

REVIEW OF THE B.A., B.S. IN MASS MEDIA
 Classification of Instruction Programs (CIP) Code: 09.0102
 Mass Communication/Media Studies

OVERVIEW

The B.A., B.S. in Mass Media program at Illinois State University is housed in the School of Communication within the College of Arts and Sciences. The School offers four undergraduate degree programs—Communication Studies, Journalism, Mass Media, and Public Relations, as well as a master’s degree in Communication. Within the Mass Media program, students can pursue coursework across two sequences: Management, Promotion, and Sales, or Media Arts. The program provides a common core curriculum focused on communication theory and professional practice, with all students completing COM 101: Introduction to the School of Communication, which introduces them to the breadth of media production and helps them build a digital portfolio. Students are encouraged to gain hands-on experience through student-run media outlets such as TV-10, WZND radio, and The Vidette, as well as through partnerships like Redbird Productions. While the program reflects guidance from the Broadcast Education Association (BEA), it does not pursue formal accreditation, as BEA does not offer it. Emphasizing a liberal arts foundation, the program equips students with the knowledge and skills needed to produce, analyze, and ethically engage with mass media content across diverse platforms and audiences.

Enrollment, Fall Census Day, 2017-2024
B.A., B.S., in Mass Media, Illinois State University
 First Majors Only

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Media Arts sequence	140	145	137	131	111	111	99	84
Media Management, Promotion, and Sales sequence	90	88	77	87	72	71	76	64
Total	230	233	214	218	183	182	175	148

Degrees Conferred, Graduating Fiscal Year, 2017-2024
B.A., B.S., in Mass Media, Illinois State University
 First Majors Only

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Media Arts sequence	35	40	34	39	38	34	36	31
Media Management, Promotion, and Sales sequence	26	33	35	27	33	28	30	31
Total	61	73	69	66	71	62	66	62

*Graduating Fiscal Year consists of summer, fall, and spring terms, in that order. For example, Graduating Fiscal Year 2019 consists of the following terms: summer 2020, fall 2020, and spring 2021. Degrees by sequence for 2015 were not available.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT

Self-study process

Program Coordinators for Communication Studies, Journalism, Mass Media, Public Relations, and the Graduate Program in Communication began planning the overall development process in September 2023, beginning with overview meetings with university officials about program review and emphasizing data collection for the self study. Consensus among all coordinators was that the reports from the previous program review are robust and well worth using as the starting point for this program review process. During the fall 2023 semester, required content for this program review was compared with the content reported in the previous program review, and revisions and notations for revisions were made in the reporting documents accordingly. The purpose of this approach was to allow coordinators to have access to content that is useful while also identify content that must be acquired for either updates or new information. Data gathering took advantage of previously successful methods as well as new methods that were needed in process to fulfill content requirements.

Program curriculum

During the last program review mass media had four tracks:

- Management, Promotion, and Sales (MPS)
- Radio
- Television Production
- Interactive Media

A curriculum redesign began in 2017 and became official in Fall 2021. The major outcomes of this included collapsing Radio, TV Production, and Interactive Media into a single track called “Media Arts” while retaining MPS with a few tweaks. Our current two sequences can be described as the “business of media” or the “creation of media.” This allows those in Media Arts to try more avenues for their creativity and hopefully shorten the time to graduation by eliminating bottle necks because of prerequisites. Courses were reviewed to make sure their prerequisites were necessary, and course titles were changed to replace “broadcast” with “media” to better reflect today’s technological reality of how media is disseminated (e.g., Media Sales instead of Broadcast Sales).

Another outcome of this curriculum revision was a redesign of COM 101 which previously was an 8-week course for one hour of credit taught by advisors. It is now a regular three-hour semester-long class which is a prerequisite for everything else in the major. Freshmen take it in their first year and transfers take it in their first semester. In this class, all mass media faculty visit the class and share with them their backgrounds, interests, and courses that they teach. Students also tour the radio and TV stations so that they know how to get involved. The goal of this class is to make sure students

Another new course is Film Festival Management & Curation (COM 434). To accompany the new film festival course, we also created a competitive festival. High school and college students from anywhere in the world can enter their work by submitting to our FilmFreeway.com site. In addition to our FilmFreeway site, we have also created a festival website and several social media channels to promote the festival. The Foxtail Film Festival has been held twice (2023 & 2024) and was a tremendous success.

Program or academic unit faculty

All mass media faculty have advanced degrees and professional media experience. All tenure-track faculty have terminal degrees and engage in traditional scholarship and/or creative activity depending on their expertise. Because of rapid technological changes in the media world, our faculty stay abreast of shifts in the media industries as well as changes in their academic disciplines.

Program goals and quality indices

Our goals are to either educate students in the “business of media” or the “creation of media.” The business of media can include sales, promotion, programming, or management. These students are taught to think

strategically. The creation of media includes writing, photography, video, audio, animation, and interactivity. Students have a large degree of latitude to pursue what best meets their personal and professional goals. Our students have won hundreds of awards since the last program review competitions at the state, regional, and national level. The external validation they have received while competing against their peers from other schools is a very high-quality metric.

Student learning outcomes assessment plan and process

Three main mechanisms for assessment are being implemented:

1. continue entering our student work in media festivals where they have been successful and to compete in festivals where we haven't had as many entries such as the Broadcast Education Associations Festival of Media Arts. We believe external validation of our student work is of paramount importance.
2. continue collecting reflection essays in the senior capstone as a source of qualitative data to gauge how we are doing in our program.
3. Creating an exit interview survey to administer in the senior capstone as a source of quantitative data that will help us detect trends regarding student needs, concerns, and successes.

Specialized accreditation

Does not apply.

Responses to recommendations resulting from the previous program review

We have addressed recommendations from the previous program review in the following ways:

- Since our enrollment is down some since Covid, our instructional capacity is not as strained as it was from the previous program review. However, we feel that our new film festival class (with accompanying festival) will help recruit more students to our program (high school and college students from anywhere in the world can enter our festival via FilmFreeway.com. When we get our enrollments back up, we will seek additional faculty.
- When we do search for additional faculty, we will follow the best avenues suggested by Human Resources to get a diverse pool of applicants to better represent underrepresented groups.
- Our facilities are always in need of or undergoing renovation. We hope to make use of the Provost Enhancement Fund to upgrade outdated parts of our studios and labs to be more in line with what our students will encounter on the job.
- We have made progress towards attracting graduate students interested in mass media by offering GTA positions to teach "Mass Media in the School of Communication" (COM 101) and to be lab instructors for "Convergent Media Writing" (COM 161). We would like to investigate ways to offer assistantships to work at TV10, WZND, and the Foxtail Film Festival to provide even more incentive for mass media students to do graduate work with us.
- Expanding on-line offerings
- We addressed the number of previous sequences (four) and collapsed three of them into Media Arts. We now have two: Management, Promotion, & Sales; and Media Arts.
- While we don't have any study abroad programs currently that address Mass Media specifically, some of our students can still have relevant experiences. Since Dr. Jong Kang has retired, we have not had a relationship with Dong Ah (Korean Broadcast School). We will have to investigate a suitable replacement for that loss.
- We will be revising our assessment plan to use methods that are more authentic. Namely, expanding the number of students who enter and participate in media festivals; continue collecting reflection papers from students' experiences in our program; and creating and administering an exit survey to capture quantitative data that will help us detect trends in student interests and satisfaction.

Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand

Possibly the most terrifying or exciting area (depending on your point of view) is the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the media world. Tools are already in existence that minimize the drudgery of some parts of media creation – those are welcome technologies and make some of our work more enjoyable. However, generative AI poses some

professional and ethical dilemmas. First, there may be fewer jobs in the media world if AI can do certain tasks faster and cheaper with fewer errors than humans. Also, it will continue to be more difficult to discern truth from fiction. This is especially problematic for our students who work behind the scenes in news and documentary. AI also raises troubling legal questions. Who is the author? How will copyright law apply to content using these tools? How will these tools be monetized? These are all important and thorny questions that must be addressed by both media scholars and practitioners. Since AI will only proliferate more widely, we will need to proactively teach students useful and ethical ways of using this technology.

Major findings of the program review self-study

The reflection papers that all mass media students submit in the capstone is great source of information that proved useful when redesigning the curriculum. One thing we discovered was that students sometimes did not understand exactly what the major was about until later in their program. Many also related that they wish they had gotten involved sooner in our student media outlets (i.e., TV10, WZND, the Vidette). In response to those concerns, we overhauled our curriculum which included revising COM 101. Now, in this course, students meet each faculty member and learn about their academic and professional backgrounds. They also learn about each class they can take in the major and what the assignments/content looks like. They tour our media outlets and learn very early on about how to get involved.

We also learned that while our students win numerous awards in state and regional competitions, we need to encourage and support them while competing at the national level. Much of this falls to individual faculty members to identify potential award-winning work and assist the students with the entry process.

Finally, we found that some of our assessment efforts were misguided. Instead of focusing on the lower rungs of Bloom's Taxonomy with knowledge-level assessment, we should encourage students to create, synthesize, and evaluate. The awards our students win are prime examples of creation that is externally validated. Furthermore, our new Film Festival Management and Curation course allows them to work at Bloom's highest level: evaluation. By participating in this course, students can see the quality of work their peers are doing at other universities, and they also get to see interesting work from some very gifted high school students.

Initiative and plans for the next program review cycle

Besides entering students into state and regional competitions, we seek to get more students entered into the Broadcast Education Association's Festival of Media Arts where we believe they will ably compete at the national level. This will require funding for entry fees and travel so we will have to seek grants, gifts, and contracts. Part of this effort will be supported by upgrading and maintaining our studio/lab facilities. We hope to receive Provost Enhancement Funds to help in this regard.

We will work to grow our new Foxtail Film Festival which not only provides opportunities for our students but has also given Art and Theater students at Illinois State University an outlet for their creative work. As the festival grows, we hope to add graduate assistantship opportunities for graduate students interested in mass media.

Finally, we will be creating an exit interview survey to give us quantitative data that will help us make curriculum, facility, and personnel decisions to best serve our mass media students

PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Review Outcome. The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the B.A./B.S. in Mass Media to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee thanks the program faculty and staff for compiling a comprehensive self-study and commends the unit for its sustained focus on curricular innovation, co-curricular engagement, and responsiveness to changes in the discipline. The self-study included relevant data and covered key areas across program operation, though additional clarity and disaggregation of school-level data would be helpful in future submissions.

The committee commends the program for undertaking a thoughtful and extensive curriculum redesign that aligned the program with evolving industry standards, accreditation-related guidance, and internal assessment findings. The integration of EDI principles across the curriculum, co-curricular programming, and faculty development was notable and reflects intentionality in fostering inclusive learning environments. The committee also recognizes the program's contribution to the general education curriculum and cross-disciplinary collaboration, including its work with Film and Digital Media and the Creative Technologies program (now School of Creative Technologies).

The program's four-year graduation and retention rates were consistently strong, and the level of student participation in internships, co-curricular productions, and industry-recognized awards is commendable. The committee notes that the program leverages its strong ties with student media outlets and industry organizations to offer valuable applied experiences. The Foxtail Film Festival and other recruitment-facing initiatives were especially highlighted as exemplars of community and university engagement.

Enrollment trends show a significant decline from 225 to 175 majors during the review period, largely following national trends and compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the committee expresses concern that data related to enrollment, diversity, and student success were often reported at the unit level and not sufficiently disaggregated for Mass Media. This created challenges in evaluating the specific performance and challenges of the program. In particular, gender diversity data suggest a marked decline in women enrolling in the program, a point that warrants further analysis and targeted recruitment planning.

The committee also recommends more clarity in how the program defines its "found major" status. While the program may serve as a destination for students entering as general communication majors, clearer documentation of internal transfer patterns and feeder course structures would strengthen such claims. Additionally, the committee encourages the program to consider providing both raw numbers and percentages in future data reporting to better contextualize trends.

The internship program was identified as a clear strength, offering structured opportunities for students and evidence of strong faculty coordination and site engagement. However, given the number of credits assigned and the variability in credit hours and instructor roles, the committee recommends closer attention to ensuring alignment with federal definitions of credit hour and institutional policies regarding internship oversight and maximum allowable credit.

The committee expresses concern that the program currently lacks a current, actionable student learning outcomes assessment plan. The most recent plan on record dates from 2009. While faculty appear to be using reflective essays and capstone activities to inform curricular changes, reliance on indirect measures and lack of clear evidence of direct measures hinders the program's ability to evaluate student achievement of learning outcomes. The committee strongly recommends that the program work with University Assessment Services to update and implement a contemporary assessment plan.

The committee also encourages the program to clearly differentiate between student satisfaction measures and actual learning outcome assessments. Reinstating direct measures such as portfolios, course-embedded assessments, or structured rubrics would provide a more robust foundation for program evaluation.

The committee notes that the program employs a high percentage (approximately 45%) of non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty. While this may reflect the applied and production-focused nature of the program, the committee recommends that the program articulate the rationale for its staffing model, including how NTT faculty are integrated into curriculum delivery, supported in their roles, and how instructional and staff duties are distributed. Disaggregated data on teaching assignments would be helpful.

Faculty productivity in scholarly and creative works appears steady, though again, data are reported in aggregate across the School. The committee encourages the program to highlight specific faculty contributions to scholarship, professional development, and industry engagement that directly relate to Mass Media.

Analysis of comparator and aspirational programs was limited. The aspirational section outlined a multi-step process but lacked follow-through on later steps. The comparator section primarily noted the program's current size but did not explore reasons for enrollment trends at peer institutions. The committee recommends revisiting this analysis to identify strategies for growth and innovation in the program.

While the self-study acknowledged changes in the field such as artificial intelligence, this was addressed more effectively in the executive summary than in the main body of the report. The committee recommends that the program provide a fuller analysis of industry and disciplinary shifts and how such developments influence curricular and staffing priorities.

Follow-up Reports.

Assessment plan.

The Academic Planning Committee recognizes faculty efforts in developing and implementing the assessment. The committee identified the program's assessment plan as an area in need of significant attention. The program's current assessment plan dates to 2009 and includes several methods that are no longer in use. The Committee recommends the program work with the University Assessment Services office to develop a revised assessment plan that includes direct measures of student learning. In particular, the Committee urges the program to reduce reliance on indirect measures such as student satisfaction and instead incorporate assessments that align with program learning objectives across multiple points in the curriculum. The committee asks that the program faculty submit a progress report regarding the implementation of the assessment plan to the Office of the Provost by October 1, 2026.

Comparator and Aspirational Programs.

The committee commends the program for acknowledging external models but encourages a deeper, more action-oriented analysis. Rather than merely cataloging peer practices, the program should identify specific strategies or structures that can be adapted. By October 1, 2026, the program should submit a revised aspirational plan to the Office of the Provost, detailing how insights from comparator programs will inform strategic decisions, curriculum updates, and recruitment initiatives.

Recommendations

In addition to recognizing the program's accomplishments and strong engagement with students and industry, the Academic Planning Committee offers the following recommendations. These should be addressed in the next program review cycle, with an updated self-study due in Fall 2032.

Program-level disaggregation of data. The self-study too often presented data aggregated at the School level, making it difficult to isolate trends specific to the Mass Media program. Future reports should provide program-level disaggregation for enrollment, student demographics, student success, co-curricular participation, and alumni outcomes. This will allow for more meaningful program-level analysis and ensure that institutional data are interpreted accurately.

Revisit use of the term "found major." The Committee found the use of the term "found major" to be confusing and inconsistently applied. If the program wishes to make this claim, it should provide evidence of significant internal transfer into the program from other majors (rather than general education or exploratory pathways). The Committee encourages the program to define the term operationally and provide relevant data to support its use.

Clarification and assessment of internship credit: The program makes excellent use of internships but should clarify how credit hour limits and faculty supervision policies are managed in accordance with university and federal definitions. The Committee encourages the program to document how credit-bearing internship experiences are supervised, assessed, and tracked—especially in cases where multiple internships may be taken across units. Given their scale, the program should also evaluate how internship-related credit hours factor into instructional load, budget models, and assessment practices.

Evaluation of non-tenure track faculty composition: Nearly half of the program's faculty are non-tenure track. While this may be appropriate given the applied nature of the field, the rationale for this balance was not well articulated. The Committee encourages the program to more clearly define an appropriate tenure-track to non-

tenure-track ratio for this discipline and to justify its current instructional staffing model. This information may strengthen future faculty line requests.

Strengthen documentation of changes in the discipline. The discussion of disciplinary change in the self-study was relatively brief, particularly given the rapid evolution of the media industry. The program is encouraged to more fully explore how major industry trends (e.g., streaming, podcasting, AI, media consolidation) are affecting curriculum, faculty needs, and student career pathways. This reflection may help explain enrollment changes and guide strategic development.

Continue collaborations with Milner Library. Build upon a strong existing relationship to evaluate and maintain resource availability. Consider expanding digital resources, integrating information fluency outcomes and assessment into the curriculum, and integrating library tools into assessment plans. Such efforts ensure that both faculty and students have ongoing access to the information and skills needed for effective scholarship.

Further alumni and stakeholder engagement. Strengthen ties with alumni and external stakeholders to remain current with industry trends and job market needs. Regular alumni surveys, advisory boards, and panels can inform curriculum updates and highlight career pathways for prospective and current students, enhancing the program's relevance and attractiveness.