Five-Year Program Review  
Dixie State University  
Communication Program  
Executive Summary  
(Review Date: 2014)

Reviewers:
External Reviewer:
   External Reviewer: Dr. Spencer Pattern, Utah Valley University
Internal Reviewers:
   Assunta Hardy, Ph. D, Office of Academic Assessment, Dixie State University
   Dixie State University Academic Council
   Dixie State University University Council
Other Reviewers:
   Trustee Liaison Committee
   Dixie State University Board of Trustees

Program Description:

The Dixie State College Communication program is part of the Communications Department in the School of Business and Communication. The Communication program offers a bachelor’s degree with four emphasis options: Human Communication, Mass Communication, Organization & Leadership, and Digital Film Production. Integrated Studies also offers an emphasis in the communications program. Starting in the fall of 2014, a minor in Communication and a certificate in Media Production were offered. The Communication program meets institutional missions by educating and training students to produce appropriate and effective messages and critically interpret human and mass communication messages. Students receive training in ethics, leadership, critical thinking, and effective interaction skills. Further, students become competent in the design, production, and delivery of visual, oral, and written communication. Students are required to complete an internship, since internships function as a key objective to applying best philosophies to practical, “real world” challenges in the professional sector.

Goals:
The Department of Communication trains students in ethics, leadership, critical thinking, and effective interaction skills. Guided by theory and application, students are trained to produce and critically interpret human and mass communication messages through the design, production, and delivery of visual, oral, and written communication.

Students who graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Communication will be able to demonstrate competency in five areas:

1. Knowledge: Apply concepts from communication theoretical traditions in small groups, business, interpersonal, mass media, and public settings.

2. Knowledge: Demonstrate effective cross-cultural communication knowledge and skills in achieving a global perspective.

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http://www.dixie.edu/academics/past_program_review_examples2.php
3. **Skill:** Apply reasoning, critical thinking and problem solving skills in interpersonal, small group, organizational, public and mass media settings.

4. **Skill:** Implement skills in researching, organizing, and writing appropriate professional documents, personal communication, and effective communication analysis.

5. **Value:** Incorporate ethical principles of the discipline in all forms of communication.

6. **Value:** Create appropriate and effective messages based on skilled analysis of the audience and situation using mediated and non-mediated presentations with a variety of purposes (inform, persuade, entertain, advocate, and celebrate).

**Distinguishing features of the program:**

- The bachelor’s degree in Communication participates in the GE program by meeting all institutional GE requirements. The Communication Department contributes to the GE curriculum with the following courses as part of the GE curriculum: 1050 Introduction to Communication Theory, 2010 Media & Society, 2110 Interpersonal Communication, and 3190 Intercultural Communication.

- Focus and culmination of research as the crowning element of curriculum in the department. Students take 3060 Communication Theory which prepares them for a research proposal preparation in 4450 Research Methods, which they then use in 4980 Senior Seminar in executing and completing the research project.

- As part of 4980 Senior Seminar, students have an option to conduct an internship as their capstone experience in which they work for an organization and provide an organizational improvement analysis based on communicative breakdown among organizational personnel.

- Students are required to complete an internship, in which they obtain practical experience which is applied knowledge and allows for networking and employment upon finishing the degree.

- The Organization and Leadership program is a Tuesday night-only program in which students with family and work demands make taking daytime classes impossible. The program offers one class per month, four classes per semester. The program is in its sixth cohort starting Fall 2014.

- The Organization and Leadership program is setup for the department to obtain and use all tuition funds for the program to meet departmental needs in media equipment for the Mass Communication and Digital Film Production programs.

- Communication is more of a process-discipline than it is an object-discipline. Therefore, experience goes hand in hand with the philosophy of communication theory. As a result, internships function as a key objective to applying best philosophies to practical, “real world” challenges in the professional sector.

- Problem-solving is a central feature of the Communication discipline. The senior seminar capstone project is about researching, hypothesizing, analyzing, and offering prescriptions for students’ inquiries about solving personal, organizational, and social problems.

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### Data Form:

**R411 Data Table**

#### DSU Communication Department

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#### Faculty

**Headcount**

- **With Doctoral Degrees (Including MFA and other terminal degrees, as specified by the institution)**
  - Full-time Tenured: 3, 3, 2, 2, 2
  - Full-time Non-Tenured: 1, 3, 4, 6, 6
  - Part-time: 2, 1, 2, 2, 4

- **With Master's Degrees**
  - Full-time Tenured: 2, 2, 2, 2, 2
  - Full-time Non-Tenured: 1, 2, 3, 1, 1
  - Part-time: 15, 16, 14, 17, 23

- **With Bachelor's Degrees**
  - Full-time Tenured
  - Full-time Non-Tenured: 1, 1, 1, 1, 1
  - Part-time: 2, 5, 4, 5, 6

**Other**

- Full-time Tenured
- Full-time Non-Tenured
- Part-time

**Total Headcount Faculty**

- 27, 33, 32, 36, 45
- 5, 5, 4, 4, 4
- 3, 6, 8, 8, 8
- 19, 22, 20, 24, 33

**FTE (A-1/S-11/Cost Study Definition)**

- Full-time (Salaried): 7.75, 8.07, 8.79, 9.61, 10.54
- Teaching Assistants: NA, NA, NA, NA, NA
- Part-time (May include TA’s): 12.34, 12.86, 17.42, 17.38, 16.92

**Total Faculty FTE**

**Number of Graduates**

- Certificates: 0, 0, 0, 0, 0

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Program Assessment:

An increasing number of students are graduating with degrees in Communication from Dixie State University: DSU has awarded more baccalaureate degrees in communication than any other degree in the last five years. Faculty diversity and specialization gives students a range of individuals to learn from. Since the program was created, classrooms have improved. Canvas has been introduced, sounds barriers have been added to editing bays, and projectors have been made available to instructors. There is also more funding and resources for faculty development through budgets for conferences. Advisors are also strengthening the program. They actively meet with students, departments, and the university graduation office. The communication program also participates in Freshman Year Experience (FYE), which provides invaluable support to first year student success. Opportunities for students to do research and creative work with faculty support also set this program apart. Technology and online learning have helped students

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learn more effectively. One faculty member has instituted a “flipped classroom” approach, which allows class time to be focused on hands-on learning.

Having only evaluated one PLO as part of the current program within the institutional assessment plan, our focus has been on a PLO that emphasizes critical thinking. The academic year 2013-14 was the first time the department used the institution’s structured approach for assessment of student learning. We are encouraged, having obtained a general baseline for the PLO we evaluated. The findings, while informative on measuring students learning on critical thinking and problem solving skills, cannot be generalizable at this point. The reasons for this are as follows:

- The measurement (VALUE Rubric) with a 1 to 4 scale gave us a majority score of 2.39 for all 40 capstones read.
- We note that the students performed better in defining the problem and explaining the issue. As the students progressed in their work to show evidence, identify assumptions, and draw conclusions, their performance declined.
- The correlation between the raters was low.
- Further, we recognize that our faculty need to discuss if this baseline is acceptable, and what additional changes should be implemented.

Some weaknesses that the program recognizes include program focus, faculty availability, and the need for additional equipment and facilities. While the degree is divided into Human Communications or Mass Communications, the program is still encountering assessment problems because the goals of the two programs are so divergent. This problem could be addressed by dividing into two departments. Mass Communications could become Media Studies and house the Digital Film Production emphasis. Human Communication could become Communication studies and house the Organization and Leadership emphasis, among other changes. Currently, the program does not have enough Ph. D. or Ph. D.-pursuing faculty to teach upper division courses. Moreover, the program carries the third largest FTE of any program on campus, so there is a significant need for additional faculty.

Some actions that could be taken to improve the program have been suggested, including that there be additional evaluations of advisor roles, and that the department be divided to represent the different and more specific goals of each type of degree, since students will be going into different fields that need different skill sets. Currently, students are earning a generic degree that does not identify and focus on their specific interests. Dividing the department and adding more faculty would also help to relieve the student to faculty ratio.

**External Review Report:**

**Process:** Upon request from Dean Wells, I conducted a review of the Communication Department on March 27th, 2015 at the campus of Dixie State University. The process began with a review of the department’s website and a thorough reading of the 2014 Year Program Review.

At the St. George campus, I interviewed the department chair, four faculty members, a focus group of communication students, staff members, and two academic advisors. I also observed a classroom lecture as well as a live taping of Talking Point. Ultimately, I feel like I was able to experience a good
representation of the department. In this report, I outline my observations and recommendations beginning with the people and culminating with more systematic observations.

**Department Chair:** The Department Chair, Dr. Brent Yergensen, seems to exhibit good leadership and communication skills in his position. Through my interaction with him, I learned that Dr. Yergensen has a strategic vision for the department that fits well with its history. He understands the growth opportunities for the department as part of the broader narrative of a university experiencing significant growth and associated opportunities.

Interviews with departmental faculty seemed to indicate an overall level of satisfaction with his leadership. This was supported with comments like “[Dr. Yergensen] is doing a really good job.”, “[Dr. Yergensen] has done a fantastic job improving collegiality and relations here in the department], and [Dr. Yergensen] is a great learner with great ethics. Overall, it seems that faculty members respect the Department Chair and trust him as a good leader.

In addition to the comments around the competence of the Department Chair, I also observed that he is spread quite thinly. In addition to emphasizing his ethics, one faculty member added, “He has a lot on his plate and needs support and guidance.” I agree with this statement. In addition to the regular duties as a department chair, Dr. Yergensen is teaching three courses. This seems to be overwhelming and I recommend a smaller teaching load as employees with too much on their plate tend to be at risk for burnout.

**Faculty:** Open interviews with faculty members seemed to gravitate toward two main topics, department culture and the potential departmental shift into two distinct departments. All the faculty members I interviewed indicated that the department culture has been moving in a positive, more collegial direction for the past few years, with the exception of complicated discussions and disagreements during faculty meetings.

Some faculty members also expressed concern about a lack of staff support and opportunity to increase their salaries. Some of them are also doing active research and representing the department at national conferences. They mentioned that they are well funded for traveling to these conferences, but only if they are presenters. This presents a challenge because they don’t perceive any benefits regarding tenure and promotion for research, but feel they are expected to research in order to get funding for conference attendance. This might be a minor issue, but perhaps it would be worthwhile to review the conference travel funding process.

Faculty members seem to strongly support and hope for the possibility to divide into two departments. I also think this is a great strategy. From my observations, the media-focused faculty are doing some really unique and interesting things that both teach and involve students.

I was very impressed to see students gaining education in the classroom via traditional lectures, but also valuable experience “doing” their education alongside faculty members. Both students and faculty indicated that this process gives students exposure to job possibilities and helps resolve professional commitment and align opportunities beyond the academy. However, I observed that the media-focused faculty members are working many hours beyond their expectations in the classroom and I recommend providing more staff.
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support to help them continue the outstanding applied experiences such as the Talking Point production I observed.

I also offer a supporting recommendation to divide the department into two departments because the human communication department is also thriving. Enrollment numbers show that a large portion of students are choosing human communication as their major and academic advisors indicated that a lot of students move from other majors and programs into the human communication degree.

Some faculty and staff members indicated that they have peers teaching full-time in the department from long distances. It seems that these long distance arrangements have created a small sense of confusion among some of the peers. I do not have a recommendation for the continuance (or termination) of such arrangements, but I think it would be beneficial to carefully consider the potential effects these arrangements could have on future expectations of faculty members.

In sum, faculty members appreciate the collegial supportiveness in the department as well as the good physical environment for teaching. They also express a common interest in gaining more supportive resources.

**Students:** The student focus group demonstrated that students are happy with the supportive resources at both university and departmental levels. They indicated that library, tutoring, and labs (math and writing) are very helpful. They also unanimously agreed that faculty members are approachable and interested in the well-being of students.

The students indicated that they would appreciate more direct opportunities and help seeking jobs as they move closer to graduation. Perhaps this could be accomplished with more emphasis on internship and placement programs. Our discussion also moved toward a concern for the alignment of their capstone projects. They felt that their capstone projects would be more beneficial with more coordination between them, faculty members, and advisors. I brought this topic up with the academic advisors as well and they offered some great discussions. My recommendation is to revisit the capstone process with a focus group of students, faculty, and academic advisors.

**Teaching and Facilities:** The teaching I observed from Dr. Harris was very well done. He included a nice blend of humor and content and the students were very well engaged. Through all my conversations and observations nobody (among faculty, staff, nor students) indicated disappointment with the academic quality of teaching.

I also observed the facilities to be very adequate for teaching and learning. Classrooms as well as the motion picture facilities include adequate technology and resources. Based on my observations, I do not have any recommendations to improve the learning facilities.

**Curriculum:** The department offers a nice array of communication courses that serve the department majors as well as other university students. The Degree Completion Program is a fantastic way to re-engage students with fitting communication courses.

The communication department makes major contributions at the university. I noticed that a very large proportion of the students earning Bachelor degrees from the School of Business and Communication are from the communication department. It also appears that the department employs an extremely high
proportion of adjunct faculty instructors. If possible, the department would certainly benefit from hiring more full-time faculty members to balance that proportion.

Upon reviewing the general education electives, I was very surprised to see that public speaking is not offered to the university. I recommend offering this course since the skill of public speaking is universally beneficial and particularly beneficial to students who receive no communication training. After doing a mini-analysis, it seems that the vast majority of communication departments offer public speaking as a general education elective.

**Summary:** In sum, the Communication Department is enthusiastically growing and many beneficial trends are developing. The department has strong leadership and a culture that faculty members enjoy. The students have many options for learning and growth and they feel like faculty members and resources are very sufficient to aid their education. The learning facilities and applied experiences appear to be very adequate. Along with the growth is an enthusiasm and hope for continued development through increased focus on the emphases via the development of two separate departments.

Some of the challenges of the department include a need to alleviate the full-time faculty from tremendous workloads that could lead to harmful stress and burnout. This could be achieved by hiring more staff and faculty members to share the workload. Faculty members seem to agree that the required workload beyond regular teaching responsibilities is challenging.

**Response to External Evaluation - Recommendations, Plans and Improvements:** Dr. Spencer Patterson’s review is accurate in understanding our program’s history and issues. It is encouraging in describing the program’s potential. We feel that with the administration’s support, we can execute the recommendations. We have provided comments on a few issues of concern and present possible solutions to address these issues.

*Restructuring Senior Seminar:* Faculty and students reported concern for the efficacy of the current objectives and delivery of senior seminar. These comments were consistent with faculty recommendations in program assessment. In an attempt to centralize and focus faculty advisement of senior seminar projects, the department changed the program in 2013 from an individual study format to a classroom format where assigned faculty oversee senior seminar during a given semester. While aiding in workload challenges, the advisement and attention given to enabling student success in this process has yet to reach its potential. Faculty observations, student feedback, and observations made by departmental leadership suggest that changes are needed.

As the Communication Department prepares to begin operating as two departments on July 1, 2015, both to-be departments have concluded that the delivery in student outcomes for senior seminar is in need of change. Specifically, the departments plan to make the focus and objectives of the senior seminar class on the theoretical development and performance of student preparation and praxis on decision-making and leadership in employment, as well as in marketing opportunities by positioning students in workplace settings where they can participate in and shadow the execution of learned communication theories and skills. This plan is driven by feedback on exit surveys that most DSU Communication students’ post-graduation plans include working as business professionals in the regions surrounding southern Utah, and

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in stated concerns regarding the usefulness of research-based only projects that do not relate to the professional ambitions of many students. Therefore, the departments will work to meet the needs of students by implementing the recommendations of Dr. Patterson by centralizing the purpose of senior seminar on students’ individual career ambitions, including that of research-based capstones which will continue to be offered and advised for students who have graduate school, research, and higher education career ambitions.

**Student Feedback as Part of Program Planning:** From student interviews, Dr. Patterson noted that we haven’t used student feedback in our improvement process. We found that students are somewhat interested in being part of the evaluation process in planning program changes. Students are aware of need for more faculty appointments, staff, and continued program development, and are particularly interested in and aware of the challenges at place in curriculum and in pedagogy. They are especially aware of problems relating to the senior seminar program, as was articulated to Dr. Patterson. Further, faculty planned the new Division and new degree programs without soliciting student feedback on the proposed changes. Engaging student feedback in the future can enhance the process of program planning as we will receive another perspective in the processes and decisions made regarding academic offerings.

From these observations and feedback, assessment efforts will focus on student involvement in decision-making include the new strategic planning of both departments to engage in community involvement for faculty and students. We also plan to better associate our faculty, staff, and the outreach efforts of our programs with alumni for fundraising and student networking opportunities.

**Departmental Leadership Structure and Demand:** Dr. Patterson repeatedly commented on the demand on departmental leadership. After university administration voted in 2012 to have department chairs carry a required 3-3 workload, demands on the Department Chair have increased with the growth of the programs. In multiple respects the chair responsibilities are alleviated with the appointment of program coordinators who prepare adjunct and often full-time course schedules and in the preparation of curriculum changes. The daily administrative demands combined with a near full-time teaching load warrants the creation of more departmental executive leadership. This issue is being addressed with coming changes in departmental structure and leadership.

The management expectations of the department on a daily basis is perhaps comparable to that found in the university’s schools. Further, the current Department Chair is not a media production specialist in praxis nor pedagogical scholarship. The oversight of the curriculum, faculty, and facilities of the media programs deserve an executive appointment who is specialist with experience and the appropriate knowledge in these fields. Per our Division proposal for another departmental executive overseeing half of the programs, the availability and role of both executives should be better enabled to function fully in their responsibilities and to be able to meet their instructional expectations per university policy.

Further, upon evaluation of the setup of an Associate Dean and Departmental Chair position after one year, the to-be Division plans to consider requesting a second Chair position, thus aiding the executive expectations of the Associate Dean and Department Chair appointments, if needed. To specify the purpose of this evaluation, having Department Chairs overseeing both departments will enable the Associate Dean to better alleviate the executive tasks that reside with the School of Business and Communication Dean through having the two Department Chair positions overseeing all departmental affairs and the Associate
Dean then functioning more independently in the role of Division executive as a representative on dean matters across campus and in the community. The continual development of leadership in the Communication disciplines at Dixie State University, considering its size of student body, faculty, staff, and program options of the Communication Division to-be, are needed as the financial, resource, and personnel management of the department is comparable to the size of the university's schools.

**Faculty Workload:** The need for more full-time faculty positions is evident. Declared number of majors in the program continue to grow year by year in a steady pace that reflects the growth in enrollment across the university. Reliance on adjunct instruction supports the need for more full-time faculty. For example, in Fall 2014, adjuncts taught 52% of all Communication courses. Adjuncts delivered 33% of courses in the Spring 2015. Spring's better report of the presence of salaried faculty in comparison to courses taught by adjunct instructors is due to the typical lower enrollment across campus during Spring, as well as the hiring of a new full-time tenure track faculty member, Dr. Jared DuPree. However, we expect the Fall 2015 reliance on adjunct instruction to surpass that of Fall 2014 due to the university's projection of enrollment, particularly as the GE offerings of the COMM 2110 sections are taught mostly by adjunct instructors.

Efforts to increase the presence of full-time Ph.D.s is a top priority each year. For three years we have requested a tenure-track faculty line in Intercultural Communication, particularly as this subject matter is a central element of our program’s outcomes. We also will continue to request additional full-time positions in the Digital Film Production emphasis, as we currently have only one full-time faculty member, and two staff members who teach as part of their appointments. Advising is also a concern. The Communication advisors prepare more BA/BS graduation applications each year than any other program at DSU. Further, advisement demands are creating a burnout effect on advisors. Finally, as we prepare to operate as the Communication Division, the reception position in the secretarial staff may need to become full-time in order to cover the continual demand for student, media, and campus visitors where guidance is expected on finding and being scheduled to meet with our personnel.

**Public Speaking as a General Education Requirement:** Dr. Patterson recommended the department offer public speaking to the university as a general education option, noting that the strong majority of our peer institutions also offer it as a general education elective. We have submitted proposals to the General Education Committee on two occasions; it has been rejected both times. We will continue to submit the course to the General Education committee given the universal benefit of public speaking skills to students, particularly those who receive no other communication training.

**Institution's Response:**

DSU’s administration congratulates the Communication Department for its efforts in preparing DSU Communication students to meet their educational goals. The growth in student enrollment is a positive indication of the program’s success.

The administration also thanks the Communication faculty for addressing the external evaluator’s recommendations and suggestions. The evaluator recommended a smaller teaching load for the chair. Administration is aware of the issues that impact the chair’s responsibilities, such as faculty, staff, program offerings, and the size of the student body. The appointment of program coordinators has helped alleviate

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some of the chair’s responsibilities since the program coordinators prepare adjunct and often full-time course schedules and help with curriculum changes. In addition, this issue will be addressed more fully as the departmental and leadership restructure progresses (i.e., division proposal for another departmental executive overseeing half of the programs). With these leadership changes, the chairs should be better enabled to function fully in their responsibilities and to be able to meet their instructional expectations per university policy.

The external evaluator had three comments related to DSU’s Communication Department faculty. First, the evaluator suggested that the Communication Department consider hiring more full-time faculty members to counterbalance the high proportion of adjunct instructors. The administration recognizes the need for more full-time faculty members with a PhD in Communication, and yet is aware of the difficulty in filling both full-time positions due to the low compensation, and adjunct positions due to the credentials needed. Administration will continue to work with the Communication Department leadership as best as possible to increase the presence of full-time faculty members with Ph.D.s and adjust the proportion of full-time faculty to adjunct instructors.

Second, the evaluator recommended that the conference travel funding process be reviewed. Currently, the Organization & Leadership Degree Completion Program provides considerable latitude to fund conference attendance for faculty members in the Communication department. In addition, the university provides professional development funds towards pedagogical research. DSU is a teaching institution, and therefore it is encouraged that any publishing with which faculty get involved directly impacts their classroom teaching and assessment. Advancing knowledge in pedagogy should have a positive spillover on student-faculty interaction. Also, administration suggests that faculty seek out grants and get students involved in research.

Third, Dr. Patterson suggested that the Communication Department leadership consider the potential effects of having full-time faculty in the department teaching from long distances on other faculty members and their expectations. The administration agrees that tenured faculty need to be on campus and discourages the practice of having full-time faculty teaching from long distances. Qualified full-time faculty members need to be present on campus to interact with students. Also as academic leaders, they need to attend to their committee responsibilities. Going forward, the administration recommends that long distance arrangements be limited to non-tenured instructor level positions.

The external evaluator raised some concerns about advisement and support staff. In addition to the high demands of meeting their advisement responsibilities, advisors in the Communication Department prepare more BA/BS graduation applications each year than any other program at DSU. Also, the secretarial staff is experiencing difficulty meeting the demands of their responsibilities. Administration acknowledges the concerns, but also recognized that the current staff to faculty ratio is within the acceptable range. Given that resources in higher education are always scarce, the administration appreciates the efforts on the part of the Communication leadership to find creative ways to improve the current situation.(e.g., either increase the staff support and/or restructure the responsibilities).

Based on the feedback Dr. Patterson received from current Communication students, he recommended that the student learning experience be improved. Administration is supportive of the recommendation to restructure the senior seminar to align the capstone projects to make them more applicable to students’
individual career ambitions. The Communication Department should embrace experiential learning and incorporate relevant high impact practices (e.g., ePortfolios) into their classroom teaching.

The administration also supports the recommendation to help students with placement as they move closer to graduation. This can be achieved by providing more internship opportunities and by working with the Career Center to help students seek jobs. Administration recognizes that DSU is still at its infancy as a university, but as the institution continues to grow, the alumni base will be a good source to help provide job opportunities for students. Incorporating continued feedback from students in the improvement process would help improve initiatives that are undertaken.

In reviewing the five-year plan set forth, it was noted that students are on wait lists for core elective courses. The administration advises the Communication Department to take measures to improve any course registration bottlenecks so that students do not have problems meeting their requirements and ultimately graduating in a timely manner.

Finally, assessment has been a challenge, but with the forthcoming structural changes and additional support, administration is confident that the Communication Department will start to see improvements in this area.

Overall, the administration commends DSU’s Communication Department for its hard work. DSU is pleased with the competent leadership and the progress the department is making, and the administration looks forward to the future of the program.

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