History of the School of Communication: A Perspective on Communication, Change, and Community, 1985-2008

Victoria Smith Holden

University of North Dakota

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.und.edu/departmental-histories

Part of the Communication Commons

Recommended Citation
https://commons.und.edu/departmental-histories/83

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Elwyn B. Robinson Department of Special Collections at UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in UND Departmental Histories by an authorized administrator of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact zeinebyousif@library.und.edu.
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
1883-2008
CELEBRATING 125 YEARS

HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION:
A PERSPECTIVE ON COMMUNICATION, CHANGE, AND COMMUNITY
1985-2008

Victoria Smith Holden
The School of Communication was created in 1985 with the merger of the journalism and speech departments. Two allied units with close connections to the departments, KFJM radio and the Television Production Center, were also merged into the School at the time.

The journalism curriculum had been strong for many years and, in 1971, had been accredited by the primary accrediting body for journalism programs, the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Donald Gillmor, emeritus professor of law and journalism at the University of Minnesota and well-known communication scholar, once remarked that the UND program was “the best between the Minnesota and the west coast.” (Gillmor’s first college teaching job was in the journalism department at UND in the 1950s, and he remained close to the program and its faculty). The speech department was equally renowned and brought to the merger a distinguished tradition of scholarship as well as a master’s degree program in communication. In 1985, the School was reaccredited based on its mass communication majors.

In the late 1980s, however, the entire North Dakota university system suffered a blow when a series of widely publicized state-wide referendums that would have allocated substantial public dollars for higher education failed in the general election of 1988. A banner headline in the Grand Forks Herald expressed the vote succinctly: “No. No. No. No. No.” Vernon Keel, School of Communication director, apparently saw the handwriting on the wall: Soon thereafter, he left the school to become chair of the program at Wichita State University. In fact, Minnesota’s Gillmor, in 1990, advised one
of his doctoral students planning to apply for a position in the School, to forget it, largely because of the funding cuts, Keel’s resignation and what he, Gillmor, considered to be an “anti-intellectual” mind set of the North Dakota state government.

Keel’s departure was a grave setback for the school: Keel had been a strong leader, who ran, in the words of Bonnie Davis, his former administrative assistant, “a pretty tight ship.” But Keel wasn’t the only loss. Between 1987 and 1989, two senior faculty members died: Harley Strauss, a talented assistant professor of photography, and Tom Deats, a popular colleague who ran the graphics program. In early 1990, Zena Beth McClatchen, Strauss’s widow and the senior journalism faculty member, decided to take early retirement and announced her resignation as did Deb Chasteen, a recently minted Ph.D. who had taught political communication and public relations for three years.

Noted textbook author John Vivian took over for a year as interim director after Keel left. In 1990, the School hired a new director: Dennis Davis, a renowned scholar whose specialty was not journalism but speech communication. A friend of Vern Keel, Davis had received his doctorate from the University of Minnesota at the same that Keel had studied there. Davis had other ties to the region, with his bachelor’s degree from St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn., and parents living some 100 miles from Grand Forks. He had most recently been a speech communication professor at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale and brought to the School an impressive publication record. Speech communication was, of course, part of the school, but a big part of its claim to fame had traditionally been news-editorial-broadcast journalism. Davis’s appointment as director and professor went through without significant opposition.
The divide between speech and journalism had a physical component: The speech faculty members had offices in “Old Science,” a building that was demolished in 1996. The speech faculty also controlled the School’s modest master’s degree program, as a carry-over from the pre-merger days. The journalism faculty worked out of the basement of Merrifield Hall, where the director, too, had offices. They came together for faculty meetings and tried to forge collegial alliances, but by the early 90s, the two groups remained distinctly separate: not hostile but separate nonetheless.

Meanwhile, the Merrifield crew was strengthening its curriculum in public relations and advertising, both of which had been popular majors for years. For many reasons, the public relations and advertising curriculums seemed to draw majors in abundance, and the School responded accordingly. As mentioned earlier, the School also had close relationships with the university radio station, KSJN-FM, and the Television Production Center, which produced Studio One, the university’s award-winning television program. In fact, both KSJN and Studio One were part of the School, and their managers served as School of Communication faculty members. Moreover, the School had a flourishing forensics program whose director was also a faculty member. The nationally recognized forensics team was the pride of the School and, indeed, of the university.

Nonetheless, the School’s facilities in Merrifield Hall were insufficient to house its many classes and growing student population, which, by 1990, had reached some 500 undergraduates. A required lecture course that routinely enrolled more than 40 students might well be taught not in Merrifield but in other buildings, such as the law school, the
education building or Gamble Hall. The Merrifield facilities didn’t provide for more than one large class. There was always talk of a new building, but nothing ever developed.

Director Davis, mindful of his lack of professional media experience, demonstrated an early commitment to the professional side of the School. Davis voiced interest in promoting community outreach, developing a science communication program and expanding the School’s existing community journalism program. Most important, perhaps, he wanted to create programs and services for Native American students, a natural but underserved constituency. With Davis’s support, Lucy Ganje, a young graphics professor with family ties to the Native community, organized a group from the university and larger community to develop an alternative newspaper with Native leanings, the Gamut. In the fall of 1991, Davis and Ganje organized an important and well-attended panel discussion on Native issues as part of the School’s annual Editors and Broadcasters Day.

In 1992, Ganje, again with Davis’s support, began writing a grant application to the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to fund the Native Media Center. In early 1993, the grant was approved. This was a significant accomplishment. The Center now had its own offices, director and staff, and joined the growing number of important Indian programs, such as Indians into Medicine, throughout the university.

The Center’s mission was to promote diversity in the field of communication by increasing awareness of American Indians among media professionals and to bring Native students into communication careers. The Center aimed to serve as a clearing house for Native issues and a comfortable meeting place for students, both Native and non-Native.
In 1991, the School came up for re-accreditation by the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. In 1971, at the behest of UND President Tom Clifford, whose goal was accreditation for as many university programs as possible, the journalism department had sought accreditation for the first time and easily received it. The accrediting council requires periodic re-evaluation of accredited programs to ensure that they remain worthy of accreditation. Thus, the School was reviewed and re-accredited in 1984-85, in the midst of the merger of the departments of journalism and speech. In 1991, it faced a similar review.

The accrediting council judges programs on 12 standards:
governance/administration; budget; curriculum; student records/advising;
instruction/evaluation; faculty; internships/work experience; equipment/facilities; faculty scholarship/research/professional activities; public service; graduates/alumni, and minority and female representation. Davis received authorization from the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, of which the School was a part, to hire a pre-accreditation consultant, a common practice for programs seeking accreditation.

The consultant, Douglas A. Boyd, the dean of communication at the University of Kentucky, came to UND and reviewed the program, interviewed faculty members and students and examined facilities and pronounced the School more or less fit for the re-accreditation review. Boyd did remark that the School might have problems convincing the accrediting council of its compliance with two of the twelve standards: faculty research and scholarship, and minority/female representation. On the first point, Boyd remarked that the faculty seemed perhaps too professionally oriented and should see its
obligation as not only to “disseminate information” but “to create new knowledge” as well. Regarding minority representation, he said the School would have difficulty explaining why it has so far failed to hire a Native American faculty member.

Boyd also voiced concern about faculty personnel turnover and inadequate computer and laboratory facilities. Interestingly, although Boyd noted that the accrediting council would likely judge that the School’s budget and faculty salaries were too low, he wrote that the School would meet the budget standard if it was able to show that faculty salaries were consistent with others at UND and that the university and the college occasionally gave the School additional money for equipment, salary increases and new faculty hires. Thus, despite some reservations, Boyd averred that he believed the program would squeak by, if not with full, then with provisional re-accreditation.

As it happened, the program did not squeak by.

In the fall of 1991, the School’s faculty members began work on the requisite self-study, an extensive written report outlining the ways in which the program argues that it fulfills the accrediting council’s requirements. In late 1991, the accrediting council’s site team visited the School. The site team is selected from prestigious members of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. The team visited classes, talked with members of the administration and faculty and inspected the School’s facilities.

It is worth noting that early in the fall, before the site team’s visit, Heather O’Keefe, one of the senior faculty members who had been present for the 1984 site team visit, advised faculty members to put on an impressive show for the team. O’Keefe, a successful businesswoman and associate professor of advertising, said it was “extremely
important” that every class be first-rate: “Give them your best lecture, your best visual aids, everything,” she counseled. Unfortunately, not everyone took O’Keefe’s advice to heart. Rather, some showed their classes as they would ordinarily be, in their natural state, as it were. Others took the opportunity to complain to the site team members about various issues they had with the school, the director and the administration.

In early 1992, the site team issued a preliminary report. It was not favorable. While the team recommended provisional accreditation for a year, to give the School a chance to make improvements, it found the school deficient on seven of the professional association’s twelve standards. Of special concern was the public relations major, which, despite the large number of students, was critically understaffed, with no permanent tenure-track faculty members.

The mass communication faculty was, as the report claimed, not only significantly underpaid relative to regional standards but was “minimally qualified” in the sense of advanced degrees. While the faculty did have three members with Ph.D.s, they taught primarily in the speech program: Director Davis; Raymond Fischer, a full professor who specialized in rhetoric and public speaking, and Stephen Rendahl, an associate professor and award-winning instructor who taught courses across the communication curriculum. The part of the program up for re-accreditation, however, had no Ph.D.s.

The journalism major was run by two assistant professors: One, Bill Holden, had a bachelor’s degree and a few graduate credits in history, although he had impressive international journalistic credentials, including several years as managing editor of the
International Herald Tribune in Paris. The other, Victoria Smith (later Victoria Smith Holden after marrying Bill in 1992), was a new hire and a Minnesota ABD.

Advertising was in the hands of Heather O'Keefe, an associate professor who maintained, persuasively, that her master’s of public administration and her family’s many achievements owning and operating successful local businesses, stood her in good stead to teach advertising. Efforts to hire an additional advertising professor – the major was the School’s largest and active enough to demand two faculty members – had so far been unsuccessful.

Broadcasting was directed by Neil McCutchan, an assistant professor with a master’s degree who had several years of radio-TV experience and was a well-liked teacher as well. McCutchan was also largely responsible for starting an on-going exchange program between Norway and UND, a program that began consistently supplying the School with talented Norwegian students.

Lucy Ganje, an assistant professor of graphic design and visual communication, was an accomplished artist whose master of fine arts degree was considered “terminal” in her field (that is, equivalent to a doctorate).

Public relations, a rapidly growing major, posed a significant problem. The School had tried repeatedly to hire a full-time public relations faculty member and had repeatedly fallen short. In 1991, for example, Davis offered a tenure-track position to a young doctoral candidate with a specialty in PR only to find that he and the search committee had somehow failed to follow proper affirmative action protocol and could give her only a one-year appointment. Regrettably, the young woman had not only accepted the position but was in the process of closing on a house in Grand Forks when
she learned of the change in plans. She decided that she did not want the one-year appointment. By the time the ACEJMC site team paid its visit, the school’s public relations courses were being handled by skilled but temporary instructors, none of them with a degree higher than a master’s.

The facilities, too, might be considered by some (although, interestingly, not the site team) to be inadequate. Classroom and office space in the basement of Merrifield was limited. Davis, Holden, Ganje, Smith and the administrative staff all had offices in one large suite at the south end of the building. Aside from School of Communication graduate Shannon Gullickson, the school’s admission director (and director of nearly everything else from the Northern Interscholastic Press Association to the School newsletter, the Communicator), had a roomy office a few doors away. No one else had offices in Merrifield. Fischer, O’Keefe, Rendahl, forensics director Eric Krug and Mary Haselrud (later Mary Haselrud Opp), who headed the public speaking program, were in Old Science, a dilapidated structure with creaking floors and tiny rooms. McCutchan worked out of the building that housed Studio One, which was a good quarter-mile away from Merrifield. The temporary and part-time instructors settled in wherever someone could find room for them.

There was no large, auditorium-sized classroom available to the school in Merrifield. There were, however, two computer labs and a copy-editing room. The IBM writing lab was rudimentary. The graphics lab, thanks to the stone-soup skills of Ganje and her assistants, Greg Beltz and Scott Telle, was much closer to state of the art, with reasonably late-model Macintosh computers and some useful programs.
While faculty members were not overly surprised at the preliminary report, some thought it unfair, especially the part about the “minimally qualified faculty.” The site team “said we needed more Ph.D.’s,” said Steve Rendahl in the Feb. 7, 1992, edition of the Communicator, adding, by way of explanation, that “this is a function of our era.” In the same story, Davis said that the site team’s recommendation of “provisional status is actually a vote of confidence from the council. They are saying that within a year this school can make the necessary changes.” In fact, many faculty members quoted in the article seemed to think that the accreditation process was a positive step for the school because it drew attention to problems and moved people to action. “It means change,” said Lucy Ganje, “and change is always exciting.”

The report was preliminary, though, and the plan was that Davis and others would have a chance to address the concerns mentioned and even challenge some of the claims. The report and its recommendations were to remain internal matters. As a 1992 training manual for accrediting teams puts it, “the school administrator should be cautioned about widespread publicity of the team’s recommendations, especially before the Council’s final decision.”

But before long, the local media got wind of the document’s existence, and the Grand Forks Herald in particular was adamant in its insistence on receiving a copy. Heeding the accrediting organization’s warnings about premature publicity, Davis told the Herald and others that, no, they could not have copies because the report was only draft, a work-in-progress, not a final document. Furthermore, Davis claimed, there were several points in the report that would be changed before the report becomes final in the spring. He didn’t mention that some of the material was embarrassing to the school, but
Herald editors in particular became suspicious and accused the School of concealing something. The Herald published editorials excoriating Davis and the School for flouting the First Amendment and refusing to allow the media access to a public document that they surely had a right to view.

Davis contacted the executive director of the accrediting council and asked for advice. The bewildered executive director said that she had never had to deal with such a situation and so, like Davis, was flying blind on this one. Finally, the Herald took the matter to the North Dakota University System’s chancellors office, which, although it was in no way a court of law, “ruled” that the preliminary report was a public document and, under North Dakota’s open-records law, had to be released to any and all media that wanted it. Now the school had little choice, other than seeking the opinion of a real judge in a real courtroom (an option that, curiously enough, was never seriously considered). Davis had several copies of the draft report made and distributed them to the Herald and other local media. Naturally, the unflattering nature of the site team’s critique was widely publicized (the prevailing attitude seemed to be, well, no wonder they didn’t want this to get out!)

Davis and faculty members learned a bitter lesson in public relations and the media over those weeks: Never try to hide bad news; just get control of it. As Bill Holden later put it, “As soon as that report came out, Dennis should have taken a copy down to the Herald city editor and slapped it down on his desk. He [the editor] probably wouldn’t have given it a second glance.”

Some corrections were made on the report. Some of the more poorly paid faculty members were, to their delight and surprise, given substantial raises in the spring. In
May of 1992, the full accrediting council met to consider its many petitions for accreditation or re-accreditation. Davis, Dean O'Kelly and Tom Clifford attended the meeting as did the head of the site team that had issued the controversial report, but their arguments and pleas for a year's provisional accreditation fell on deaf ears. The council determined that the school, and particularly the administration, had failed to make the improvements that the council had deemed necessary as far back as 1984 and, in 10-3 vote, stripped the School of Communication of its accredited status. The sentiment seemed to be that provisional re-accreditation would be pointless because the school and the administration had not heeded warnings issued earlier. Why would this time be any different?

The immediate fallout from the loss of accreditation seemed minimal. The School's faculty and, by fall of 1992, the new university president, Kendall Baker, pledged dedication to regaining accredited status, possibly as soon as 1995. Talented students continued to enroll in and graduate from the program, despite the School's newer, higher minimum GPA requirement (from 2.3 to 2.5). In October of 1992, Shannon Gullickson reported that enrollment was up 20 percent and that the School's 542 students represented a quarter of the entire College of Arts and Sciences enrollment. Students continued to win regional and national awards in their respective professions. The debate team completed what forensics director Eric Krug described as an "incredible year," placing in all the major national circuit tournaments. Progress toward a substantial grant for a new Native Media Center proceeded apace. There were, as the Oct. 2, 1992, edition of the now-student-edited Communicator crowed, "opportunities galore."
The School succeeded in hiring a public relations faculty member with a Ph.D., Jae Shim of the University of Wisconsin, as well as other instructors in public relations and broadcasting. Faculty members won awards, published articles and books and were invited to important conferences. Student clubs flourished and the School hosted several prestigious guest speakers.

Still, the loss of accreditation began to take its toll. In the next several years, accreditation – its loss and the struggle to regain it – came to be the overarching theme (if not the obsession) of the School.

In the early months after the accrediting council’s unfavorable decision in the spring of 1992, students started to express uneasiness about the School’s new condition. In September 1992, the School formed a student advisory committee to give students a forum that, ideally, would provide useful input to the School. In a November 1992 meeting of the student committee, students posed several questions: If accreditation isn’t all that important, as the School maintained after losing it, why is the School making such a vigorous effort to regain it? Will graduates of the program have trouble getting into major journalism graduate schools? Will they have trouble getting well-paying jobs?

Davis and other faculty members did their best to reassure the students and correct rampant misinformation. Although having accreditation is nice, it isn’t necessary for a good program, Davis said. Much of what the accrediting council requires depends on money, and everyone knows the state of North Dakota seldom gives much of that to higher education. Moreover, only about a third of U.S. journalism and mass communication programs are accredited. Many programs, including those at Wisconsin and Stanford, have steered clear of accreditation because of the stringent and, some say,
overly restrictive requirements. And, Davis pointed out, the School is thriving. Students are acquiring the skills necessary to get good internships and jobs, and no graduate program in the nation will reject highly qualified applicants based solely on whether their undergraduate program was accredited. Finally, Davis reminded students and others, the University of North Dakota itself is accredited, so it is fruitless for communication students to fret that they would now receive degrees from an unaccredited institution.

Unspoken in these and subsequent discussions was the indisputable fact that had the School never sought accreditation in the first place, the whole accreditation controversy would not exist. As a St. Cloud State University communication professor and citizen of pre-Walensia Poland once remarked sardonically, “Accreditation is rather like membership in the Communist Party. It’s hard to get in, but once you’re in, it’s really hard to get out.” It is widely acknowledged among mass communication departments that a program does not need ACEJMC accreditation to be superior. An accredited program that loses accreditation, however, as the School just had, must regain it – or suffer the public relations consequences.

And for the School of Communication, the public relations consequences, both short- and long-term, were considerable. Public skepticism about the School grew. The unpleasant publicity generated by the controversy over the preliminary accreditation report had made an impression. It was not uncommon for worried and sometimes angry parents to phone Shannon Gullickson or Dennis Davis to complain about the loss of accreditation.

Another outcome of the re-accreditation debacle was that upper administration decided that the School needed some serious revamping – indeed, restructuring – or, if
this was not possible, disbanding. So, in fall of 1992, the School began a months-long effort to come up with something that the administration would find acceptable. Several models were proposed. The model that garnered the strongest faculty and administrative support was a single communication major with emphases in the five traditional areas of journalism, broadcasting, advertising, public relations and speech.

In February of 1993, soon after announcing that Lucy Ganje’s team had finally succeeded in getting a large Knight Foundation grant to start a Native Media Center, a beleaguered Dennis Davis told the faculty that he would not seek re-appointment as director. He said he did not believe he had enough faculty confidence in his leadership to continue to lead the program. Most faculty members greeted Davis’s resignation with surprise and disappointment, while a few, as well as some students, seemed to think the School needed a fresh start with a new director. In any case, most were relieved that Davis, a productive scholar and a valued teacher and adviser among graduate students in particular, would stay on as a professor; he didn’t leave the School until 1996.

Some might say that Davis’ choice to resign as director was understandable. In addition to its achievements since the 1990-91 academic year, the School had also endured its share of mishaps.

In April of 1992, just when the School was struggling to contain negative publicity about re-accreditation, a controversy arose over a student poster announcing the annual School of Communication spring banquet. The poster, which selected faculty members had judged the best of several entries from the graphics class, encouraged people to “expose” themselves to spring. The graphic was a cartoon character dressed as an old-fashioned reporter with a fedora and raincoat, which he was opening to show his
cartoonish nakedness strategically concealed by a large tulip. Apparently, a student from another department found the poster “offensive” and complained to the university’s affirmative action director, who, in turn, asked Davis to remove the posters. Having run afoul of the affirmative action director once before, Davis decided to remove the posters. One faculty member, however, a temporary instructor no longer with the School, decided that Davis’s action was an instance of censorship and urged students to rise up and rebel. Within days, new posters appeared across campus calling for Davis’s resignation. One thing led to another, and soon local television crews, cameras rolling, were attending School of Communication faculty meetings to film whatever sparks might fly.

In February of 1993, the School again made headlines when a Dakota Student sports columnist, as one faculty member quipped, “got his ass in a sling.” The columnist had jokingly disparaged the game of soccer and the nation of Brazil, which, he wrote, didn’t even merit a position on the board game Risk. The Hispanic Students Association rose up in arms, apparently unaware of the American tradition of outrageousness in newspaper sports columns, and publicly demanded that the Board of Student Publications fire the columnist as well as the Dakota Student editor. The School’s journalism faculty unequivocally supported the sports columnist, who, they argued, was not seriously ridiculing Brazil or its premier soccer star, Pele. They insisted that the writer was actually a brilliant humorist and writer (although one long-time English professor sniffed, in a letter to the Dakota Student that “I have yet to see any evidence of this great writing talent”). The incident eventually blew over, with no one losing a job and with the Hispanic Student Association dissatisfied but resigned. The sports columnist, as it
happens, was Chuck Klosterman, who would become a best-selling writer, one-time senior editor at Spin magazine and a writer for the New York Times.

In the summer of 1993, the faculty voted to postpone the search for a new director until fall. John Miller from the music department took over as interim director for the summer, and, in the fall, political science professor and former Lieutenant Governor Lloyd Omdahl was appointed as interim.

Later that year, President Baker and the new provost, Marlene Strathe, advanced a plan to streamline the School by moving it wholesale from the College of Arts and Sciences to the College of Fine Arts. Fine Arts, under the direction of the late Dean Bruce Jacobsen, was a smaller college encompassing the departments of music, theater and art. The idea was to group the more “professional” and “applied” programs into one college, and communication, the administration reckoned, fit it perfectly. The School of Communication, then as now, was a relatively large program at UND, so the move would reduce the pressure on Arts and Sciences and give the relatively small College of Fine Arts a healthy injection of students. Baker and Strathe assured the School that it would remain a school under the new arrangement and not be reduced to a department. Moreover, as Jacobsen noted in the Feb. 7, 1994, issue of the Communicator, every degree offered in Fine Arts is accredited, and “we will do everything we can possibly do to see the School of Communication achieve accreditation.”

Some communication faculty members, suspicious of the new Baker administration’s motives, opposed joining Fine Arts. Especially disturbing was that part of the deal was the effective end of the forensics program. The School’s debate team had been a prominent star in the university’s constellation and one of the School’s claims to
fame. Losing it was a jolt, but the administration decided that the program was too expensive. Forensics director Eric Krug had little choice but to resign. The School lost not only Krug and a handful of his exceptional students, but, some have observed, Krug’s salary, which seemed to disappear from the School’s budget. Despite some faculty grumbling, however, the School of Communication officially became the fourth element of the College of Fine Arts by mid-1994.

On the positive side, the School managed to hire Kirk Hallahan, a tenure-track public relations faculty member (Jae Shim, a one-year appointment, had left) as well as Ross Collins, a talented graphics/photography teacher. Although they came to UND as ABDs, both Collins and Hallahan soon received their Ph.D. degrees: Collins in 1993 from Cambridge University in England, and Hallahan in 1995 from the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

With the start of the 1993-94 academic year, the search for a new director for the School began in earnest. Three communication faculty members, a communication student and three outside members from other departments and administration made up the search committee, which was appointed by the administration itself.

The search committee assembled an impressive pool of candidates, ultimately selecting North Dakota native and UND graduate Lana Rakow as the new director. Rakow, a leading feminist scholar, brought a strong record of scholarship and teaching to the job as well as substantial experience in administration. In addition, she had professional media experience in journalism and public relations. Rakow received her Ph.D. in 1987 from the University of Illinois where she studied under James Cary, an almost legendary communication theorist. Her dissertation, which studied women’s use
of the telephone as a means of communication and community building, was published as
a book soon after she completed it. Rakow continued to publish prolifically with a focus
on feminist theory and ethical models of communication. As she told the communication
faculty during her interview for the directorship, she believed that communication
scholars must find ways to prove to the larger academic community that communication
is central to everything – an empowering idea to a faculty that had, over the last year or
so, had been feeling demoralized and powerless.

Rakow’s appointment, which began in July of 1994, had a clear mandate to regain
ACEJMC accreditation as soon as possible. Despite all the uncertainties surrounding the
School’s future, Rakow brought to the program energy, enthusiasm and faith in the
School, all of which had been in short supply for many months. She immediately began
to build valuable alliances by courting communication industry leaders in the region as
well as influential alumni, asking for both political and financial support. To ensure that
these influential leaders had a chance to get to know the faculty and staff, Rakow held
parties and receptions at her comfortable south Grand Forks home. And under her
leadership, the School began overhauling the curriculum and, in fact, its entire
pedagogical structure.

In the spring of 1995, the School announced its new and improved
communication degree. As Rakow wrote in the spring 1995 issue of the communication
alumni newsletter, the changes aimed to deal with “shifting enrollments between the
traditional areas of communication and the rapidly changing world of communication
industries and technologies.”
The new curriculum was organized around three broad communication themes: community, information and technology. Several new courses, including a “capstone” Senior Portfolio class, were added to the existing curriculum. All communication students planning to graduate had to take the course, which obliged them to compile an academic portfolio of their work in the School. The portfolio class also gave students a chance to demonstrate competency in the School’s 12 recently created goals for student learning. In addition, the new plan required 1-3 credits of applied professional experience, in the form of an internship or some other practical endeavor. In general, the new curriculum sought to allow students greater flexibility in designing a program to meet their individual skills and career needs.

The revised curriculum also had the advantage of making it all but impossible for the administration to Balkanize the School by splitting off certain majors into departments and thus weakening the School overall. Rakow and the faculty vigorously opposed such a move because smaller programs separate from each other would be easier for an administration so inclined to eliminate.

The curriculum, which took effect in fall of 1995, was widely praised by professionals and academics alike, at both national and regional levels. It met the accrediting council’s strict credit standards, which restricted the number of communication credits that majors could take to allow for a greater number of liberal arts and science credits outside the program. Rakow, who had served on several accreditation site teams, conceded that the new curriculum was a radical departure from traditional mass communication programs of study, which tended to stress skills over theory. The School’s new program sought a balance between theory and skill and was, to some
extent, experimental. Rakow told the faculty that the curriculum might serve as a test case for accreditation of non-traditional communication programs.

That the School was well on its way to regaining accreditation was clear. The School even had a new home, one that would unite the Merrifield and Old Science faculty for the first time. (The lack of "adequate and adjacent space for all components of the School" had been one of the 1992 accrediting site team’s major criticisms.) In summer of 1995, the School assumed its new quarters on the second floor of the old Medical Science South building left vacant when the medical school moved to a new facility. The building, soon to be renamed O’Kelly Hall, in honor of Bernard O’Kelly, the long-serving Arts and Science dean who retired in 1996, was across the UND quadrangle from Merrifield and centrally located near the law school, the library and the Memorial Union. The faculty and staff got spacious offices. Work began to equip new computer and video labs and to furnish a reading room. O’Kelly also provided space for large lecture classes, faculty meetings and, eventually, the Native Media Center, the Northern Interscholastic Press Association, the campus public radio station and a communication research center. The move to O’Kelly was part of a two-year plan to expand the School’s facilities into other parts of the new building. The only unit in the School that would not be housed in O’Kelly was the broadcast branch of the Television Production Center, which was moving to the new Rural Technology Center on the western edge of campus.

Also in the 1994-95 academic year, the School hired three tenure-track faculty members: Cheryl Gooch, Kazumi Hasagawa and Richard Shafer. Gooch, whose Ph.D. was from Florida State University, had several years of teaching experience and was to
teach mass communication skill and theory classes. Gooch also had an interest in
cultural studies, an area Rakow hoped to develop in the curriculum. Hasagawa was
completing a Ph.D. in mass media/telecommunication at Michigan State University and
would become the new advertising professor, replacing Heather O'Keefe who retired in
1995. Shafer's Ph.D. was in rural sociology from the University of Missouri, and, with
extensive international experience, he was especially interested in community and
development journalism. He filled the vacancy left by Bill Holden, who had left the
School a year earlier.

The School took the first step toward re-accreditation in fall of 1995 by bringing
in an accreditation consultant, Willard Rowland, dean of the College of Journalism and
Mass Communication at the University of Colorado. Rowland's review was generally
positive. His main concern, however, was the accrediting council's governance standard,
with which he believed the School would be found in non-compliance. The governance
standard requires a program to have strong faculty governance, freedom of expression
and a positive relationship with higher administration. It was this last point that was
troublesome, Rowland said.

And with this, the consultant put his finger on a problem that had been growing
for months: tension between higher administration and the School. The sources of
conflict were not always clear, but they seemed to stem from the administration's sense
that the School wanted more than it, the administration, was willing and able to give.
The School's position was that it was asking for no more than it needed to build an
accreditation-worthy program. Rakow and the faculty began to appeal to the School's
many outside supporters in the academic and professional community (including the local
media) to put pressure on the administration for more physical space, more funding and more faculty lines. The administration was not pleased.

Nevertheless, the School continued to rack up achievements in the 1995-96 academic year. In the fall, the School hosted a well-attended Communication Day (formerly Editors and Broadcasters Day) symposium and sponsored several distinguished speakers through the year. Although faculty resignations continued, with Dennis Davis, Neil McCutchan, Cheryl Gooch and, later, Kirk Hallahan leaving the program, the School was able to fill most of the vacant positions. In 1996, Marwan Kraidy, a gifted Ohio University Ph.D., joined the faculty to teach courses in culture, theory and new technologies. By late spring, the School had hired Raoul Tovares, a recent Ph.D. from the University of Texas, Austin, to take over the broadcasting courses McCutchan had taught. Also hired were two non-tenure-track Ph.D.s from the University of Georgia, Laura Wackwitz and Chris Schroll.

In the spring of 1996, the School hosted the midwinter conference of the huge mass communication and society division of AEJMC. The conference, which included refereed paper sessions, panels and workshops, focused on media, technology and communication and drew participants from across the country. The Native Media Center, by now going strong, received a $111,900 Knight Foundation grant to support a native youth leadership media institute.

The decades-old Northern Interscholastic Press Association, which provides journalism services and training to area high schools, continued to be housed in the School. Under a series of different directors over the years, NIPA sponsored fall workshops, spring competitions and summer institutes for high school students and their
advisers. The relationship served both the high schools and the School of Communication for which NIPA was a source of new students.

The School continued to receive new endowments for scholarships and, at the 1996 spring banquet, presented more than $13,000 in student scholarships and awards. In the spring of 1996, Rakow announced that a new accrediting site team would visit the School on Oct. 27-30 of that year. "We're building an excellent program," she said confidently. "Accreditation should follow."

But in late July of 1996, the administration abruptly relieved Rakow of her duties as director of the School of Communication. Understandably, the faculty was in an uproar, and the School once again began to make the headlines and attract unwanted, negative public attention.

Dan Plato, a faculty member from the theater department, was appointed interim director in the summer of 1996. The academic year that followed was fraught with bitterness and conflict. Even the weather that year seemed to conspire to make an already unpleasant situation thoroughly miserable. After months of blizzards, record snowfalls and ice storms, the 1996-97 school year ended prematurely in April of 1997 with a massive flood. Grand Forks residents were ordered to evacuate on April 19 when the Red River broke through existing dikes and submerged more than three-quarters of the town in murky flood waters several feet deep. The university, which seldom cancelled classes for any reason, was forced to close for the rest of the semester.

By midsummer of 1997, however, Grand Forks began to recover and rebuild. Likewise, the School sought to salvage the program. Before the flood, a new tenure-track public relations faculty member, Jeffrey Courtright, had been hired. Courtright had
extensive public relations experience and a Ph.D. from the University of Miami in Ohio. In addition, the administration had hired a new director for the School – Richard Fiordo, who had most recently directed the communications program at Eureka College in Illinois. Fiordo had received his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois in 1974 and had extensive teaching and research experience.

Fiordo, a good-natured, collegial man, began his duties at the School in fall of 1997, bringing what a winter 1997 edition of the School’s alumni newsletter described as “a fresh perspective to his role as director.”

In a commentary, two graduate students wrote that Fiordo “is genuinely enthusiastic about the School’s goals for teaching and learning, excited about its future and certain of its success. Overall, Fiordo would like to see SComm faculty, staff and students ‘walk forward together.’” Fiordo also pledged to continue the School’s pursuit of accreditation.

Then, in 1998, Lana Rakow, having exhausted all internal avenues of redress for her demotion in 1996, filed a civil rights/civil liberties lawsuit against the University in federal court. The trial took place in Fargo in the summer of 1998. Rakow ultimately lost the lawsuit and the subsequent appeal but stayed on as a professor of communication. Not so for Baker, Strathe and Jacobsen, all of whom left UND just before or soon after the trial.

Nevertheless, under Fiordo’s direction, things rocked along without undue controversy for some two years. The College of Fine Arts was dismantled, and its departments, including the School, were returned to Arts and Sciences, under the interim direction of Al Fivizzani, chair of the biology department. Rakow and Kraidy in
particular became active in upgrading and expanding the School's graduate program, and soon the program was attracting a greater number of highly qualified applicants. New courses were added to the graduate curriculum, and the theory and methods courses were made more comprehensive and consistent.

The faculty renewed the pledge to seek re-accreditation, and another consultant, Joe Foote, was brought in to review the School. Foote's report, like those of the previous consultants, was generally optimistic about the School's prospects for achieving accreditation. His concern, however, was about students and advising, which, he suggested, needed to be more consistent and thorough. Thus, beefing up faculty advising became a central concern for faculty and director over the next several years.

In 1998, the Grand Forks Herald gave the School some extra funding, which it used to bring in a Pulitzer-Prize winning investigative reporter, Bill Gaines, of the Chicago Tribune. Gaines, who had done a lot of undercover investigations in his day, helped teach investigative reporting skills for the first part of the fall semester to community journalism students, all of whom adored him and soaked up everything he said. (Later, although he had officially retired from the newspaper business, Gaines accepted a position at the University of Illinois teaching investigative reporting).

In 1998 and 1999, the School made two additional new tenure-track hires: Dale Zacher, a 1988 School of Communication graduate who was working on his Ph.D. at Ohio University, and James Hikins, a seasoned rhetoric and speech scholar who had earned his Ph.D. at the University of Texas. Zacher's duties were to handle some of the more technical skill courses in broadcasting. Because of his extensive publication record
and recognition for his speech and rhetorical scholarship, Hikins joined the faculty as a full professor without tenure. He took over for Ray Fischer, who retired in 1998.

Then, in the summer of 1999, Fiordo decided to take a two-year leave of absence from the School to teach in the Georgia Perimeter Community College System. Bemused faculty members wondered who or what was next, although by now many had become accustomed to abrupt changes in leadership. Fivizanni, the interim Arts and Sciences dean, announced that Steve Rendahl, who had been with the School since 1974, would serve as interim director. To many, this seemed a wise move: Rendahl knew the School intimately, and most people – students, faculty and administrators alike – seemed to think highly of him.

Among Rendahl’s chief duties in the next two years was to hire two tenure-track faculty members – one in advertising and the other in public relations. Kazumi Hasegawa who taught advertising had resigned in 1999 to take a job at Emerson College in Boston, and Jeff Courtright, who taught public relations, left the School in 2001 for family-related reasons. The following year, Raul Tovares resigned for personal reasons. In 2000, the School hired Seounmi (Katie) Han Youn, who was completing her Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota, to take over the advertising sequence. Michael Nitz, a University of Arizona Ph.D. whose most recent job had been at the University of Idaho, joined the faculty as an associate professor of public relations. In 2000, the School also hired Selene Phillips, a doctoral student at Bowling Green University, for a one-year position filling in for Richard Shafer, who had received a Fulbright fellowship to teach communication in Uzbekistan.
Starting in 1999, higher administration was undergoing big personnel changes as well. Charles Kupchella, whose specialty was microbiology, was selected as university president, replacing Kendall Baker. John Ettling, who had succeeded Bernard O’Kelly as Arts and Sciences dean, became provost and vice president for academic affairs. In 2001, Martha Potvin, an evolutionary biologist, was chosen as the new Arts and Sciences dean.

Fiordo returned to UND in 2001 but as a professor, not director. Rendahl, continued to serve as director this time with the title of director instead of interim director.

Meanwhile, the graduate program was expanding. Thanks in part to an internationally more diverse faculty and in part to faculty members’ frequent travels to distant parts of the world, the number of international students was expanding as well. The School’s graduate faculty had been tossing around the idea of a Ph.D. program for some time, but it had always seemed beyond the School’s resources and capabilities. In 2001-02 academic year, however, the talk became more serious. Jim Hikins in particular was convinced that a Ph.D. program could become a reality, and sooner rather than later. In 2002, the School won approval by the North Dakota board of higher education to start offering a Ph.D. degree in Communication and Public Discourse.

Marwan Kraidy, who had been serving as graduate studies director and was revered by his students, graduate and undergraduate alike, announced his resignation, just as the new doctoral program was taking shape. He had taken a job at the American University in Washington, D.C. He told the faculty that he regretted leaving at such an important time, but he could not pass up the opportunity. Besides, it was common knowledge that Kraidy deplored the paltry library resources at UND and craved the
intellectual stimulation of larger centers of learning. The loss was significant, but the School still had its foremost intellectual powerhouse, Lana Rakow. She was not only a renowned feminist but was becoming a public intellectual as well.

In 2002, Dean Potvin and others in higher administration decided that the School needed to search for a new director, one from outside the School. A 2002 search was not successful, and Rendahl served as director for another year. The year ended with the Native Media Center losing grant support from the Knight Foundation.

Another director search began in 2003, this time under the leadership of James Mochoruk of the history department. The 2003 applicant pool was larger than in previous years, possibly because of the new doctoral program, which made the School a more attractive place to work. In fact, several candidates, including the finalists, mentioned the Ph.D. program as one of the reasons they applied for the position. Three internal candidates, Rakow, Fiordo, and Rendahl, all applied to be the new director. The search committee narrowed the list to three highly qualified candidates, all of whom were asked to come for campus visits. One of the candidates – the faculty’s first choice – withdrew from consideration because his family refused to move to North Dakota. A second candidate was offered the position but, unable to negotiate the contract she wanted, turned it down.

The third candidate was Pamela Kalbfleisch. Kalbfleisch received her Ph.D. in communication from Michigan State University and had most recently been a communication and journalism professor at the University of Wyoming, where she had twice been elected to head the faculty senate. Kalbfleisch, who specialized in interpersonal communication, was nationally and internationally recognized for her work.
on mentoring relationships, deceptive communication and gender. She was also editor of
the International Communication Association's serial publication, Communication
Yearbook. In her early career, Kalbfleisch had worked as a radio news reporter and as a
news stringer for United Press International.

A few faculty members were hesitant to offer the position to someone with less
mass communication experience but conceded that this was not a decisive obstacle to her
candidacy. Besides, it quickly became clear that Kalbfleisch had Potvin's support and
might be able to get the School's needs met more fully than past directors. Kalbfleisch
told the faculty she hoped to facilitate the School's progress toward a nationally and
internationally recognized program. Kalbfleisch was offered the position. She accepted
and began work in July 2003.

Meanwhile, in spring 2003, the School won the prestigious Departmental
Outstanding Service Award at the annual UND Founders Day banquet. As Rendahl
remarked, "now we have to go for the outstanding research award." Improving the
School's research record, however, was difficult. Katie Youn, who had begun to publish
extensively after completing her doctorate, announced her resignation in spring of 2003.
Dale Zacher also announced his resignation in spring 2003. Sam Johnson resigned as
director of alumni relations and technology to work at Lake Region State College.
Johnson continued to serve as NIPA Director.

In summer of 2003, when Kalbfleisch came to campus, she was asked to
reestablish external funding for the Native Media Center, which had lost its Knight
Foundation grant in spring of 2002. She was also charged with helping implement the
new doctoral program, restoring a relationship between the school and disgruntled
alumnus Chuck Johnson, improving faculty timeliness and consistency in class attendance, and encouraging an alienated Lana Rakow to participate in faculty governance. Kalbfleisch was given authority to fill three faculty positions and the promise of a fourth faculty position if her leadership was successful. She was also given funds to hire a lecturer, Jenny Saplis, to replace Sam Johnson as director of technology and alumni relations and to teach graphics and other classes as needed.

A faculty retreat was held in fall of 2003 to decide on the nature of the new positions. Faculty decided to hire colleagues in advertising and social influence, international and intercultural communication, and new communication technology in the coming year and to hire a colleague in health communication the next year if the new position was forthcoming.

Kalbfleisch worked with faculty to develop a policy for variable teaching loads to allow faculty additional time to focus on research, teaching or special projects. This brought the teaching load down to four classes a year for faculty actively engaged in research. Faculty members focusing more on teaching could teach more classes with fewer research expectations. Research expectations were tied to research outcomes, teaching expectations were tied to teaching outcomes and service outcomes were also established for all faculty members. Those working on special projects could be released from some teaching or research expectations during the period of the project.

Faculty members interested building their research programs and applying for external grants were given a class release and a research assistant. Four faculty members chose this option, several grant proposals were written. Richard Shafer was successful with a Fulbright proposal to travel to Asia to facilitate journalism education.
By spring of 2004 Kalbfleisch had reestablished funding for the Native Media Center, with a $305,000 grant from the Knight Foundation for three new initiatives at the center. These included Native Community studios, hands-on journalism workshops, the Red Nation News (an electronic newsmagazine) and recruitment trips designed to increase the number of Native students pursuing journalism careers. Funds from this grant allowed her to hire a full-time director for the center and to upgrade the assistant director position held by Holly Annis, who was an enrolled member of the Sheyenne River Sioux. Kalbfleisch also received $75,000 in additional support from the University of North Dakota for the center.

Alumni relations improved for the School. Kalbfleisch reestablished a relationship with Chuck Johnson, visiting with him regularly and inviting him to visit the School. Johnson, who was chiefly interested in improving journalism education for UND students, worked with Kalbfleisch to build connections to other distinguished alumni of the school and encouraged students and alumni to give back to UND.

Faculty members, lecturers and graduate students began documenting their teaching effectiveness through teaching portfolios. The portfolios contained several indicators of teaching effectiveness, including self-evaluation, peer evaluation, student evaluation, samples of student work and teaching materials. While all teaching members of the School were evaluated as meeting teaching expectations, one member of the teaching faculty excelled both in the school and across the university. Mary Haslerud Opp received the University of North Dakota Outstanding Teaching Award in spring of 2004. The portfolios also helped support two additional achievements in 2004: James Hikins received tenure and Richard Shafer was promoted to full professor.
The 2003-04 faculty searches went well. Each search generated a respectable pool of candidates, and, by the end of the school year, four new colleagues were on board. The teaching positions were filled quickly. Brian Householder, who was completing a Ph.D. in communication and social influence at the University of Georgia, was hired for the advertising and social influence position. Bettina Heinz, a University of Nebraska Ph.D. teaching at Bowling Green State University, joined to faculty to teach courses in international/intercultural communication. Tatyana Dumova, a 2003 graduate of Bowling Green's Ph.D. program, was hired to teach courses in new communication technology. Both Heinz and Dumova were foreign-born – Heinz in Trier, Germany, and Dumova in Moscow, Russia. Their addition to the faculty complemented the School's growing enrollment of international students, especially in the graduate program.

Finally, after a lengthy search, a new Native Media Center director was hired. He was Paul Boswell, an enrolled member of the White Earth Indian Reservation. Boswell had been director of multicultural student services at North Dakota State University for six years. An experienced journalist, he did his undergraduate work at Bemidji State University, received a master's degree in educational leadership at NDSU and was a doctoral student in the communication program at NDSU.

In late November of 2003, tragedy struck the university community in general and the School of Communication in particular. Dru Sjodin, a graphics design major, disappeared under suspicious circumstances late one snowy afternoon from a Columbia Mall parking lot. All signs pointed to abduction. Days and weeks passed, and Sjodin was still missing, despite massive search efforts by community members and police. Many of the School's faculty members had had Sjodin as a student in their classes.
Admissions director Shannon Gullickson, voicing her grief over Sjodin’s disappearance, said sadly that every time she, Gullickson, reached for a student file under S, she always seemed to put her hand on Sjodin’s. Kalbfleisch organized a special session for graduate students and faculty to talk about the situation with a university mental health professional. The School also moved to bolster building security in O’Kelly. In April of 2004, Sjodin’s body was found in a snow bank near Crookston, Minn. She had been murdered. The story received sustained national attention, but for the School and the university, Dru Sjodin was not a mere news story – she was one of their own.

The School of Communication’s 2004-05 academic year began with a faculty retreat and party at the main lodge at Turtle River State Park near Larimore. All four new colleagues attended, and spirits were generally high, although one long-standing fixture was absent: Lucy Ganje had left the School to join the faculty of the art department and to build a course sequence in graphic design and the arts.

Retreat discussion centered on the future trajectory of the School, curriculum, assessment and additional faculty searches. As a reward for a successful year, the School had been given approval to search for a health communication faculty member. Additionally, alumnus Chuck Johnson had decided to give the School funds to hire an endowed professor of journalism. Faculty discussed these and other possible positions in connection with course development. Kalbfleisch, Fiordo and Householder were especially interested in developing courses in health communication while others wanted to see the School develop intercultural communication.

The year began smoothly. Both the master’s degree and doctoral programs were growing, with several new graduate students enrolling for 2004-05. Kalbfleisch had
established funding for 21 teaching assistantships for most of the new doctoral students and many masters students. As a result, the public speaking class offerings were growing because more sections could be opened with the new teachers. Graduate students with professional experience began teaching skill classes across the School curriculum. An accreditation preparedness committee was formed to work on preparing the school for accreditation.

In the fall, the faculty developed a strategic plan for the School. The plan included ambitious aims, such as expanding the frontiers of knowledge through research and teaching. The plan pointed out that the School's major and pre-major enrollment had grown at the remarkable rate of 20 percent in the last year. Moreover, students taking communication classes was up 17 percent because of expanded course offerings as well as the perceived need for communication skills in contemporary society. The Ph.D. program had grown from two students when it began to 16 students in 2004. The masters program had also grown, from 15 students in 1997 to 23 in 2004.

Requests were made for permanent funding for a director of public speaking, a 12-month permanently funded technology coordinator/instructor, 14 new permanently funded doctoral-level teaching assistantships, and expanded office, classroom space and funding.

The School's strategic plan identified its commitment to becoming a national leader in rural communication. This meant the School ideally would undertake activities emphasizing rural communication, including rural health communication, rural government communication, rural development communication and Native American outreach programs.
The faculty developed guidelines for tenure and tenure track, annual and triennial evaluations of faculty, and annual evaluations of lecturers, adjuncts and graduate assistants. The faculty also developed a policy governing student organizations in the School.

In the spring semester 2005 the school faculty developed a new mission statement. The new mission statement read:

The University of North Dakota School of Communication is a regional, national, and global leader in communication education, research, and outreach. The School of Communication provides comprehensive undergraduate, masters and doctoral programs. The School of Communication teaches students the professional skills to make critically informed professional and life choices, use technology, and communicate ethically and effectively with diverse communities.

Lana Rakow rejoined the faculty for this discussion and again became actively involved with faculty governance in the School.

Several candidates applied for the new health communication and the endowed journalism professorship. The endowed journalism professor search was not successful, and the search was closed. The health communication search resulted in hiring Mary Lee Horosewski, a doctoral candidate from the University of Kentucky who had experience working on several major health communication grants and was interested in helping to build health communication in the School.

At the close of the year, Michael Nitz left the School to join a program with an intercultural communication emphasis at Augustana College in South Dakota. Jim Hikins left the program and took a faculty position at Wooster College in Ohio. Bettina Heinz left the School for a faculty position at Royal Roads College in Victoria B.C. Lana Rakow was appointed director of the new Center of Community Engagement and was
released from teaching four classes a year in the School so she could serve on this special project.

The 2005-06 academic year began with the addition of Mary Lee Horosewski in health communication. In addition, two new temporary faculty members joined the school: Jacquelyn Lowman, a journalist with a Ph.D. in mass communication from Michigan State University, and Patricia Traynor, a specialist in public relations with a Ph.D. in crisis communication from North Dakota State University and experience as former public affairs officer for the Grand Forks Air Force Base.

Thanks to intensive fund-raising by Kalbfleisch and others, the year opened with several physical improvements to the School. A new state-of-the-art communication research laboratory was developed to support interaction research. It was designed by a team of faculty members interested in interaction research and was the first digital recording laboratory on campus. Also new was an extreme makeover for the Native Media Center aimed at providing a state-of-the-art media center for Native students. Designed by Paul Boswell and Pamela Kalbfleisch, with the help of a professional design team, the new Center featured a circular design, earth colors and new equipment. Also new was a special-needs restroom facility in the School, and Kalbfleisch was making additional efforts to gain other special-needs access to the School’s facilities.

The School of Communication began a cooperative arrangement with the School of Medicine and Health Sciences, the Center for Rural Health and the National Resource Center on Native Aging to publish the Journal of Native Aging and Health focusing on the health needs of Native American elders. The journal was edited by Kalbfleisch with
help from an editorial board that included scholars with national reputations working in health sciences and communication research.

In September of 2005, Sam Johnson resigned as NIPA director. New funds were not available to hire another NIPA director. Victoria Smith Holden agreed to serve as NIPA director as a special appointment and was released from research to serve in this capacity.

The search for the endowed professor in journalism was reopened. Funding was sought for additional permanent faculty for the School to replace the open positions. The endowed professor search was closed, and funding was not forthcoming for new faculty.

Meanwhile, the undergraduate and graduate program continued to flourish. In October, the school hosted a two-day Communicators Day program at the new Hilton Garden Inn. The well-attended event brought speakers from the region to lead panel discussions on timely communication-related topics.

The Native Community Studios funded by the Knight grant also began in November of 2005. The event featured presentations by Native journalists, specialists in Native culture and other communication professionals.

Faculty continued to do research. In spring of 2006, the School adopted research pool guidelines, and several new communication research projects were initiated. Graduate students presented papers at conferences, and faculty members published their work. Two graduate faculty members were nominated for university-wide outstanding teaching awards and one faculty member was nominated for a university-wide outstanding service award.
In February of 2006, tragedy struck the School again when, on a bitterly cold Friday night, Native Media Center Director Paul Boswell was injured in an auto-related accident. He died a day and a half later. The School went into mourning. Classes were cancelled, and offices were closed so faculty, staff and students could attend the memorial service and funeral.

The spring semester of 2006 was difficult for everyone – faculty, staff and students alike. At one point, students walked out of their classes and demanded increased focus on their education. Faculty members were chagrinned. They met as a group with a large delegation of students to listen to their concerns and to formulate plans to better serve the School’s students.

As the 2006-07 academic year began, School of Communication faculty members met and came up with position descriptions for several new hires to replace the faculty members who had left. The administration refused to authorize a search for any more tenure-track positions, at least in 2006-07. The Native Media Center, however, was allowed to hire a new director. In late summer of 2006, Monique Vondall-Reike joined the school as a staff member and as the director of the Native Media Center. She immediately began working with assistant director Holly Annis in preparing additional grant proposals to fund the Native Media Center.

Kalbfleisch secured a technical assistance grant from the Knight Foundation to help the Native Media Center Leadership Team strategically re-structure the Center to allow it to secure continued funding and to continue to play an important role in the community. Vondall-Reike and Annis were successful in receiving a $90,000 grant from
the Otto Bremer Fountain to fund the activities of the Native Media Center. The Native Media Center also hosted two Native Community Studios.

In fall of 2006, a new journalism practicum was begun with the Grand Forks Herald. Mike Jacobs, editor and publisher of the Herald, initiated the effort, and Kalbfleisch worked with him to establish funding for the program. Jacquelyn Lowman was tapped to teach the practicum in which students could learn journalism hands-on in a learning news room. Efforts to invigorate the community journalism program were also underway. Lowman was able to establish community partners with four North Dakota community newspapers. As a result, more students were drawn to journalism classes in the School.

The accreditation preparedness committee became active under Lana Rakow’s leadership and began working in earnest to bring the School closer to meeting accreditation standards for a professional program.

The faculty completed a review of the graduate programs in communication. Mission statements for the two graduate programs were revised, and faculty reviewed the curriculum and the accomplishments of the program.

In spring of 2007, the first two graduates of the new Communication and Public Discourse doctoral program defended their dissertations. Dr. James Abbott authored a dissertation titled “Intrapersonal Communication and Well-Being.” Dr. Cheryl Long Feather authored a dissertation titled “A Lakota/Nakota/Dakota Model of Oratory.”

The spring and summer of 2007 brought more faculty departures. In the spring Patricia Traynor left to become manager of the Devils Lake Airport. In the summer,
Brian Householder left the school to be director of the basic course at a college in
downtown New York City.

To the astonished joy of the remaining School of Communication faculty
members, the 2007-08 year began with university approval to search for four of the five
open faculty positions. Arts and Sciences dean Martha Potvin told faculty members at
their fall retreat that the positions were to be open-rank/open-area positions and that
senior faculty with tenure could be hired to fill these lines. The new colleagues would
need to be able to teach journalism, advertising and social influence, public relations, and
visual communication. A large search committee composed of all the tenured and
tenured-track faculty in the school and additional faculty from the university was formed
with Jim Mochoruk from history and Mike Jacobs as co-chairs. This search is underway
at this writing, and the new faculty members are to begin teaching in fall of 2008.

Admission to the School’s doctoral program was closed in the fall of 2007
because, according to the graduate school, the program needed better student services and
more faculty members engaged in active research. Graduate admissions to the doctoral
program are scheduled to reopen in fall of 2009 when additional faculty members are in
place and improvements have been made in programming and student services.

Meanwhile, three additional doctoral students graduated with doctorates in
Communication and Public Discourse in the fall of 2007. Valicia Boudry authored a
dissertation titled “Ethnojournalism: A Hybrid Model of Ethnography and Journalism to
Create Culturally Diverse News Content.” Stuart Schneider wrote a dissertation titled
“Communication and Pandemic Preparedness in Rural Critical Access Hospitals,” and
Megan Tollefson authored a dissertation titled “Social Isolation Meets Technological

42
Innovation: Towards Developing a Model of Communication Among Parents Who Homeschool."

The first year of graduates chose primarily education-based employment with Valicia Boudry as an assistant professor at Bemidji State University, Stuart Schneider as an assistant professor in the Department of Information Systems and Business Education at the University of North Dakota, Cheryl Long Feather with an appointment to United Tribes Technical College, James Abbott as a lecturer in the School of Communication and director of the North Dakota Certified Public Accountants Association, and Megan Tollefson with post doctoral work on the Journal of Native Aging & Health for the School of Communication and the School of Medicine and Health Sciences, and an instructorship at the University of Minnesota/Crookston.

Graduate and undergraduate students in the School of Communication have achieved success in publishing their work. Students published more than a hundred journal, magazine and newspaper articles in 2007. Many of the articles were published by undergraduate students in North Dakota and eastern Minnesota newspapers. When a devastating tornado struck the local community of Northwood, students from the community journalism class went to Northwood to offer their services to the local newspaper, the Gleaner. The students worked as reporters for this newspaper and providing support while the newspaper staff tried to get their lives and the newspaper back in order. Many of the stories appearing the Gleaner were written by these students.

The School of Communication has remains a dynamic and interesting place to work and to study. The activities of the school are further described in the school’s
newsletter, the Communicator. Issues of the Communicator can be found in the appendix to this history immediately following this narrative.
About the Author

Dr. Victoria Smith Holden is an associate professor in the School of Communication. With a background in journalism, talent for writing and long tenure in the School, she was commissioned to write a history of the school from her own perspective. Dr. Smith Holden is a former editor of The Communicator newsletter.
Appendices