

Contact: Rachel Boon

**REQUEST FOR NEW PROGRAM AT IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY: BACHELOR OF ARTS IN  
SPORTS MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION**

**Action Requested:** Consider approval of the request by Iowa State University for a Bachelor of Arts in Sports Media and Communication in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

The Council of Provosts and Board office support approval of this program.

**Description of proposed program.** The field of sports media and communication (SMC) encompasses a wide range of career opportunities across amateur, youth, high school, college and major league sports. SMC includes television broadcasts, social media platforms, talk radio, podcasts, websites, news organizations, magazines, video games and fantasy sports. To best prepare Iowa State graduates for employment in this growing industry, which requires highly specialized skills that are not available in the Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication's existing majors, the SMC major will provide a wide array of hands-on instruction and experiential learning opportunities. Students would acquire skills in social media listening/data analytics; digital branding; livestreaming and play-by-play announcing; and short- and long-form news, highlight and documentary content.

The program will embed several high impact practices, especially on-the-job learning, that will differentiate the SMC major at Iowa State from programs offered by peer institutions regionally and nationally. Most notably, the SMC major will leverage the Greenlee School's long-standing relationship with Iowa State University Athletics – through which our faculty have tapped networks for guest speakers and short course partners and through which our students have secured internships and post-graduate employment. Extending this collaboration, a hallmark of the major will be a set of practicum experiences with our athletics partners and with on-campus student media publications, which will enable students to build their industry resume as early as the first year. Beyond the practica, students would also complete the Greenlee School's required internship course, through which students gain 400 hours of hands-on experience working directly in the sports media field. Successful graduates will land positions working in collegiate sports communication offices, broadcast networks, sports leagues/teams and other emerging industries connected to the evolving fan experience.

**Academic objectives.** Students who major in programs of the Greenlee School are expected to develop competencies in 10 key areas:

- apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, in a global context, and for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located;
- demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts;
- present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies;
- write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;

- demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- effectively and correctly apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

In addition, specialized learning outcomes for the sports major could include:

- effectively communicating sports stories across multiple platforms, using appropriate content forms, including writing, audio, video, photography and graphics;
- critically thinking about how communication in sports functions within contemporary culture;
- demonstrating an understanding of the impact of media rights across the high school, collegiate and professional sports landscape.

All students would be required to complete a minor outside of the Greenlee School. Potential minors to complement the new major could include: exercise science, health promotion kinesiology, event management and entrepreneurship.

Need for program. To assess initial student interest in SMC, the Greenlee School first experimented with creation of special topics courses. In 2015, Greenlee School faculty created its first sports-related course, which covers the media's relationship with high school, collegiate and professional sports in a 24/7 digital world.

Expanding upon its offerings, Greenlee School faculty created a series of one-credit short course intensives to supplement the curriculum. Topics for the offerings have included sports branding and sports broadcasting. Beyond the classroom, Greenlee School faculty founded the Sports Media Club, which introduced incoming students to sports-related internship opportunities on campus and in Central Iowa. During the first Sports Media Club meeting of fall 2022, more than half of the 27 students indicated they were interested in sports broadcasting careers. Similarly, a survey of 109 incoming freshmen enrolled in the Greenlee School's orientation course in fall 2022 indicated that 51 percent students would be interested in pursuing SMC careers. Based upon this energy, the Greenlee School faculty voted in fall 2022 to pursue creation of a new major in sports media. In spring 2023, an ad hoc committee was formed to guide efforts. Also in 2022-2023, the school received approval from the college and Provost's Office for two new term faculty hires. The faculty endorsed seeking expertise in sports communication for one of the vacancies. The search launched in spring 2023 and the school hired an industry professional with multiplatform expertise in sports media.

Relationship to existing programs at the institution. ISU does not currently offer a standalone major in SMC. The plan is to collaborate across the college and university to identify a pool of electives -- likely in fields such as exercise science, health promotion kinesiology, event management and entrepreneurship -- that would help provide a balanced perspective for majors.

Relationship to existing programs at other colleges and universities. Some Iowa community colleges offer degrees in closely allied fields, such as sports media technology or sports management, which are more about business-facing approaches to the curriculum. In terms of bachelor's-granting institutions, while many offered sports management degrees, these programs

often only feature a single class that has a media and/or communications focus. Simpson College and Upper Iowa University offer bachelor's degrees in sports communication, but the curriculum appears to center nearly exclusively upon journalistic applications, and does not appear to integrate perspectives from strategic communications or analytics.

Across the Regents institutions, the University of Iowa's School of Journalism and Mass Communication offers a new Sport Media and Culture major and provides courses crucial to UI's B.S. in Sport and Recreation Management. The courses contained in the new major are based upon theoretical perspectives to sports and society, driven from a humanities viewpoint. The degree would be differentiated from ISU's proposed offering, which would contain more hands-on instruction and industry experiences, with the integration of numerous high-impact practices. UNI has an emphasis in Sports Public Relations under its major in Public Relations.

Resources to establish a high-quality program. The Greenlee School would leverage existing, talented personnel to drive the program's development and implementation. In particular, there are two term faculty members (one with expertise in strategic communication, the other with expertise in journalism) who will be the primary leaders of the new major. In terms of facilities, the SMC major would benefit from recent renovations to Hamilton Hall, including the creation of a social media listening lab. The Greenlee School also forged a partnership in spring 2023 to use the broadcast production facility in the ISU Student Innovation Center for undergraduate instruction. There are opportunities to enhance the existing connections to ISU athletics and Cyclones.tv to potentially use their on-site production facilities and equipment. Additional reallocations from other programs or areas of the university are not anticipated.

Student demand. There are three indicators of student interest: participation in the sports media club, enrollment in our special topics courses and expansion of our short courses. Taken together, this existing student demand provides a strong foundation for the new major. The new major would provide fertile recruiting ground for the institution, college and school. Leveraging the vibrant culture of Big 12 athletics on our campus, it is likely the new major would attract enrollment from student-athletes. The major may also attract a new type of student –who is passionate about athletics, but whose talents may not be aligned with ISU's existing major pathways in kinesiology or athletic training, for instance. Taken together, strong energy exists from the student population to fuel the major's initial and continuing enrollments.

Workforce need/demand. According to U.S. Bureau Labor of Statistics data, sports and entertainment employment will increase by 13 percent in the next decade – a growth rate that outpaces all other industries tracked by the BLS. The agency forecasts that 95,500 new jobs will be created between 2021-2031. This uptick can be traced to the expansion of sports media rights – a hyper-competitive space in which networks, cable channels and streaming services vie for the abilities to broadcast sporting events regionally and nationally. To secure and sustain audiences in this environment, companies are forging new jobs not only to capture live sports content, but also to foster connections with fans in digital, social and virtual spaces.

ISU is well placed to capitalize upon these trends by creating a new major that positions graduates for newly-emerging careers in team-generated, athlete-generated and fan-generated content creation. In the major's development process, the Greenlee School will rely on connectivity with successful alumni in the sports media industry. To this end, a subcommittee was formed on the Greenlee School's Advisory Council, which will provide industry guidance. In addition to the school's vibrant Advisory Council -- populated by industry practitioners, many of whom work in sports media – the school has assembled a database of more than 150 ISU alumni working in sports media careers.

Creation of the new degree would help satisfy regional employer demand. In 2019, the Big 12 Conference expanded its existing ESPN media rights agreement to launch the Big 12 Now on ESPN+ digital platform, a direct-to-consumer subscription sports streaming service. The transition to ESPN+ created a need for separate control and production crews for the streaming service and the video board. Greenlee School students are paid to work on live home volleyball, soccer, women's and men's basketball, wrestling, gymnastics and softball productions distributed on ESPN+. In addition, Greenlee School students currently work on the in-house video board production crew for all home athletic events at Jack Trice Stadium and Hilton Coliseum. During 2022-2023, there were 62 video board productions and 55 ESPN+ broadcasts. For cost efficiency, a preference exists in hiring students instead of professional freelancers. There is capacity for more hiring of talented SMC graduates as well.

The skills acquired in the SMC major will also prove transferable to other communications industry careers. For instance, SMC graduates would leave the program with skills in communications writing, presentational skills, creativity and project management – competencies that are highly desirable across most complex organizations. New courses and experiential opportunities will continue to be responsive to industry demand both for today and tomorrow.

Funding and Cost. Internal allocations in the Greenlee School provide initial support for this program. Given anticipated growth of the SMC major, the school believes a substantial development opportunity exists. Discussions are underway with the ISU Foundation around new potential resources for the major. Future resources could include, but are not limited to, Greenlee-controlled studio space and equipment (to complement existing facilities at the Student Innovation Center and Hilton Coliseum); additional SMC- dedicated cameras available for student check-out; additional faculty line(s), including a new hire in sports broadcasting production; graduate assistant line(s) and a professional development fund for Greenlee School faculty, staff and students to attend industry conferences.

Projected student enrollment.

Undergraduate	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5
Majors	20	40	60	80	100
Non-Majors	80	90	100	100	100

Accreditation. The Greenlee School will seek programmatic accreditation in the future through the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) to align with the other three accredited majors within the Greenlee School; however, this is not necessary immediately and will be addressed in the future.

Date of implementation. Fall 2024.

Letter of Support



March 20, 2024

To the Board of Regents:

The Council of Provosts discussed the Iowa State University proposal for a Bachelor of Arts in Sports Media and Communication and reviewed associated documentation. The university has the resources and expertise for this program already in place through the Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication, and there is evidence of student demand among current students and workforce benefit in the state of Iowa and throughout the Midwest. The plan indicates due diligence with the other Regent universities regarding related programs and many opportunities for internships at ISU Athletics and other outlets. Based on the evidence and documentation, this program is likely to benefit the Iowa State University and the state of Iowa.

The Council of Provosts is supportive of the program and wishes Iowa State the best in its implementation.

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