



**MEMORANDUM**

August 25, 2011

TO: American University Faculty and Staff  
FROM: Scott A. Bass, Provost  
RE: Dean of the School of Communication

Larry Kirkman, dean of the School of Communication (SOC), has informed me that he will step down as dean at the end of this academic year and return to the faculty in the fall of 2013 following a one-year sabbatical.

Dean Kirkman was appointed dean of SOC in 2001. Bringing a rich and varied communication background in public affairs television, strategic communication, social advertising, communications policy, and the creation of online services, Dean Kirkman led the expansion of the SOC. The curricula was enhanced to respond to the changing professional environment with the addition of new courses on topics such as health, environment, and science communication; race, ethnic, and community reporting; and digital skills and social media. The school's first doctoral program, the PhD in Communication, was established along with the new communication studies division. Interdisciplinary master's degrees in political communication and international media were also created with the School of Public Affairs and the School of International Service respectively.

In addition to these curricular changes, Dean Kirkman led the development of partnerships with major media organizations. As outlets for faculty and student work, applied research, and experiential learning, these partnerships include prestigious organizations such as *The Washington Post*, *USA Today/Gannett*, NBC, PBS' Frontline, Newseum, Associated Press, Smithsonian and New America Media. Likewise, he oversaw the development of professional innovation and scholarship centers including the Center for Social Media, the Investigative Reporting Workshop and the Center for Environmental Filmmaking and acquired J-Lab: The Institute for Interactive Journalism and *Current*, the journal of public media. Over \$16 million in external support from Ford, Knight, MacArthur, and other foundations was raised during his tenure to support these centers and the work of SOC's highly productive faculty.

SOC's programs have received strong external professional and academic validation under Dean Kirkman. The Film and Media Arts Division was inducted into CILECT, the international association of film and television schools, making it one of only 16 U.S. programs to hold such membership. The three-year MFA in Film and Electronic Media grew in size and stature, with two thesis projects winning student Oscars. The Journalism and Public Communication undergraduate and graduate programs completed two successful reaccreditation reviews with top marks on all standards from the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications. In its 2008 report, the accreditation visiting team noted "American University's School of Communication has enjoyed incredible success in the last six years. The School is led by a highly motivated and visionary Dean, supported by a collegial group of productive faculty...His vision, energy and focus have given the School a real momentum and put it on the national stage with major partnerships."

As the programs and partnerships grew under Dean Kirkman, so did his vision for SOC. He grew the full time faculty from 36 to 49 members and recruited senior tenured professors, veteran professionals in-residence, and a new generation of tenure-track scholars and professional innovators. He built a base of alumni support with the establishment of a Dean's Council and creation of activities to engage alumni in the substantive life of the school, including an extensive alumni/student mentoring program. Additionally, he created a vision, program and plans for a new home for SOC in the McKinley Building.

Of his vision and contribution, President Kerwin said:

"Larry Kirkman came to the deanship of the School of Communication at a critical juncture for his field. He understood the importance of the seismic changes that were afoot in communication, broadly defined, and he led SOC with vision and discipline to a position of leadership in what is now a transformed landscape. The number of new programs and approaches he brought the SOC are too numerous to list and far too important for facile description. Suffice it to say that Larry Kirkman revolutionized communications education at American University and positioned our programs to compete at the very highest levels for years to come."

A national search for a new dean will be initiated as soon as possible. Details about the search and announcement of an event celebrating Dean Kirkman's contributions will be shared at a later date.

Please join me in thanking Dean Kirkman for his many years of service to SOC and to AU. We look forward to his continued leadership this coming academic year.