

## **Lehman College**

### **Journalism and Media Studies Department Review**

*External Reviewers: Russell Chun (Hofstra University) and Nadine Barnett Cosby (Iona University)*

**Departmental Structure & Academics:** JMS has 3 possible student majors - Film & Television Studies (FTS), Journalism (JRN), and Media Communication Studies (MCS) - with each major also offering several concentration options. The department has a leadership structure consisting of a department chair and nine full time faculty that teach across the majors. Faculty provided a breakdown as follows: Of the nine full time faculty, 4 contribute to teaching JRN courses, 7 contribute to MCS courses, and 4 contribute to FTS. Four of the full-time faculty teach in only one major, four teach in two majors, and one faculty member teaches in all 3 majors. The department seems to be operating under a deficit of faculty lines, with the loss of four full time faculty within the last eight years. Of significant note is the fact that the number of student majors have remained fairly consistent during this time. The department has requested the hiring of two full-time faculty lines. The reviewers believe this allowance is critical to the continued progression of the JMS department. In addition to addressing a major issue of course availability in which some required major courses need to be staggered or offered in alternate semesters/year, causing a graduation delay for some students, the hiring of at least two full-time faculty lines would allow the JMS department to strategically curate teaching assignments with faculty skills and/or research specializations and curriculum design/redesign. Furthermore, this would create more opportunity for faculty to oversee student capstones.

Of important note regarding the department structure, this is a fairly large department with three distinct majors that each have multiple concentration areas within them. However, with no assistant chair, director, coordinator, or "head of area" positions to assist with academic

oversight for the individual major areas, it is hard to envision a comprehensive strategic plan coming together for the department. The current structure leaves complete administrative, curricular and academic oversight of the department upon a sole individual, the department chair. At a minimum, each major should have a designated director or coordinator from among the full time faculty, that would focus on guiding the strategic and curricular development of that major, as it relates to and fits within the department overall.

Experiential Learning: Experiential or service-learning and exchange programs are rapidly becoming a major factor in the appeal of academic programs, as well as a resume booster for recent graduates. The JMS department shared of a Global Fellowship program with Barbados, in which a member of the full-time faculty received grant funds to facilitate. This is exactly the kind of innovative curriculum design that enhances the appeal of the program among students, as well as its competitiveness in our global marketplace. While it may not be operationally or financially practical for the department to facilitate many programs of this magnitude each academic year, other experiential opportunities would further enhance the department's visibility and JMS student experience. These could include courses that incorporate service-learning by engaging with local organizations. Likewise, courses designated as service-learning often provide an opportunity for faculty to integrate their creative or research projects into their courses, benefiting both students and faculty.

Internships are another way in which students often gain experiential opportunities that are critical to successfully starting their careers after graduation. While the JMS department offers an internship option, students seemingly can (or must) choose between a capstone - working on a paper or project with faculty supervision, or an internship. Given the large demographic of first generation students, adult learners, and students from marginalized communities, the capstone might often be the only option due to the inability of students to accommodate internship hours

**Commented [RC1]:** Internships are vital, especially for Lehman students, to get their foot in the door in a very competitive market

to their busy schedules and lives. However, internships are vital for college students, and especially the demographic of Lehman students who may otherwise struggle to gain footing in a very competitive job market without prior media and communications experience. Perhaps the department could benefit from identifying opportunities for in-house internships that could take place on campus. Conversations with students and faculty, resoundingly indicate that the JMS production facilities (studios, control room, editing suites) are under-utilized. Students further indicated that the current curriculum does not offer enough production experience to make them competitive in the internship market. The department could benefit from utilizing current JMS events, or creating new events, that allow students to gain production experience by working the events (such as setting up cameras, recording, editing content for the department's website, etc). Many similar programs have found it beneficial to collaborate with non-academic offices on campus to create in-house internships in which students work in a media production or writing capacity directly on campus. There also seems to be potential for the student to engage with Bronx Net, Meridian Newspaper, Obscura Magazine, and the Bronx Journal. Students commented that of the four, they were only aware of the Bronx Journal currently functioning and offering student opportunities. A revival in the function of these campus clubs could be a huge boost for students who want to gain more experience but are unable to accommodate or even secure an internship.

**Goals:** The goals outlined in the JMS selfstudy all seem appropriate to the vision and needs of the department, student body, and the college overall. Goals iv, v, and vi in particular relate to the JMS's contributions to Lehman's college-wide goals. The department seems to have identified the importance and benefits of participating in/collaborating with college-wide programs. The number of collaborations with other academic disciplines is impressive and forward-thinking. The reviewers believe that continuing to foster interdisciplinary partnerships with other academic programs will be a pivotal move for the JMS department's growth. In

particular, with the rapidly expanding digital environment of today, there seems to be great potential for JMS to offer more General Education courses that could introduce all students (not just majors) to the practices of journalism and media studies. This would also increase the department's visibility among students, particularly incoming freshmen and transfers, who may be uncertain about what major to declare. This plan however, is also dependent on increasing full-time faculty in the JMS department. While the department reports that adjuncts have been very helpful in JMS offering Gen Ed courses, it is our belief that more full-time faculty could be exposed to the student body outside of JMS majors, particularly those that engage with more skills-based areas of JMS such as the production of short-form content, and new or exploratory media. This would likely serve as a recruitment function for the major as well.

#### **Department strengths**

The Lehman Department of Journalism and Media Studies recognizes the critical mission of training diverse and multiculturally-aware media professionals to prepare them to face a new media landscape in a society with shifting demographics and technology. They have implemented curricular changes to reflect this need and have the infrastructure and faculty in place to carry through with their vision. Nevertheless, the Department faces challenges to their program growth and success.

#### **Student Rapport and Advisement**

Lehman students, overall, were impressed by the faculty's unwavering support for them and their in-person interactions. Students appreciated the interpersonal relationships with faculty, ease of access, and particularly noted their "humanity." That said, there was a disconnect with the perception of faculty-student advisor responsibilities. Students stated that they did not have faculty advisors despite faculty insisting that each of them are assigned a "shift" for student

advisement. The confusion speaks to a weakness in the official faculty-student advisor program. Rather than relying on casual and individual contact, the Department could benefit from a more defined, explicitly laid out, and regularly scheduled faculty-advisor sessions that can help students in curricular requirements, choices, internship opportunities, and general mentorship.

**JRN211 Multilingual Media:** We applaud the thoughtful modernization of the course focus for JRN211 Multilingual Media described in the self-report. The Department demonstrates the willingness and ability for curricular revision that meets the current demands of media professionals. We find the course content more valuable for students to navigate the complexities of how race and identity intersect modern journalism practice. However, the legacy course title might be less reflective of the revamped content, as it seems the goals are more aligned with media literacy than it is with ethnic press. Moreover, since the course is still a requirement for students of all majors in the Department, the refocusing of the content appears to have decreased its relevancy for Film and Television majors. Film majors, for example, expressed a desire to take courses that were less journalistic-facing and wanted more variety in writing for fiction. One student commented that there was “too much journalism infused into FTS.” We see opportunities for the faculty to rethink the core course requirements and sequencing so that each major within the Department are receiving material relevant to their specialty.

**Hands-on experience:**

Students noted that the program lacked more advanced-level production courses. In particular, Television majors bemoaned the inability to do more hands-on work with cameras, lighting, and editing in the field and wished to have more experience in the control room. They admired the state-of-the-art equipment at their disposal but were frustrated that the space and the equipment were underutilized by the students and by the department. There was a consensus that “no one

was really promoting the space” even though “we have a goldmine” here, suggesting that the Department should leverage their existing physical assets better. We agree with students who suggested that the Department should strive to promote and host media events and activities across the campus. Doing so would not only give students opportunities for leadership and hands-on experience producing media, but it would also raise the public profile of the Department in the college and the community, potentially increasing interest and enrollment.

#### **Academic innovation and research**

While we acknowledge the strides the Department has made in modernizing their curriculum, we see areas of improvement. Effective use of social media appears to be lacking, in both its use as a tool for the Department as well as a topic of study in the program. There was also a sense that emerging forms of “multimedia” have not been embraced or recognized by the Department, and we urge the Department to take a broader view of media and its potential for film, television, journalism, and communication in general.

On that note of curricular innovation, the Department may be facing a bottleneck for a more responsive curriculum should tenure-track faculty lines that were lost are replaced with lecturer positions, given that curricular changes are restricted to tenure-track faculty committee work. We suggest that the Department consider the teaching needs that a 4/4 lecturer position fulfills with the service to curricular revision a 3/3 tenure-track professor can bring.

#### **Faculty strengths**

The Faculty of the Department are professionally and academically accomplished, and their commitment to teaching is clear. They exhibit a strong sense of responsibility for their students’ professional and personal growth. In terms of DEI issues, the faculty are keenly aware of and committed to the need to diversify their ranks. We second their own call to strengthen their

alumnae network as one approach to expand the diversity of the instructors. Furthermore, we believe that the department would benefit from deliberate efforts on the part of the institution, to make diversity a deliberate function of the search for new faculty lines. Research has indicated that all students benefit significantly by encountering diverse educators throughout their time as students. This is also significant on the college level due to the formation of mentors and a professional network that often provides extra curricular resources and opportunities. Lehman boasts an incredibly diverse student body, yet the faculty in the JMS department does not reflect that student body. We applaud the efforts of the faculty to supplement DEI through adjuncts, bringing in external guests and reaching out to the alumni network. The addition of full time faculty that reflect diverse backgrounds and experiences would further enhance these efforts and benefit the students.