

**Department of Communications
College of Arts and Sciences
Bowie State University**

**Middle States Commission on Higher Education
Three Points of Pride
Master's Program in Organizational Communications**

The coronavirus pandemic wrought unprecedented challenges during academic years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, upending traditional education practices at institutions of higher learning worldwide. Bowie State University was no exception as students, faculty, staff, and administrators were forced to learn, teach, serve, and manage under a triple threat of a global disease, racial discrimination and economic depression.

As with all of the colleges and their departments at Bowie State University, the Department of Communications had to pivot in its assessment of instructional delivery to ensure that its nearly 600 undergraduate and graduate students continued to make progress toward their degrees. As a result of these adjustments, the department is pleased to present three assessment points of pride:

1. Even under normal circumstances, students in the master's program in Organizational Communications are responsible to complete course work, comprehensive examinations and/or write a master's thesis based on their original research. Faculty in the master's programs successfully adapted to virtual learning through the use of Blackboard, Blackboard Collaborate, Zoom and other online teaching modalities to provide master's students with the opportunity to complete courses, comprehensive exams and thesis defenses in AY 2019-2020 and AY 2020-2021. Moreover, faculty added several 8-week sessions to allow students – many of whom are full-time professionals and parents of children engaged in virtual learning – to shorten their time to degree. Two students successfully defended their thesis and met the requirements for graduation in Spring 2021.

2. At the onset of AY 2019-2020, departmental faculty had varying degrees of comfortability with instructional technology. Some faculty were fully versed in online instruction and assessment while others rarely used Blackboard, iCAN, Qwickly Attendance Pro, Zoom, Blackboard Collaborate, Microsoft Teams, among other platforms.

Through workshops and tutorials offered by the Center for Teaching and Learning (CETL) and Academic Computing, department faculty progressed from beginner to intermediate, intermediate to advanced and advanced faculty provided one-on-one support for other faculty. These improvements affected direct and indirect assessments such as attendance, assignments, tests, exams, feedback to learners, internship supervisor evaluations, midterm grades and final grades, among other measures.

3. As was the case with several universities globally, Bowie State University experienced a decrease in the number of returning students between Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. To retain students, the department acquired the names of students who had not registered for Spring 2021 classes and developed a survey to determine some of the reasons why students elected not to return. Faculty called, texted, emailed students and provided them with information regarding course registration,

financial aid and university-loaned laptops and hot spots. The data collected from this outreach effort will be used to improve student retention rates among Communications students.

Submitted by:

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