Penn State shield logo with black text and blue shield

Unit Strategic Plan: **College of Communications**

2014/2015 through 2018/2019

A more detailed version of this plan can be found at:   
<http://comm.psu.edu/about/strategic-plan>

# College of Communications

# Strategic Plan, FY 2014-15 to FY 2018-19

## Overview

The College of Communications, established in 1995, is home to four academic departments that offer five undergraduate majors and two graduate degree programs. We are the largest nationally accredited program in mass communications in the U.S. Two of our majors are among the top 20 for enrollment at University Park, and we serve an undergraduate population larger than all but five other UP colleges.

We have a strong reputation for prioritizing student success. Our retention and graduation rates for undergraduates are among the highest at Penn State, and our students consistently demonstrate excellence in collegiate competitions involving core skills in the communications professions, such as writing, research, strategic campaign design, and visual storytelling. Internships and co-curricular activities are central in our students’ experience. In our graduate programs, students present at the nation’s most competitive conferences and publish in top journals, leading to strong job placements in academia and industry.

Our special enterprises include annual conferences and lecture series; embedded travel courses; internship residency programs; and research centers that focus on contemporary issues in media, technology, communication, and related policy.

We have been accredited – first as a department (1948), then School (1989), then College (1995) – by the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. We adhere to the basic principles of our national accrediting process, which include a commitment to diversity and inclusiveness, a focus on outcomes-driven learning, and accountability to the professions and the public.

## Our mission and vision

Through our teaching, research and outreach, our mission is to prepare students to take their place in an information-rich society and in the communications professions as active, critical, ethical and engaged participants. Our activities promote effective, responsible use of communications media and technologies by individuals, organizations, industries, and government.

We have, over the past decade, cemented the College as the largest, most comprehensive, student-centered mass-communications program in the United States. We will continue to pay close attention to the bedrock fundamentals that have earned us that place among our peers and prospective students, alumni and friends, and employers. We remain committed to student success in all our endeavors.  
  
We will also work to advance our reputation as a *leader* in research and in outreach to the professions and to relevant publics. Simply put: We will **expand our impact** across Penn State through collaborative partnerships that tap into our expertise; we will **expand our impact** in the professions through outreach and engagement; and we will **expand our impact** with citizens, consumers and audiences through public scholarship, service learning, and research that speaks to contemporary issues.

## Our goals

The following priorities guide our resource allocation and our collective energy. We seek to:

***Contribute to a culture of ethics and integrity at Penn State and provide ethical leadership for the professions****.* Ethics is infused across our curriculum, and we are proud of our students’ commitment to our Student Honor Code. Through our growing relationship with Penn State’s Rock Ethics Institute and with key organizations in the professions, we are committed to leadership in conversations focused on ethics in communications and media.

***Retain and enhance our reputation for prioritizing student success in all our endeavors****.* Our reputation among our nationally accredited peers for student engagement and focus on student success is unparalleled. We seek to maintain excellence in advising, instruction, and opportunities – while using a strong assessment process to improve learning outcomes and the student experience.

***Expand our reach – to new populations and in new settings – with high-quality programs and service.*** Outreach is part of the College’s mission, and we must take advantage of new platforms and opportunities to extend our expertise. With the World Campus and other partners at Penn State and beyond, we will more powerfully engage adult learners, youths, professionals, and the public.

***Impact the professions and society through our research, creative activity, and public scholarship.*** Our faculty members possess significant media experience or scholarly credentials – and many have both. The breadth of output, from documentary projects to research published in top journals – has been recognized as a “signature strength” by our accrediting council. As we focus our collective expertise and increase our collaborative efforts, we will expand our impact.

***Steward our resources, relationships, and investments****.* Perhaps few other fields have been more transformed by digital technologies than those in mass communications. We must, with clarity, harness emerging technologies and steward our significant investments in these resources in forward-thinking ways. Key will be our willingness to work collaboratively, consult broadly, plan carefully, and value sustainability.

***Reflect and promote an appreciation of diversity in our classrooms and among our students, faculty, and staff****.* Diversity and inclusion are moral imperatives for a public university; they are also environmental and business imperatives. We are committed to diversity in our classes, our curriculum, and among our faculty and staff. We are also committed to recruiting, retaining and graduating a diverse student body, one that reflects an evolving society.

***Expand our international activity, interacting with and making an impact on the global community****.* Our engagement with scholars, professionals, and students from across the globe has, not surprisingly, dramatically increased in the past decade. The work of our faculty members has also increasingly taken on an international dimension, and they are well equipped to prepare students for the global community and workplace. Our embedded learning programs are nationally recognized for excellence; we will grow in these areas of strength.

These strategic priorities, along with the objectives and strategies for each, strongly align with Penn State’s imperatives: a focus on **student engagement; diversity and demographics; excellence; student career success and economic development; accessibility; and technology**.

We must systematically track our progress and build pathways of accountability if we are to meet these goals. It will also be important to share our progress with our University partners, our friends, and our alumni, who will help us reach our goals.

# Contribute to a culture of ethics and integrity at Penn State and provide ethical leadership for the professions.

### Objective 1: Teach our students to work ethically in the professions and to contribute to society as responsible citizens.

**Strategy:** Support a focus on ethics, integrity, and social responsibility in key courses for each academic program.

**Strategy:** Use direct and indirect measures of student learning outcomes to

improve curricula as needed.

**Strategy**: Familiarize students with academic integrity and best practices for Academic Integrity during their first-year experience.

### Objective 2: Integrate the Honor Code into the life of the College.

**Strategy:** Introduce students to the Honor Code during orientation sessions, during the first-year experience, and at other key College functions for students.

**Strategy:** Recognize students who pledge the Code at annual events and at commencement.

### Objective 3: Provide leadership to our constituents through creative activity, research, and public scholarship.

**Strategy:** Through the College’s ethics co-hire, its Davis Professorship, and the A.W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication, produce projects with impact at all levels on issues of ethics, integrity, and social responsibility.

**Strategy:** Contribute to professional and societal understanding of ethical components of sustainability, Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and related communication.

# Retain and enhance our reputation for prioritizing student success in all our endeavors.

### Objective 1: Ensure programs are current, relevant, and attractive.

**Strategy:** In consultation with the professions and disciplines, develop

relevant courses and degree programs, collaborating with other units as appropriate.

**Strategy:** Emphasize pathways to career success, including entrepreneurship and innovation, in our curricula.

**Strategy**: Hire qualified full-time faculty members to meet the evolving needs of our academic programs.

**Strategy:** Strengthen our first-year experience to engage students and excite

them about possibilities in the College.

**Strategy:** Update and support our general-education portfolio to align with University priorities and provide effective, outcomes-driven learning experiences.

**Strategy:** Use a constantly improving assessment process to strengthen courses and curricula and to demonstrate learning outcomes.

### Objective 2: Strengthen advising services.

**Strategy:** Maintain first-year retention rates above 90% for undergraduates.

**Strategy:** Maintain four-year graduation rates of at least 75%.

**Strategy:** Maintain five-year graduation rates of at least 85%.

### Objective 3: Grow internship and placement opportunities.

**Strategy:** Grow the percentage of students placed in for-credit internships.

**Strategy:** Increase the number of job-fair participants (students and employers).

**Strategy**: Track the job placement rate of graduates.

### Objective 4: Expand co-curricular opportunities, enhancing and showcasing student performance.

**Strategy**: Create and maintain a showcase website for student work across the College.

**Strategy:** Earn a national reputation for achievements of our students, including in regional and national competitions, exhibits, and festivals; and in public

scholarship and research.

**Strategy:** Seek and implement co-curricular opportunities for underserved majors.

### Objective 5: Increase support for student learning.

**Strategy**: Award more scholarships and awards, including merit-based scholarships for qualified incoming students.

**Strategy:** Expand the College’s endowed funds for scholarships and awards.

### Objective 6: Invest in our graduate program to benefit the College.

**Strategy:** Aggressively recruit, enroll, and financially support (at the Ph.D. level; at the M.A. level where possible) top-quality graduate students who contribute to undergraduate teaching, research, and outreach.

**Strategy:** Demonstrate outstanding, improving quality indicators for incoming cohorts.

**Strategy:** Serve graduate students in other degree programs at Penn State through relevant coursework.

**Strategy:** More effectively engage alumni of our MA and Ph.D. programs.

# Expand our reach – to new populations and in new settings – with high-quality programs and service.

### Objective 1: Aggressively, responsibly, and sustainably grow high-quality online degree programs with World Campus.

**Strategy:** Provide incentives, as appropriate, to faculty to build quality online courses in areas of need, using an array of digital tools for powerful teaching.

**Strategy:** Increase the number of full- and part-time faculty members engaged with developing and teaching online courses.

**Strategy:** Evaluate online instructors and update courses with the same rigorous standards as applied in our residence programs.

**Strategy:** Promote and support existing online programs so they thrive.

**Strategy**: Develop and offer an online master’s degree in Strategic Communications; develop other degree programs, and, where appropriate, do so in collaboration with other units.

### Objective 2: Expand and support outreach to high school students interested in the communications professions.

**Strategy**: Offer workshops and institutes for high school students and teachers.

**Strategy**: Support the Pennsylvania School Press Association (PSPA), a statewide scholastic organization for teachers and students interested in communications, through training and contests.

**Strategy**: Increase scholarship support for students from under-represented groups to attend summer institutes.

**Strategy**: Expand communication efforts to guidance counselors at key high schools.

**Strategy**: Involve trained and motivated undergraduates in high school outreach.

**Strategy:** Use scholarships and awards to recruit the brightest high school students.

**Strategy:** Explore, in tandem with the University, summer programs making for-credit coursework available to qualified high school students.

**Strategy:** Identify and publicize, working with World Campus and high school administrators, courses that could be offered for dual-enrollment credit to Commonwealth high school students.

### Objective 3: Expand and support outreach to the professions and the community.

**Strategy**: Partner with media and communication organizations on initiatives that serve the professions.

**Strategy:** Provide timely programming to the public, such as panels, lectures, and webinars, that features faculty expertise and address relevant issues.

**Strategy:** Develop blended or online seminars designed for the professions.

### Objective 4: Promote public scholarship and service learning.

**Strategy**: Support service-learning projects in upper-level courses and faculty who engage students in public scholarship.

**Strategy:** Integrate service learning and public scholarship into the faculty annual report process.

**Strategy:** Publicize our service learning and public scholarship.

# Impact the professions and society through our

# research, creative activity, and public scholarship.

### Objective 1: Promote projects with demonstrated impact.

**Strategy:** Collect data annually on faculty productivity in research, creative activity and public scholarship to benchmark, share, and promote areas of synergy.

**Strategy:** Connect the work of our faculty, Centers and Institutes to one another and across the University to capitalize on our core strengths in translational communication – moving knowledge to key publics in actionable ways. Much of this work can and should be collaborative, contributing to the dissemination of discoveries and knowledge around key global issues such as health, child protection, and the environment.

**Strategy:** Support faculty in research and collaborative projects that extend our expertise across the Penn State and other universities.

### Objective 2: Attain increasing external support.

**Strategy:**  Increase the number of faculty members who pursue external funding

through incentives and support of projects that could lead to such funding.

**Strategy:** Increase the number and quality of proposals, with special emphasis on collaborative research and joint projects.

**Strategy:** Pursue federal-, foundation- and industry-sponsored projects that tap into our expertise and align with our mission and values.

### Objective 3: Integrate students in our scholarly and professional work.

**Strategy:** Support student travel to conferences and for research or public/engaged scholarship.

**Strategy:** Encourage student participation in on-campus symposia and exhibitions.

**Strategy:** Increase the number of undergraduate students involved in faculty projects.

**Strategy:** Support and highlight student scholarship and faculty who guide it.

# Steward our resources, relationships, and investments.

### Objective 1: Serve students across all majors with up-to-date technology for production and research.

**Strategy:** Invest in tools, technologies and labs that are forward-looking, enhance University resources available to students, and enable us to logically build on our digital assets.

**Strategy**: Ensure effective use of College facilities for teaching, research, and co-curricular activities, updating and repurposing them for emerging needs.

### Objective 2: Leverage relationships with other units.

**Strategy:** Encourage faculty/staff to use technology-related University resources to

improve their teaching and empower their research.

**Strategy:** Work with other University units to develop needed contingency

plans, ensure the College is aligned with University priorities and

policies, collaborate for efficiencies, and secure resources.

**Strategy**: Participate in the University’s IT Leadership Council and Research

Computing Advisory Council.

### Objective 3: Invest College funds wisely and sustainably.

**Strategy:** Maintain a stable, annual budget for hardware and software purchases.

**Strategy:** Empower a representative College technology and equipment committee to recommend spending priorities that best serve the College’s mission.

**Strategy:** Implement a long-term program capitalizing on student-owned and College-purchased technology to provide a strong academic experience.

### Objective 4: Sustain our resources.

**Strategy**: Support the work of our Green Team to encourage recycling and lower consumption of paper and power by faculty, staff, and students.

**Strategy:** Expand the use/storage of digital documents and digital signage.

**Strategy:** Work with OPP to install energy-saving devices and lighting configurations where feasible.

**Strategy**: Manage & track resources to minimize waste and provide accountability.

# Reflect and promote an appreciation of diversity in our classrooms and among our students, faculty and staff.

### Objective 1: Promote an inclusive understanding and appreciation of diversity.

**Strategy**: With the help of an active Diversity Committee, communicate our diversity-related values, objectives and initiatives across the College and to our alumni and friends.

**Strategy:** Sponsor and promote efforts to enhance awareness and understanding of diversity and inclusion among faculty, staff, and students.

**Strategy:** Use our assessment process to ensure that learning objectives around valuing and exploring our cultures (U.S. and international cultural competencies) are met across our programs.

### Objective 2: Maintain a welcoming campus climate.

**Strategy**: Help students from underrepresented populations thrive through advising, mentoring, student organizations, and events.

**Strategy:**  Improve our service to University commissions promoting diversity.

### Objective 3: Support and graduate a diverse student body.

**Strategy**: Recruit a diverse student body using means such as campus visits and events, summer institutes, and programs such as the Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP).

**Strategy**: Retain a student body among the most diverse among UP Colleges.

**Strategy**: Use College- and University-based funds to recruit top-tier students.

**Strategy**: Attain and maintain retention and graduation rates for students from underrepresented groups that are equivalent to the average for all students in the College.

### Objective 4: Recruit and retain a diverse workforce.

**Strategy**: Improve racial and ethnic diversity among the faculty and staff.

**Strategy**: Improve the representation of women on the full-time faculty.

**Strategy:** Ensure that our leadership team is diverse and prioritizes our diversity-related goals.

# Expand our international activity, interacting with and making an impact on the global community.

### Objective 1: Develop offerings that allow more students to gain global perspectives.

**Strategy:** Develop international internship opportunities and recruit qualified, motivated students to participate.

**Strategy:** Develop and support a sustainable course in each major that offers a high-quality, affordable embedded travel experience to students.

**Strategy:** Assist faculty members in identifying courses that could be improved by adding content that sharpens students’ global perspectives.

**Strategy:** Regularly offer courses, in-residence and online, that focus on international media and communication and that align with our learning objectives around valuing and exploring our cultures.

### Objective 2: Develop sustainable and mutually beneficial collaborations.

**Strategy:** Selectively cement relationships with compatible mass communication programs to facilitate faculty teaching exchanges; establish pipelines for qualified doctoral students; and pursue collaborative research efforts.

**Strategy:** Support faculty members who apply for funded international opportunities. Work with Global Programs to identify, develop and administer grants.

**Strategy:**  Facilitate arrangements for short-term residency by international scholars or media practitioners working collaboratively with faculty.