

Department of Communication Strategic Plan
Initially Adopted in 2021
Revised in 2024

Executive Summary

During the three-year time period between 2021 and 2024, the departmental faculty assessed all current programs in the five concentrations, revised curriculum and outreach efforts as needed to meet current industry standards, and adopted new DEI Plans, Mission and Vision Statements, and this Strategic Plan.

Some specific actions included adding a graduate program, starting complete online concentrations in the Communication and Media Studies Concentration and Public Relations concentration, and assertively increasing partnerships with on-campus units and off-campus organizations as well to gain input and improve overall departmental quality for faculty, students, and alumni. These specific efforts also included offering more opportunities for faculty to reach out to high schools and community colleges to recruit students. An increased emphasis on civic engagement by faculty to further enhance partnerships also has been encouraged.

In addition, the updated Strategic Plan coincides with the recently revised College of Arts & Sciences Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Goals and Mississippi State University Transforming MSU plan and the corresponding five pillars or goals listed on the bottom of this report.

Compatibility with College and University

College of Arts & Sciences

All departmental goals, strategies, and actions listed above coordinate with the College of Arts & Sciences Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Goals. In addition, the department and college strategic plans coincide with those of Mississippi State University.

Mission Excerpt Summary

“The College of Arts & Sciences educates students through experiential and interdisciplinary curricula that cultivate the knowledge and critical skills students need to be both well-rounded scholars and global leaders who find inventive ways to solve complex problems. . .”

Vision Statement Excerpt Summary

“To provide a wide range of degrees paired with high-quality instruction, cutting-edge technology, and dynamic teaching practices to prepare students to attain their personal and professional goals. . .”

The five core values listed by the college are Civic Good, Collaboration, Inclusion, Integrity, and Applied Knowledge.

The six broad goals of the college are listed below:

1. Stimulate Student Success;
2. Enhance Teaching Skills and Prioritize Delivery of High-Quality Instruction;
3. Enhance Visibility of Research and Its Impact on Society;
4. Expand External Engagement;
5. Increase Faculty, Staff, and Graduate Student Quality, Inclusivity, and Excellence; and
6. Grow and Enhance Our Financial and Human Capabilities.

Mississippi State University

All departmental and college plans also help to bolster the five pillars expressed at the university level. These are listed below under the Transforming MSU plan of “. . . redefining the role of a Land Grant university. We provide an innovative, hands-on learning experience, meeting all students where they are and equipping them for a world that needs their talent. We’re working to help our communities prosper while exploring cutting-edge solutions to the world’s biggest challenges. Together we’re taking care of what matters in the 21st century – starting in our own backyard.”

The five broad goals of the updated university plan are listed below:

1. Serve the Whole Student,
2. Strengthen Our Bond,
3. Ignite Innovation,
4. Elevate Our Community, and
5. Tell Our Story.

(https://www5.msstate.edu/sites/www.msstate.edu/files/inline-files/Transforming%20MSU%20handout_8x11.pdf)

and

(<https://www.msstate.edu/transformation>)

Departmental Units (Concentrations)

Broadcast & Digital Journalism
Communication & Media Studies
Print & Digital Journalism
Public Relations
Theatre

Mission

The Mississippi State University Department of Communication prepares students through scholarship, creative practice, and ethical and cultural awareness to be empowered professional artists and communicators.

Vision

Graduates of the Mississippi State University Department of Communication will excel in diverse professional landscapes and will contribute to an ever-evolving global society as critical thinkers, savvy consumers, life-long learners, storytellers, content creators, and audience-focused and communicators.

Core Values

As a unit that integrates various disciplines (including Broadcast & Digital Journalism, Communication & Media Studies, Print & Digital Journalism, Public Relations, and Theatre) toward a single goal of furthering responsibility in producing and consuming mass communication, we value and focus on the following: Equality, Ethics, Community Engagement, Resourcefulness, Collaboration, and the Practical Application of Scholarship. With our mission and core values aligned, we commit to the following goals.

Strategic Goals

1. Instill competence and confidence in our graduates by offering them a competitive educational experience that prepares them for professional success.

- Strategy 1a:
Identify and continually evaluate our core values and competencies and develop a curriculum capitalizing on those areas that are in line with current professional standards and practices.
- Strategy 1b:
Respond to students' professional interests and goals when planning future curriculum.
- Strategy 1c:
Offer courses in face-to-face, online, hybrid, or other formats to meet student needs.

Actions for success:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Regularly conduct faculty workshops and concentration meetings to brainstorm and develop possible updates to the curriculum. ○ Use Special Topic classes to initially test new curriculum offerings and assess student response to those offerings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategy 1d: Recognizing the need for strengthened competencies, recruit and hire faculty best positioned to address those needs and provide necessary incentives to retain productive faculty members.
<p>Actions for success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Find new avenues to advertise open positions and recruit beyond traditional academic sites. ○ Routinely survey identical positions to determine if our compensation packages are competitive with other programs in the Southeast similar to ours.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategy 1e: Provide students and faculty with the facilities, technology, and other resources necessary for staying competitive not only in the professional arena but also in the academic one. This may include reducing costs on textbooks and other materials. ○ Strategy 1f: Decentralize resources (such as technology or physical spaces) that prove to be barriers to student recruitment, retention, and success.
<p>Actions for success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Engage with other campus disciplines and departments to find shared resources available to our students and faculty (the MaxxSouth Digital Media Center in the library for example). ○ Communicate our needs to external stakeholders to encourage fundraising and donations that meet our needs. ○ When possible, reduce technological and financial barriers (for example, costs of equipment, hardware, and software) for current and potential students.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategy 1g: In every facet, provide the opportunity to assess what we offer students, faculty, and the profession. Curriculum benchmarks should assess our students' adoption of core values and competencies. Faculty benchmarks should assess the positive impact of that member on the department, college, university, professional organizations, and the community. Community and professional impacts and students' success following graduation should assess our contribution to the profession.

Actions for success:

- Formulate and routinely execute our assessment plan (currently in development) to evaluate program success.
- Gather feedback from outside professional sources to evaluate our success. For example, survey past clients in our Public Relations in Organizations class (SOON TO BE RENAMED), internship providers, practitioners colleagues, and recent graduates. Allow opportunities for professionals to critique current student work and provide feedback for improvement.
- Continue to use external reviewers for departmental faculty awards.

○ Strategy 1h:

While matriculating in our department, provide students with exposure to external stakeholders, internship experiences, work experiences, and on-campus activities that strengthen their likelihood of current and future employment within our field.

Actions for success:

- Continue hosting and attending events with such organizations as the Mississippi Association of Broadcasters, Mississippi Press Association, Mississippi Communication Association, Public Relations Association of Mississippi, Southern Public Relations Federation, Public Relations Student Society of America, Mississippi Theatre Association, Southeastern Theatre Conference, or similar conferences that give our students access to current professionals in hopes of building connections helpful in finding future employment. We also bring in the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival to respond to our shows. They give students insights into their work on productions by providing feedback on the shows as well as recommending them for awards.
- Continue supporting the position of internship coordinator and provide that position with tools for success, including a student intern.
- Maintain and possibly expand our contributions with Hail State Productions and the ESPN/SEC Network to give students beneficial experience during their time with us.
- Track, publicize, and connect with our alumni from across the country and globe so that the pride and recognition of our department can be felt on a larger scale.
- Work more closely with the MSU Alumni Association to build stronger networks for our students and alumni.

- Enhance relationships with the MSU Career Center to provide more opportunities for direct career links.

2. Encourage and support research and creative works that inspire fresh ideas, offer new solutions, and critically analyze issues we encounter in our world.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategy 2a: Provide incentives to increase and reward productivity of peer-reviewed scholarship and creative works.
<p style="text-align: center;">Actions for success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue awarding a departmental research award with a stipend to honor those who have performed at a high level. ○ Provide financial assistance when possible to support faculty collaborations and interactions with professors on and off-campus as well as outside professionals in our field. ○ Encourage eligible faculty to apply for sabbaticals and provide departmental assistance with their applications.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategy 2b: Allocate available resources to properly promote and share faculty works with external academic communities increasing awareness of our brand.
<p style="text-align: center;">Actions for success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide travel funding for professors and instructors to present at state, regional, national, and international conferences. ○ Distribute a newsletter focused toward external stakeholders that contains spotlight pieces on research being currently conducted and/or published by faculty and students in the department.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategy 2c: Find creative strategies to increase extramural funding of research and creative works.
<p style="text-align: center;">Actions for success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Host experts in grantsmanship from within our disciplines to give advice and assistance in helping our faculty successfully apply and earn outside funding.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategy 2d: Create relationships across campus and disciplines that inspire collaborative research and creative projects.

<p>Actions for success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use our connections with the Social Science Research Center to promote collaborative research. ○ Promote our knowledge, skills, and abilities to assist with other centers and institutes across campus.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategy 2e: Network with external industry, alumni, and external stakeholders to investigate possible collaborations and joint projects that lead to productive scholarship, creative works, and increased visibility of the department.
<p>Actions for success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use alumni and advisory board connections to network with professionals in the field to assess any needs our researchers could address. Each concentration now has an advisory board that typically meets once a year. ○ Use our Public Relations in Organizations (UPDATE NAME WHEN APPROPRIATE) and PRISM classes to promote our services to the local community and state.

3. Expand and promote our department’s identity through community engagement, public service, and assistance in analyzing messages in a continuously changing and frenetically paced media landscape.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategy 3a: Demonstrate the department’s commitment to professional education through workshops, seminars, continuing education courses, and other innovative offerings.
<p>Actions for success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use our associations with groups such as the Mississippi Association of Broadcasters, Mississippi Press Association, Mississippi Communication Association, Public Relations Association of Mississippi, Southern Public Relations Federation, Public Relations Student Society of America, and Mississippi Theatre Association to provide in-house workshops, luncheons, and other interactions with our faculty to gauge current trends, needs, platforms, etc., so our faculty members are knowledgeable about the state of the industry in various related fields. ○ Bring in professional guest artists to work with our faculty and students.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue to add more faculty to the College of Arts & Sciences Experts List to connect with external groups (https://www.cas.msstate.edu/all-experts).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategy 3b: Continue current involvement and develop new opportunities to incorporate service-learning components in our curriculum. (Five faculty members have already been selected for the Community-Engaged Learning Fellows Program since the program's inception in 2018.) ○ Strategy 3c: Assess the need for mass communication education in the local elementary and secondary schools, services that are needed, and build relationships with those schools.
<p>Actions for success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Five Communication faculty members have been CEL selected ○ Establish a stronger relationship with our Partnership Middle School in which we gain access to all 7th-grade students in the Starkville Oktibbeha School District, and they gain our expertise in media production and criticism. ○ Offer departmental faculty as guest speakers for high schools and community colleges across the state and region in conjunction with the college and university recruiting colleagues.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategy 3d: Ensure faculty participate in key positions of leadership within the university, college, department, and community.
<p>Actions for success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strive to always have a member of the department on top university committees such as the Holland Faculty Senate and University Committee on Courses and Curricula. ○ Work to have faculty serve on college committees as their experience allows. ○ Continue having faculty collaboration within the department when possible on committees and through other collaborations. ○ Encourage opportunities for faculty to serve on civic committees and in positions of leadership corresponding to their interests and abilities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategy 3e: Increase community awareness and use of our department's classes and services, like PRISM and the Public Relations capstone classes, <i>The Reflector</i>

student newspaper (<https://reflector-online.com/>), Bulldog Online Newsroom (<https://www.bulldognews.msstate.edu/news>), and WMSV campus radio station (<https://www.wmsv.msstate.edu/>) that could benefit local organizations and businesses.

Actions for success:

- Promote through the Office of Public Affairs, community newspapers, broadcasters, and social media instances where these classes aid in organizations' goals.
- Provide speakers at local civic, nonprofit, and religious organizations who can detail our services to their group.

4. Combat Mississippi's past history and current perceptions of intolerance and discrimination by celebrating our cultural richness, promoting inclusivity, and cultivating pride in the different perspectives expressed on our campus.

- Strategy 4a:
Demonstrate the benefits of diversity to students by offering multicultural learning environments and activities.

Actions for success:

- Per ACEJMC standards, ensure all classes under the auspices of accreditation have some component of diversity, inclusion, and equity. The department created the course Race, Gender, Class, and Global Media (CO 2003) that was piloted three times as a Special Topic course. This course has now been approved for fall 2024 by the University Committee on Courses and Curricula as a required A&S Social Science elective to ensure all students have some component of DEI.
- Follow DEI standards as established by other relevant organizations, such as the National Communication Association, Public Relations Society of America (through the Certification in Education for Public Relations administered through the Educational Affairs Committee), Commission on Public Relations Education, and the National Theatre Association.
- Work with on-campus organizations such as the Holmes Cultural Diversity Center, Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion, and the ACCESS program (for students with intellectual or developmental disabilities) to actively recruit students for classes and activities, including theatre productions.

- Strategy 4b:

When advertising and recruiting for available faculty and staff positions, seek out avenues that provide a diverse applicant pool.

Actions for success:

- Express our commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity in all position announcements, be it through the university or through other industry-related groups
- Ensure that our position announcements are being communicated through organizations devoted to underrepresented groups in all areas of the department.

- Strategy 4c:
Cultivate and retain relationships with alumni from underrepresented groups who aid our efforts in recruiting, retaining, and graduating students from those groups.
- Strategy 4d:
Ensure diversity on all advisory boards, based on race, gender, and experience level.

Actions for success:

- Periodically review the makeup of our alumni/advisory boards and make adjustments when needed to ensure diversity.

- Strategy 4e:
Maintain a committee of faculty, staff, and students to assess the department's commitment to diversity, plan future efforts, and evaluate current performance on such initiatives.

Actions for success:

- Schedule and conduct recurring meetings of a departmental diversity, inclusion, and equity community to explore areas where further diversity efforts could be made.