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Advancing the Discipline: Guidelines from the Experience of Colleagues

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In 1997, the National Communication Association published the report of the Task Force on Discipline Advancement. The Task Force had been appointed in 1995 by Second Vice President Judith Trent to recommend what departments and the Association might do to ensure that they and our discipline flourish. The Task Force made an array of recommendations that can be found in the April 1997 edition of *Spectra*.

Strongly stressed by the Task Force was the importance to disciplinary advancement of the work of the individual department. If our departments are strong, the discipline will be strong; if our departments are well-regarded, our discipline will be well-regarded.

As the Task Force concluded, though, there is no one formula for departmental strength and regard. Each department's situation is different; sometimes extremely different. Hence, its strategy for advancing its cause and the cause of the discipline must be different. The Task Force members tried to take that into account in their set of recommendations. In this issue of *JACA*, we try to do so even more by providing a variety of models, examples of quite different individual departments that have recognized and taken into account their particular institutional circumstances while building strong and well-respected programs.

The first two papers in this volume are excellent illustrations of how departments in two quite different institutions advanced the cause of their departments, and, thus, the cause of our discipline, by their sensitivity to the values of their institutions. Jacqueline Schmidt explains how her department built a solid campus reputation by broadening its scope; Jesse Delia describes the way his department achieved its outstanding reputation, both on campus and nationally, by narrowing its scope, focussing much of its energy on one theoretical idea. John Carroll University and the University of Illinois took almost precisely opposite approaches, but both worked because each one's approach fit its campus' values.

John Makay makes this point more explicit in his paper describing the way his department built credibility with its administration. Ronald Lee and William Seiler do so also as they lay out the departmental characteristics that administrators at their university perceive as strengths and weaknesses and how a communication studies department such as theirs measures up. Perhaps more important, they urge departments to take a strong,

proactive stance as their department did so successfully in warding off a threat of elimination and becoming even stronger and more respected on campus than it was before.

Joseph MacDoniels and Rhonda Kekke remind us of the different ways the discipline must be advanced in the small liberal arts college, community college, or large research university. Even within these categories of institutions, though, there is great variance. So, no matter what type of institution it is in which you are attempting to advance the discipline and your department, you must gain an understanding of what your institution's administrators value and reward and then shape and promote your program in a way that shows it exemplifies those values and, thus, contributes substantially to the institution's goals.

Alfred Mueller and Delmar Crisp illustrate MacDoniels' and Kekke's point well with a case study of a successful effort to overhaul the communication major in a small college where the institution's values play a strong and direct role in all curricular decisions.

If there is one common value developing in almost every type of institution these days, it is belief in the importance of fund-raising. Institutions are recognizing that endowments, or even uninvested moneys that are acquired through fund-raising, can be even more beneficial and have longer-range impact on the institutions than monies acquired through research grants, since there is often little true financial gain from the latter. As a result, most department chairs are going to need to become active in fund-raising. To provide some background and guidance on fund-raising, we turned to Robert Jeffrey, former Dean of the College of Communication at the University of Texas. He was one of the first administrators in our field to become involved in fund-raising and was extremely successful during his tenure as dean, raising a total of almost \$15-million in gifts, a total that now has a market value of over \$27.5-million. Although most department chairs will probably not be acquiring gifts as large as those Jeffrey discusses in his paper, the principles and strategies he espouses should be useful guides for all who venture into this activity.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

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