Annual Assessment Report, 2012-2013

Department of Communication Studies

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Overview

This year, the department implemented its new assessment plan (see attached), with updated learning goals that align with the University's Baccalaureate Learning Goals. We collected data across disciplines to determine how well student performance matches the department's high standards for learning.

The assessment measures are based on quantitative methods and validated rubrics – including those from AAC&U's written and oral communication and inquiry and analysis areas. The department assessed student papers, oral presentations and exams. It focused on those learning goals that were not part of last year's pilot study.

The assessment plan divides the department into three sub-categories: Communication Studies, Journalism and Digital Video. While there is overlap between these areas, the department conducted assessment on each one. Additionally, the department gave exams in several sub-disciplines of Communication Studies, including Public Relations, Mass Communication and Organizational Communication.

As part of the department's self-study, we performed additional assessment this year on stand-alone and hybrid sections of Coms4, Introduction to Public Speaking and Coms5. The department used the AAC&U's Oral Communication rubric to assess student presentations, and developed student and faculty surveys. We included that data in this report.

Summary of changes for 2012-2013

As a result of the pilot data from 2011-2012 (see IPP), we made the following changes to the curriculum:

- Coms 100B, Critical Analysis of Messages, became a writing intensive class, which we expect will result in more opportunity for writing practice and evaluation.

- Jour. 100, Principles of Journalism, was added to the curriculum to increase our focus on ethical responsibility.

- Jour. 135, Public Affairs Reporting, also became a writing intensive class.

The following personnel changes will be made based on the results of assessment:

- The department hiring committee will more carefully consider how we rank lecturers.

- More coordination of expectations and performance of identified Part-Time faculty was instituted.

Learning outcomes

        The three major learning outcomes are the same across programs, and align with the University's Baccalaureate Learning Goals in the areas of Competence in the Discipline, Intellectual and Practical Skills, Personal and Social Responsibility and Integrative Learning. The methods with which we attain these goals, however, vary by area of study. The learning outcomes are as follows.

1. Students will communicate effectively in a variety of contexts.
2. Students will think critically when constructing and consuming messages.
3. Students will have knowledge of program principles.

Findings

Communication Studies

1. Students will communicate effectively in a variety of contexts.

    a. *Demonstrate proficiency in oral communication*: determine presentation needs in different situations; correctly use visual aids; make appropriate language choices; use proper structure; and effectively deliver presentations.

    The department sampled 5 presentations from a senior-level class, Coms 183, Senior Seminar in Media Issues. Faculty used the AAC&U's VALUES Oral Communication rubric to score the selected presentations. The rubric is comprised of five dimensions: organization, language, delivery, supporting material and central message. They are scored on a 5-point scale that ranges from a value of "0," indicating that it does not meet the benchmark to "4," indicating complete proficiency. The following is a table of the average scores for each area.

Organization	3.2
Language	3.6
Delivery	2.6
Supporting Material	3.0
Central Message	3.4

    The above scores show that in four of five categories, the average is within one point of complete proficiency. The average score demonstrates a near complete proficiency in the area of Language in this student population. In the fifth category, the average is above the benchmark.

    b. *Demonstrate proficiency in written communication*: implement a variety of style sheets; use thesis statements; use appropriate organizational strategies; apply transitions; include appropriate evidentiary support; and employ grammar conventions.

The department sampled 5 papers from a senior-level class, Coms 183, Senior Seminar in Media Issues. Faculty used the AAC&U's VALUES Written Communication rubric to score the selected papers. The rubric is comprised of five dimensions: context and purpose, content development, genre and disciplinary conventions, sources and evidence and control of syntax and mechanics. They are scored on a 5-point scale than ranges from a value of "0," indicating that it does not meet the benchmark to "4," indicating complete proficiency. The following is a table of the average scores for each area.

Context & purpose	3.6
Content development	2.6
Genre & disciplinary conventions	2.2
Sources & evidence	2.6
Control of syntax & mechanics	2.4

The above scores show that all five areas are above the benchmark. In the first category, context and purpose, the average score is notably high.

After reviewing the data, it is clear that we need to both expand our sample size and diversify the classes in which the data is collected to ensure a more accurate reflection of student learning.

2. Students will think critically when constructing and consuming messages.
   a. *Demonstrate proficiency in critical analysis research*: identify key critical perspectives of thought; be able to frame a question; appropriately select an artifact; and select appropriate methods to answer a question.

   The department sampled 32 student papers in a required upper-division writing class, Coms 100B, Critical Analysis of Messages. Faculty used the AAC&U's VALUES Inquiry and Analysis rubric to score the selected papers. The rubric is comprised of six dimensions: topic selection, existing knowledge, research and/or views, design process, analysis, conclusions and limitations and implications. They are scored on a 5-point scale that ranges from a value of "0," indicating that it does not meet the benchmark to "4," indicating complete proficiency. The following is a table of the average scores for each area.

Topic selection	3.2
Existing knowledge, research and/or views	3.0
Design process	2.9
Analysis	3.1
Conclusions	2.8
Limitations & implications	2.3

The results show that student perform well above the benchmark in all areas. Topic selection and analysis scored within a point on complete proficiency.

   b. *Demonstrate a proficiency in quantitative research*: identify principles of research design; understand operational and conceptual definitions; select the correct statistical approach to answer hypotheses; and have knowledge of internal validity threats.
   See pilot data – 2011-2012 (IPP)

3. Students will have knowledge of program principles.

   For this learning objective, the department administered 20-question multiple-choice exams that were constructed, vetted and approved by the faculty. To meet the benchmark, students must earn a score of at least 70 percent.

   The exams took place in the following classes:
   Communication Studies = Coms 100A, Survey of Communication Studies
   Mass Communication = Coms 150, Mass Communication Theory and Effects
   Organizational Communication = Coms 145, Organizational Communication
   Public Relations = Coms 118, Introduction to Public Relations. The average scores are as follows.

   a. Communication Studies = 71 percent
   b. Mass Communication = 58 percent
   c. Organizational Communication = 50 percent
   d. Public Relations = 80 percent

   After analyzing the data, we noticed two major issues with these exams. First, some of the exams were given in classes taught by part-time faculty who did not weigh in on the development of this assessment measure. In some cases, the part-time faculty did not cover the material on which the exam was based before students took it. Second, the exams were less challenging than in other areas. We need to address this issue to obtain more accurate data about student learning in the future. In the coming year, we will look at revising these exams with standardized guidelines.

Journalism

1. Students will communicate effectively in a variety of contexts.

   a. *Demonstrate a mastery of journalistic style writing for a variety of audiences and media:* use clear and concise language; adhere to Associated Press style; show proficiency in using written English, including proper spelling, grammar and punctuation; and construct stories in an organized, logical way.

The department sampled 5 papers from a senior-level class, Jour. 135, Public Affairs Reporting. Faculty used the AAC&U's VALUES Written Communication rubric to score the selected papers. The rubric is comprised of five dimensions: context and purpose for writing, content development, genre and disciplinary conventions, sources and evidence and control of syntax and mechanics. They are scored on a 5-point scale that ranges from a value of "0," indicating that it does not meet the benchmark to "4," indicating complete proficiency. The following is a table of the average scores for each area.

Context & purpose	3.0
Content development	3.4
Genre & disciplinary conventions	3.4
Sources & evidence	3.6
Control of syntax & mechanics	3.6

The results show that in all areas, students are within 1 point of complete proficiency. While we are pleased with the results of this data, the sample size is small; perhaps creating higher scores than if more papers were reviewed.

2. Students will think critically when constructing and consuming messages.

    a. *Demonstrate higher-level thinking through ethical decision making, story development and writing*: evaluate information and judge its veracity; and use appropriate research methods, including interviews, public records and qualitative data to produce publishable content.

    The department sampled 5 papers from an ongoing class project in an upper-division course, Jour. 130, News Reporting and Writing I and II. Faculty constructed, vetted and approved a rubric – based on recommendations from the Poynter Institute, the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication and the Society of Professional Journalists – to score the selected papers. The rubric is comprised of five dimensions including: accuracy, thoroughness, balance, story development and research quality. They are scored on a 5-point scale that ranges from a value of "0," indicating that it does not meet the benchmark to "4," indicating complete proficiency. The following is a table of the average scores for each area.

Accuracy	3.2
Thoroughness	2.6
Balance	3.4
Story development	2.6
Research quality	2.8

The results show that students scored within 1 point of complete proficiency in the areas of accuracy and balance. The other areas are above the benchmark.

3. Students will have knowledge of Journalism principles.
   a. *Demonstrate ethical decision-making*: apply ethical principles as practiced by professional journalists in research, interviewing, writing and audio-visuals; recognize ethical responsibility to the public and profession; use the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics.
   See pilot data – 2011-2012 (IPP)

   b. *Demonstrate knowledge of media laws*: understand laws that govern journalists' rights and responsibilities, freedom of speech, libel and slander, public records and open meetings.
   See pilot data – 2011-2012 (IPP)

Digital Video

Overview

The program emphasizes film production, history, criticism and writing. Students develop an understanding of the art and practice of film/video production applying a common core of classes, shared with other Communication Studies areas of study.

Background
The goal of the assessment plan is to improve student learning. The program will use the assessment process to set high standards for learning and collect data to determine how well student performance matches those expectations. Through this process, the program will identify areas of strength and weakness and look for ways to improve the quality of the program. Improvements may include curriculum modifications, changes to teaching practices and/or materials, additional resources or the use of new technologies.

The assessment plan encompasses a broad cross-section of data that includes reviews of student video projects, student papers, student surveys and exams. The program created these measures, based on quantitative methods and validated rubrics, including that from AAC&U's written communication area. Other program rubrics were created based on the format of AAC&U's VALUE rubrics.

The program's learning goals align with the Baccalaureate Learning Goals in all five areas: Competence in the Discipline, Knowledge of Human Cultures, Intellectual and Practical Skills, Personal and Social Responsibility and Integrative Learning.

Assessment Schedule
Assessment data will be collected in both fall and spring to disperse faculty efforts across the academic year. Each program learning outcome is assessed at least once per year.

Learning outcomes & assessment measurements
The program has developed three learning goals. They include:

1. Students will communicate effectively in a variety of contexts
2. Students will think critically when constructing and consuming messages
3. Students will have knowledge of discipline principles

The following is a description of how these overarching goals are measured.

1. Students will communicate effectively in a variety of contexts
   Demonstrate a mastery of video communication: Develop clear video concepts, implement effective organizational strategies, select evidentiary support material, use appropriate cinematic conventions to convey meaning.

Faculty distributed student peer review surveys in ComS 185 Senior Video Practicum in Fall 2012. This survey assessed students' ability to communicate effectively, share responsibilities and properly manage time. The following table shows the results:

Schedule, Dependability, time management	*Successful completion of work as a group*	*Conflict management*	*Overall*
67% Excellent	71% Excellent	62% Excellent	68% Excellent
19% Good	19% Good	26% Good	23% Good
11% Fair	5% Fair	8% Fair	6% Fair
3% Poor	5% Poor	4% Poor	3% Poor

From the results it is clear that students' experience working with others in Senior Practicum is quite good. While the area of conflict management scored the lowest, it was still scored 88% *Excellen*t to *Good*. More work in the class needs to be on group dynamics and how those dynamics can be handled in groups when creative work is being done.

Some directors need more guidance in terms of communication with their crewmembers. Another set of guidelines for this leadership role needs to be included in the course as well as more oversight by the instructor. Directors should also be required to have assistant directors to schedule shoots and maintain contact with other crewmembers. Directors who had assistant directors all scored perfectly in every category.

The way the class is structured allows for students to select their own groups and also have a voice in the selection of project proposals. I believe that student involvement in these processes is part of the reason why the results shown above are so positive. Any changes made to the course should not interfere with this broader structure, but should provide guidance in the areas outlined above.

2. Students will think critically when consuming and constructing messages.

Demonstrate higher-level thinking through interdisciplinary video and film critique: analyze messages in film and video; evaluate the aesthetics of media productions, explain the values, ideologies and cultural influences in cinematic messages.

Papers from Coms 100B, Critical Analysis of Messages, will be assessed using the AAC&U's VALUES Critical Thinking rubric.

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3. Students will have knowledge of discipline principles.

Demonstrate a mastery of film discipline knowledge: Understand contemporary practices in digital video and cinema, identify the historic development of media and film and its evolution into digital forms.

Students in Coms 128, Video Production, complete a 20-questions multiple-choice examination that was constructed, vetted and approved by the faculty. To meet the benchmark, students must earn a score of at least 70 percent.

In Fall 2012, an assessment consisting of twenty questions was given to a random sampling of students in ComS 128 (Video Production) and Com S 185 (Senior Practicum).   The exam covered the following areas:

- Area 1 – Camera Technology
- Area 2 – Editing Theory
- Area 3 – Camera Lenses
- Area 4 – Video Signals
- Area 5 – Audio Processing (EQ, Compressors, etc.)
- Area 6 – Time-Code
- Area 7 – Script formatting
- Area 8 – Lighting basics

The following is a summary of the scores:

- Below average understanding of camera technology. (note: part-time faculty). 69% correct answers.
- Extremely below average editing theory score (note: part-time faculty). 33% correct answers.
- High retention of the theory of lenses. 99% correct answers.
- Very low understanding of video signals (note: part-time faculty). 27% correct answers.
- Extremely high understanding of audio processing. 100% correct answers.
- Poor retention of time-code fundamentals. 45% correct answers.
- Very high understanding of script formatting. 82% correct answers.
- Poor understanding of lighting basics. 55% correct answers.

Conclusions:

- We have a problem with a part-time instructor. However, this should not be the case in the future because the instructor ran into "technical" issue with the Avid editing systems which not only set her back, but also as it was the first time they taught the course they did not know how to adjust their time to cover required problems. This should be corrected next semester because 1) the class will not spend any time in the studio next semester (too much effort was put into this area and it is not a studio class), and 2) the instructor should have a better understanding of the Avid system the second time teaching it and will be able to solve technical issues sooner. Also, the results of this exam will be shared with them so that they can see the areas of teaching that they are deficient in. (This all relates to areas #1 [69%], #2 [33%], #4 [27%]) These scores are not acceptable.

- We need to spend more time in explaining Time-Code basics, although this technology seems to be somewhat less of a concern with "lower-cost" professional video, it is still extremely important at the "higher-end."

- I believe the lighting area poor results relates to two factors; a) the need for more questions to measure this area, and b) confusing questions on this initial assessment exam.

- We need to add more audio questions to obtain a better assessment of our students audio education.

Coms 4 and 5

The department sampled student presentations at the beginning and end of the semester. Faculty used the AAC&U's VALUES Oral Communication rubric to score 30 selected presentations from hybrid and stand-alone Coms 4 and 5 classes. The rubric is comprised of five dimensions: organization, language, delivery, supporting material and central message. They are scored on a five-point scale that ranges from a value of "0," indicating that it does not meet the benchmark to "4," indicating complete proficiency.

Coms 4 – Hybrid – 1st presentation

Organization	1.9
Language	2.2
Delivery	2.5
Supporting material	2.1
Central message	2.3

Coms 4 – Hybrid – 2nd presentation

Organization	3.3
Language	2.9
Delivery	2.9
Supporting material	3.0
Central message	2.8

Coms 4 – Stand-alone – 1st presentation

Organization	2.9
Language	2.4
Delivery	2.4
Supporting material	2.6
Central message	3.2

Coms 4 – stand-alone – 2nd presentation

Organization	3.7
Language	3.4
Delivery	3.1
Supporting material	3.0
Central message	3.9

Coms 5 – hybrid – 1st presentation

Organization	3.4
Language	2.6
Delivery	2.0
Supporting material	2.4
Central message	3.4

Coms 5 – hybrid – 2nd presentation

Organization	3.8
Language	3.0
Delivery	3.4
Supporting material	3.0
Central message	4.0

Coms 5 –stand-alone – 1st presentation

Organization	2.0
Language	2.0
Delivery	2.4
Supporting material	1.8
Central message	2.4

Coms 5 –stand-alone – 2nd presentation

Organization	2.6
Language	2.4
Delivery	2.8
Supporting material	2.6
Central message	2.4

Student scores show improvement in both the hybrid and stand-alone models over the course of the semester. This data demonstrates that students perform better in Coms 4 stand-alone classes as compared to the Coms 4 hybrids. It is worth noting, however, that they score higher when they start the class as well. For Coms 5, the opposite is reflected, with students in the hybrids outperforming those in the stand-alone classes (but by smaller margins than in Coms 4) and entering the class at lower levels. The data for Coms 5, however, may be affected by a smaller sample size. Only 5 presentations were sampled for each area in Coms 5, while 15 were sampled for the Coms 4 hybrid and 10 for the Coms 4 stand-alone. The department will continue its efforts to assess students using this rubric but will seek larger sample sizes in the future.

New Curriculum & Assessment Future
While we need to adjust some of our assessment measurements, this data gives feedback to the department as we negotiate a major curriculum overhaul in the coming year and work to expand our hybrid and online offerings.

The faculty voted on a streamlined curriculum plan, which we expect to implement in Fall 2014. We do not expect to make changes to our learning outcomes as a result of this change, (they were developed in 2011-2012 with assistance from the University's Office of Assessment) but we will need to modify our assessment plan to reflect the new model. The adjustments will occur with the exams, which now measure several different areas.

As these areas are merged, we will need to create a revised exam for all Communication Studies majors that measure Learning Outcome 3. The exam will be developed, vetted and approved by the faculty for use in the 2013-2014 year. This change will solve the issue we faced this year of widely varying difficulty levels on the knowledge exams in the Communication Studies sub-disciplines.