1. Goals or learning objectives/outcomes were assessed for the academic year 06-07:

The Communication Studies Assessment Plan stipulates that four questions will be asked during evaluation of student capstone activities:

1. In what areas did the evidence suggest that students typically meet or exceed the assessment standard?

2. In what areas did the evidence suggest that students typically fail to meet the assessment standard?

3. What should be done in the areas of curriculum, teaching practices, resources or use of technology to increase the percentage of students who meet or exceed area standards?

4. What outcomes does the area committee feel might be refined or added to those in effect during this cycle?

2. In general terms how does the department assess learning outcomes? Describe the measures you use and the information gathered.

The Communication Studies Department relied upon its 2005 revised assessment plan:

1. The Department had suspended its prior portfolio requirement.

2. The Department also suspended its three common goals for all ComS majors. We redefine department assessment outcomes exclusively in terms of program exit knowledge, competencies and abilities.

3. The Department, however, retained the existing departmental assessment structure including the departmental assessment committee, subject area sub-committees, and office support staff.

4. Beginning with the 2006-2008 catalog, the department was to require all ComS and Jour majors to complete a capstone course. At this time the prospective list of capstones include senior seminars (ComS 168, 180, 181, 182, 183, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191), senior project courses (ComS 184a/b or 185), a Journalism course, yet to be named, and possibly a senior research course (e.g., a revamped ComS 171).
5. Subject area sub-committees were charged with designating a suitable capstone exercise for respective capstone courses. Exercises were to facilitate assessment of area exit knowledge, competencies and abilities. At the discretion of the area sub-committees capstone exercises could include papers, projects or research reports. Respective capstone course instructors were charged with executing and capturing exercises from their respective capstone courses.

6. Faculty were instructed to submit a sample of their capstone exercises to the Assessment Committee. It is hoped that in the future, area sub-committees will perform a formative evaluation of the sample exercises and submit an evaluation memo to the Assessment Committee. The Department assessment plan mandates that area sub-committees were to use the existing “four question” assessment format carried over from the old assessment plan until area sub-committees can formulate suitable assessment rubrics.

7. At its discretion the Department Assessment Committee will augment the plan with additional measures such as surveys and focus groups.

3. In specific terms how did the department assess learning outcomes for 06-07?

a. Describe the measures you used and the information gathered.

A sample of representative capstone exercises were received by the Communication Studies Assessment Committee from the instructional areas of Intercultural Communication and Digital Media. Digital Media and Public Relations faculty reviewed capstone exercises from the Public Relations capstone course and sent a summary memo to the Assessment Committee.

b. As a result of these assessments what did you learn about the program’s success in helping its students achieve these learning outcomes?

1. In what areas did the evidence suggest that students typically meet or exceed the assessment standard?

The Assessment Committee reviewed the (DVD videos) and memo submitted by the Digital Media faculty. The videos demonstrated a wide variety of subject matter and genres, including documentary, dramatic, and commercial products. To the untrained eyes of the committee the work appeared to be of high technical and artistic quality.

Prior to the formation of the Digital Media Concentration many students failed to complete high quality senior-level projects, and it was almost unheard of for individual students to complete such projects. Those problems appear to have been solved by current faculty operating under a newer curriculum.

More importantly, the overall quality of the portfolios during the last Digital Media assessment was too low to allow the students to be serious contenders for admission into graduate schools and for industry jobs. A substantial revision of ComS 185 was undertaken to resolve the situation. Happily the latest sample of capstone activities demonstrates an impressive improvement in the quality of work.
Additional problems identified in the previous Digital Media Assessment included problems with lighting skills, writing skills, poor acting, and project scopes that were inconsistent with the available budgets and timelines. As illustrated below, significant steps have been taken to mitigate or solve each of these problems.

In the area of Intercultural Communication the capstone activity (essays) indicated that intercultural students are well grounded in the synthesis and application of intercultural theories.

2. **In what areas did the evidence suggest that students typically fail to meet the assessment standard?**

To some extent faculty in all three of the areas reviewed expressed concerns about the breath of writing abilities exhibited in capstone essays and videos. The consensus of many faculty, including faculty not teaching in areas included in this year’s assessment, is that writing skills acquired through lower division writing courses taught in community colleges, learning skills and the English Department are simply inadequate. We believe that Communication Studies majors should exhibit a higher standard of writing proficiency.

Some of the capstone essays in the area of Intercultural Communication seemed to indicate a tendency of students to over generalize trends and conclusions. Assertions without supporting data and evidence were common in the essays. Instructors might wish to stress the necessity of careful development and proof of theses presented within capstone essays.

3. **What should be done in the areas of curriculum, teaching practices, resources or use of technology to increase the percentage of students who meet or exceed area standards?**

To respond to the writing problem the Communications Studies Department is considering adding the one-unit Journalism 20 course to the curricular requirements for all of our majors. If logistical and funding barriers can be overcome, and pending approval by the Curriculum Committee and the full department, the Arts and Letters Budget and Curriculum Committee can expect to entertain such a curricular proposal.

Furthermore, Public Relations faculty believed that individual student writing should be emphasized in Communication Studies 118. Communication Studies 118 is identified because it is the first course in the PR concentration for both native students and transfer students.

Public Relations faculty have identified a set of courses that act as a bottleneck for students concentrating in Public Relations. The courses Marketing 101 and Marketing 125 are taught by the College of Business. The College of Business does not allow Public Relations students to use the regular registration; instead students must seek the permission of the instructor to add the class. If sections of the course are full then Public Relations students must delay taking these courses until future semesters. This delay adds to time-to-degree. Without a change from the status quo the problem will likely persist. Therefore, it is recommended that the two
courses should be removed as requirements and listed instead as elective courses for students within the Public Relations concentration.

The Public Relations concentration should seek accreditation. Public relations faculty have obtained the PRSA accreditation standards and intend to formulate a plan of action that will result in major in Public Relations becoming accredited.

In the area of Digital Media the ComS 185 has undergone a variety of improvements to resolve problems identified in the previous assessment:

- Beefed up requirements for project proposals
- Shorter timeline for script development
- Shorter timeline for production completion
- A more sophisticated auditioning process for projects requiring actors
- Enhanced storyboarding requirements
- More detailed project narratives for documentaries and industrial projects
- A requirement for primary and secondary editors for each project
- Differentiation of roles for the director and cameraperson
- Better data back-up protection for projects
- Rough cuts due four weeks before project due dates

4. What outcomes does the area committee feel might be refined or added to those in effect during this cycle?

Over time it is expected that instructional area sub-committees will develop more detailed rubrics. At this time, however, the Communication Studies Assessment Committee does not believe it necessary to make revisions to the 2005 approved Assessment Plan. The committee believes that all instructional areas of the department should participate fully in the existing plan before major plan revisions should be entertained.

Nor does the committee believe that graduate education within the department belong within the purview of the Assessment Committee.

4. Did your department engage in any other assessment activities such as the development of rubrics, course alignment?

None, other than those already mentioned.
5. What assessment activities are planned for the upcoming academic year?

We expect to add two new measures during Spring 2008: (1) a survey of graduating seniors, and (2) focus groups with seniors in a selected instructional area. The instructional area will be chosen on a rotating basis.

The Communication Studies Assessment Committee suggests that faculty within specific instructional areas (Organizational, Media, Interpersonal/Small Group, Public, Intercultural, Public Relations, Journalism and Digital Media) evaluate the capstone activities, rather than leaving the task exclusively to the Assessment Committee. Each area should then submit a memo answering the four questions identified above. Each of the sub-committees should also submit sample activities along with the memo.