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FROM THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY

SUBJECT: Departmental Status for the Communications Program

At its regular meeting on May 10, the Committee on Educational Policy voted to recommend to the faculty and to the administration the transformation of the present program in Communications into a new department, effective this fall, and subject to four principal conditions outlined at the conclusion of this report. Three members of the CEP voted in favor of the resolution; two members voted in the negative; two members abstained. The following report represents the opinion of the members who voted in the affirmative to create a new department.

I

Since its inception over a decade ago, the program in Communications at UCSD has generated more controversy in the committees of the Senate than any other single issue. Condemned by some faculty, praised by others, the program has continued to attract a growing and enthusiastic student constituency for its major. Now, faced with nearly 500 majors, but with only eight permanent and five temporary faculty to teach them, the program stands at an important crossroads that requires a clear decision by the UCSD faculty and administration. The present situation,

intellectually and administratively, borders upon the intolerable-- for the students who major in the program; for those who hope to do so in the future; for the faculty who currently teach in it; and for the committees of the Senate who have spent countless hours this year studying the program's past achievements and present difficulties.

Our choices are clear. Either the present program must be reduced in size, thereby encouraging many undergraduates to seek their education in the field at other universities; or it must be given the permanent faculty resources and institutional standing to do its present job more effectively. We firmly believe that the second alternative is in the best interests of the entire campus and that it can be achieved only by granting the program full departmental status in conjunction with a revised lower-division curriculum that utilizes to the fullest extent possible the teaching resources of other social science and humanities departments.

II

When last reviewed by CEP in 1976-77, the program contained 350 majors, taught by five permanent faculty, only one of whom had tenure. The CEP report of that year was very critical of the program and called for two specific reforms--the hiring of additional tenured faculty through joint appointments with other departments; a revamping of the curriculum in order to reduce

the large number of cross-listed courses. Responding to this CEP agenda, the faculty and departments associated with the program have made important strides in five years. Three new tenured faculty have been recruited, plus one tenure-track assistant professor, and seven faculty who occupy temporary positions. The curriculum, both lower-division and upper-division, has been focused and strengthened through the reorganization of core courses, especially Communications 20 and Communications 100.

Not surprisingly, these curriculum innovations and the hiring of distinguished new faculty increased the program's attractiveness to UCSD students. Between 1977 and the present, a faltering program became a thriving one. But with the addition of another 150 new majors, it now faces severe problems that cannot be easily solved through the expediency of hiring temporary faculty or the time-consuming and often conflict-ridden process of making joint appointments with other competing departments.

III

Why has the program grown so large? For many years, some critics have attributed its rapid expansion to a combination of public relations ballyhoo and low intellectual standards, manifested, it is sometimes said, in easy course requirements and relaxed grading policies. Departmental status, it is claimed, will institutionalize mediocrity. However, our review of the evidence--

including campus-wide grading data, course syllabi, examinations, and interviews with students and faculty--does not support these charges. At both the lower-division and upper-division level, for instance, it is easier for a student to garner an A or a B in several other departments on the campus. In terms of formal course requirements--numbers of books read, term papers, and difficulty of examinations--there is little if any variation between courses taught in Communications and those taught in other social science and humanities departments. As the previous CEP report of 1977 pointed out, students who choose to major in Communications have on the average the same SAT scores and GPA as other students in the non-science departments.

We have concluded that the Communications program at UCSD attracts large numbers of students because its courses are stimulating and well taught; and because, rightly or wrongly, many students with a bent for the social sciences and humanities believe that their opportunities for employment will be enhanced by an undergraduate degree in that field rather than in history, anthropology, or linguistics. Flabby intellectual standards do not account for the program's success, but they will be the inevitable consequence of an effort to continue to operate it in the future with only eight permanent faculty and a shifting configuration of temporary FTE's.

A second objection to departmental status comes from those who argue that Communications is not a distinct discipline with

a unified methodology, but rather a subject that can be explored most fruitfully through its present interdisciplinary format. But this objection ignores the fact that many university departments--neurosciences, social ecology, astronomy, earth sciences, and psychobiology--are also interdisciplinary in nature; that none of the traditional social sciences possess a single methodological paradigm; and that they, too, evolved out of other fields such as moral philosophy a century ago.

Intellectually, we believe that the program in Communications is one of the liveliest areas of the social sciences and humanities at UCSD today. There is great ferment in the integrated areas of cognition, language, and literacy; computers, new information technology and social change; semiotic and other textual analysis of films, television, and print media; and the social and political consequences of the mass media. Research into these various areas is complimentary and reinforcing. The current faculty in the program have developed intellectual bonds as strong as those in more traditional departments. They teach courses together and lecture in one another's classes; they read and comment upon one another's research. They do not share a common methodological orthodoxy, but they do share something equally important--a commitment to the same kind of intellectual pioneering that once characterized the "new" academic fields of sociology, anthropology, and political science during their infancy.

IV

The intellectual quality and compatibility of the present faculty in the program are sufficient, we believe, to justify the creation of a department. The case becomes all the more compelling when one considers the difficulties of teaching 500 majors with a faculty composed almost entirely of those holding joint or temporary appointments. Communications needs faculty members who are committed to its effort on a full-time basis and who teach regular courses for more than one or two years on temporary contracts. Given the present Senate and administrative prohibitions against appointing ladder-rank FTE's to programs, Communications can only gain its needed resources when it becomes a full-fledged department.

Joint appointments with other departments have worked successfully in the past, but this process is very time-consuming and has been often marked by irreconcilable conflict between competing intellectual interests on the faculty. Other departments, having long ago developed a special focus for their own graduate and undergraduate programs, have been understandably reluctant to accommodate new appointments that may diverge sharply from their dominant intellectual orientation. Departmental status will give Communications the important option of pursuing joint appointments where that strategy seems most likely to produce a quality appointment or of making their own appointment when other alternatives are closed. We trust that the normal peer-review process, embodied

in the deliberations of CAP and its ad hoc committees, will guarantee that the highest standards of academic excellence prevail for appointments of either kind.

V

We recommend, finally, that the current program in Communications become a regular department of the university, subject to the following conditions:

(1) Prerequisites to the major shall include appropriate lower-division courses from other social science and humanities departments in order to insure that students have a solid foundation in these traditional disciplines and in order to make efficient use of the university's existing resources. Specifically, students who major in Communications will be required to take Linguistics 5 or 10; Psychology 10 or 11; a sequence of two courses chosen from Sociology 1AB, Anthropology 22, 23, and 24, or Political Science 10, 11, and 12; plus two courses from the following: Lit/Gen 4ABC; Music 3ABC; Drama 11, Visual Arts 1, 2, 3, or 4; and Visual Arts 10.

(2) Because graduate-level instruction is vital to the intellectual life of departments and the university, the faculty in the new department shall move expeditiously to secure approval for its Ph. D program.

(3) All of the present tenured faculty who teach in the program, with the exception of the coordinator, Professor Michael Schudson, shall have their FTE's located full-time in the new department. Professor Schudson shall retain a 20% fraction of his FTE in the Department of Sociology. We urge the Vice Chancellor and the Program Review Committee to provide adequate compensation to those departments where the transfer of FTE's produces programmatic hardships.

(4) The new department shall be reviewed again by the Committee on Educational Policy during the academic year, 1984-85.

Respectfully submitted,

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