's enrollment decreased. Naturally, the budget changed accordingly.

In just three years, the unit's budget decreased from about \$922,000 to about \$670,000 for compensation and benefits as the unit had to eliminate two staff positions, including a technology coordinator and an administrative assistant. Meanwhile, as the university reduced travel campus-wide, the department's travel budget doubled for the 2024-25 fiscal year, and it was more than \$9,000 for the 2025-26 fiscal year.

Other than faculty and staff budget lines, the unit's biggest budget needs are building, equipment and facilities expenses. The unit's television production studio had been located in the Kennedy Building until a 2015 move to the Whiting Hall, where the department is now located. As the department's enrollment declined, the university invested in the unit. There have been a couple of major studio upgrades since then, including a \$1.4 million refresh and renovation. These university investments recognized the need for advancing the journalism and mass communication curriculum as an important part of Savannah State University. As the unit's enrollment declined, the university invested in the department's future. Declining enrollment happened for a number of reasons as the university's overall enrollment declined. Still, the university helped the unit navigate fiscal realities with a strategic focus to prepare for the future. For example, one renovation included green screens and green paint as those closest to television production anticipated a changing media landscape. That forward-looking decision was on target as more production became more high-tech and more virtual. Since the last ACEJMC site team visit, the unit invested in a Tricaster system and upgraded iMacs to enhance real-time editing, streaming, and broadcasting capabilities. In addition, separate from the studio, a PC lab was upgraded to enhance hands-on learning and course production. Some of these improvements were the result of unit external partnerships and in-kind support from professional media supporters.

#### **(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.**

As the university's contracted and budgets were tightened, the university has focused its efforts on retooling its strategic plan with Georgia's new emphasis on job-ready graduation expectations. The new university president identified the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication as the larger unit of the new College Media, Arts and Communication. Recently, the unit was notified that the department in Whiting Hall would receive a \$1.2 million Title III Activity #4 grant: "Enhancing Classroom and Career Success in Mass Communications."

That is a huge investment that ACEJMC accredited programs two, three and four times the size of JMC would like to receive. Such an investment shows that the university administration is serious about making the unit a central focus of enrollment growth as the president pursues his 6,000-student by 2030 university enrollment goal.

According to the Title III grant, the financial investment is critical for the unit to continue to be competitive. The existing studio, even after a couple of upgrades, is a decade old. Partner and potential employers have advised the unit and the university that the unit is falling behind industry standards, making an investment like this critical to future student success – especially tying matriculation to graduation with career readiness.

The significant upgrade includes a studio lighting grid, a Tricaster Vizion, a Tricaster 1 Pro, four Panasonic 4K cameras, a set of PTZ portable web cameras, 52 Canon XA60 Professional UHD 4K camcorders, soundproofing kits and 130 new Macs. That is only part of what is coming. The president and the dean are so determined that this project be completed quickly that the deadline for everything to be installed and working is June 1, 2026 with the goal of 60 mass communication students having introductory sessions with 80% of them scoring 80% or higher on a skills knowledge test, 40 mass communication students cycled through the podcast studio with 80% of them scoring 80% or higher on a podcast studio knowledge assessment, and 90% of all mass communication majors positively answering with “agree” or “strongly agree” when asked whether “The instructional equipment used in my Mass Communications classes are helping me to prepare for my career” -- all by September 30, 2026.

Faculty and students are aware of the project and are quite excited. However, some graduating seniors are disappointed that they won't be enrolled in time to experience the significant upgrade.

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

Such a large investment will provide state-of-the-art facilities and resources to promote effective scholarship, teaching, and learning. A group of media professionals reviewed and advised the university to make a significant upgrade. With the State of Georgia's focus on producing more job-ready graduates, and a short timetable for action, the unit will be well-positioned to compete with other journalism and mass communication programs. Department faculty, staff and students are excited about what's about to happen.

**(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 has an equipment checkout program that students appreciate, respect, understand and use. Students can check out Canon digital SLRs to record still images and videos for class projects, including six video kits, each with a camera and a Røde VideoMic. A set of Azden SGM 990s are available for narration and recording with SLRs. For class assignments, students have access to light kits, boom mics and two Panasonic AG-AC90APJ camcorders.

Since the last site visit, the department expanded facilities for student media engagement and other activities with Rooms 122 and 128 to enhance co-curricular activities and student media engagement. Room 128 expands the Student Media Center, making it suitable for quick video shoots, professional headshots and more.

**SUMMARY:**

Compared to other units on campus, this unit has experienced university investments to continue upgrading the department's facilities. Now that a third significant investment has been provided, with a short completion timeline, students returning to campus this fall are expected to see a next-to-new television production studio and a state-of-the-art department available and ready to help them ramp up their journalism and media knowledge and skills.

**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 has an engaged alumni, advisory council, community, media and school professionals who regularly advise the unit about the curriculum and teaching techniques. They regularly engage with formal and informal meetings and conversations. This engagement was important as the president, the dean and the unit chair considered an important financial investment to support the president's vision of attracting students to Savannah State University, in part with the unit as a jewel with a film focus.

**(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 unit regularly meets this standard by including journalism and communications professionals as course and event speakers, as coaches who provide content feedback and as guides who share the latest industry demands, requirements and trends. These professionals have ongoing relationships with unit leadership, faculty and staff. They emphasize accuracy, ethics and expectations.

**(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 contributes to its various communities in a number of ways. Unit faculty, staff and students attend, host and participate in community school activities and events, including high school journalism programs and community festivals. Faculty regularly participate with community and university service, including the faculty senate, university committees and community boards.

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

The unit had a summer journalism workshop program for high school students and it has K-12 partnerships that showcase the unit's alumni and students as inspirations for younger students. The advisory council has expressed a desire to see the unit continue its scholastic journalism efforts, encouraging young people to consider journalism and media careers, in part to urge students to consider the university's Department of Journalism and Mass Communications. The advisory council has urged the unit to revive the camp by 2028, while continuing to develop its collaboration with the university's marine science summer camp.

### **SUMMARY:**

The unit actively engages department alumni, industry professionals and stakeholders who can identify unit strengths and development needs so the department can produce job-ready graduates. With strong

engagement from alumni, faculty, staff and industry professionals, the department is well-positioned to become an academic leader for smaller journalism and mass communication programs – and even some larger programs.

**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**

Leadership

Engaged faculty and students

Community engagement and outreach to professional organizations and local schools

Support for the program mission including adequate equipment and facilities for the program size

##### **Areas for Improvement**

Increased funding support to enhance faculty research and creative activity

Increased opportunity for student organization engagement with professional associations

Continued support for independent student media

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

N/A

#### **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.**

N/A

#### **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.**

N/A

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

N/A

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

The previous report cited a noncompliance on leadership in Standard 1 because of multiple changes in department leadership that prevented the department from maximizing its fullest potential. Since the last visit, the unit has made significant improvements in stabilizing leadership at the president, provost, dean and department chair levels. This stability has resulted in one of the strongest, adequately supported units in its new college home and within the university.

#### **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 comprehensive but complicated. Information was difficult to find because of the photos and graphics used in the standards. It was hard to identify the question being answered, and the size of the PDF made it impossible to navigate.