**2010 – 2011 Communication Studies Department Assessment Report for Majors AND Minors**

**ASSESSMENT TEAM MEMBERS**

All members of the assessment team are from the Department of Communication Studies.

Dr. Karen Erlandson *(Associate Professor and Department Chair—Fall 2010; On sabbatical—Spring 2011)*

Dr. Jeremy Osborn *(Assistant Professor and Department Chair—Spring 2011)*

Dr. Yuxia Qian *(Assistant Professor)*

Andy Boyan *(Visiting Instructor)*

Lynsey Romo *(Visiting Instructor—Spring 2011 only)*

**OVERVIEW OF CHANGES FROM PREVIOUS REPORT**

As outlined below, we changed our learning goals to reflect the current, three-track structure of the department. The first two goals from the previous report were retained, the third goal was deleted and replaced with four more specific goals reflective of the departmental tracks (interpersonal, organizational, and mass mediated communication), and a final goal focused on research was added to reflect changes to our capstone course. These changes to our learning goals also resulted in changes to the specific indicators. All details are clearly outlined in the report.

# **SECTION 1.**

# **LEARNING GOALS**

The curriculum in the Communication Studies Department is designed to allow students some degree of flexibility while still requiring a common curricular core. Consistent with these aims, coursework in the department can be divided into two main categories: 1) Courses in the “core” include COMM 101 (Introduction to Human Communication), COMM 241 (Public Speaking), and COMM 322 (Communication Theory and Research); 2) Specialized courses covering our three fundamental areas of emphasis—Interpersonal Communication, Organizational Communication, and Mass-Mediated Communication. All majors **AND** minors must complete the three core courses and at least one course from each of the three emphasis areas. Majors must also complete three additional “elective” courses within the department. These courses may fall within any of the three emphasis areas (although more specific requirements are in place for students choosing one of the three “tracks” in the department).

Our previous learning goals did not adequately capture this structure, so this year we updated them. The learning goals we have developed are reflective of our curricular structure and are equally applicable to both majors and minors. Learning Goal 1 reflects the basic information covered in COMM 101. Learning Goal 2 reflects the oral competency developed in COMM 241. Goals 3, 4, 5, and 6 are specific goals associated with the three emphasis areas in the department. Learning Goal 3 reflects organizational understanding and Learning Goal 4 reflects interpersonal understanding. Two goals (5 and 6) related to mass-mediated communication were developed because a single goal seemed inadequate for capturing the dual theoretical and applied aspects of that area. Finally, Learning Goal 7 reflects the ability to contribute novel ideas to the field that we hope to have cultivated in our students by the end of the capstone course (COMM 322). The seven specific goals are outlined below.

1. Students will master a clear understanding of the fundamental concepts and processes of human communication.
2. Students will gain a facility with public speaking.
3. Students will develop the ability to understand, evaluate, and apply organizational communication theories.
4. Students will develop the ability to understand, evaluate, and apply interpersonal communication theories.
5. Students will develop the ability to understand, evaluate, and apply theories of mass mediated communication.
6. Students will develop a clear understanding of mass mediated communication consumption and production processes.
7. Students will develop both a basic understanding of the research process and the ability to apply that understanding to a personal research project.

**SECTION 2.**

**QUANTITATIVE MEASURES AND/OR QUALITATIVE INDICATORS**

First, a question that measures the department’s success at achieving Learning Goal 1 as identified in the previous section is embedded in COMM 101 (Introduction to Human Communication) exams. This is a required course for both Communication Studies majors and Communication Studies minors. It is also a course that attracts a number of students from other majors as well. Since it is nearly impossible to separate majors from non-majors, data for all students are included in this report. The data were collected in one Fall 2010 section and one Spring 2011 section. Both were taught by Andy Boyan.

Second, in order to assess Learning Goal 2, student speeches from COMM 241 (Public Speaking) were taped. Two instructors (Dr. Yuxia Qian and Lynsey Romo) taught sections of this course during 2010-2011. Both recorded students giving an informative speech. As with COMM 101, this course is required of all Communication Studies majors and minors, but it also attracts a number of students from other disciplines. Due to the time-consuming and complex nature of assessing oral presentations, a sample of 12 speeches was used for assessment rather than a full census of all speeches completed. The selected speeches were evaluated by two instructors (Dr. Qian and Lynsey Romo) who used a five-point scale on twelve questions to assess the students. The questions are included in Section 3 of this report.

Third*,* learning goals associated with each of the three emphasis areas (3, 4, 5, and 6) were assessed using a combination of embedded exam questions and tasks embedded in written assignments. Assignments were specifically embedded in the fundamental course associated with each of the three emphasis areas. Goal 3 was assessed through a question embedded in the COMM 203 (Small Group and Organizational Communication) midterm exam. Goal 4 was assessed using a question embedded in the COMM 202 (Interpersonal and Family Communication) final exam. Goal 5 was assessed using a task embedded in COMM 365 (Media Theory) final assignments. Finally, Goal 6 was assessed using questions embedded in two of the COMM 205 (Mass Communication) exams. Dr. Qian collected data for Goal 3, Dr. Erlandson collected data for Goal 4, and Andy Boyan collected data for Goals 5 and 6.

Finally, Learning Goal 7 was assessed using scores from a Research Proposal assignment in COMM 322 (Communication Theory and Research). As the capstone, this course is designed to require students to draw from the knowledge they gained in other Communication courses to develop a proposal for a research project that reflects a novel contribution they would like to make to the field. That ability would be impossible to assess using targeted, embedded questions, and thus the overall research proposal scores were chosen as a more complete indicator (and one that is better able to accommodate the different specializations students develop by the time they graduate). Since this capstone is required of all majors and minors, the research proposal is a common experience that all students must complete near the end of their Communication education. The course is taught by Dr. Osborn.

**SECTION 3.**

**SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE COLLECTED**

Learning Goal 1

*Students will master a clear understanding of the fundamental concepts and processes of human communication*

This learning goal is assessed through the following question embedded in one of the COMM 101 (Introduction to Human Communication) exams:

One of the key points in class thus far has been the complexity and the multifaceted nature of the communication process.  Early in the semester I asked you to define communication.  For this question you must revisit that idea and, given what we have discussed in class so far, define communication.  In your answer you should address the different processes and components involved with the communication process and how these components fit together as a cohesive whole.

Data for this question were collected from COMM 101 students during Fall semester 2010 and Spring semester of 2011.  Students who were seen as demonstrating a thorough understanding of the concepts received scores of 83-100 (3.0 – 4.0). Students who were seen as demonstrating an adequate understanding of the concepts received scores of 70-82 (1.7 – 2.7).  Finally, students who were seen as demonstrating an inadequate understanding of the concepts received scores 69 and below (0 – 1.3).  Based on these criteria, 26 (15 Fall; 11 Spring) students demonstrated a thorough understanding of the basic concepts and processes, 16 (6 Fall; 10 Spring) students demonstrated an adequate understanding of the basic concepts and processes, and 8 (2 Fall; 6 Spring) students demonstrated an inadequate understanding of the basic concepts and processes.

These data clearly indicate that few students complete the introductory, COMM 101 course without at the least an adequate understanding of the basic concepts and processes that comprise human communication and most students complete the course with a thorough understanding.

Learning Goal 2

*Students will gain a facility with public speaking*

Two instructors (Lynsey Romo and Dr. Yuxia Qian) examined videotapes of COMM 241 students delivering their informative speech. Each graded each speech on a series of 11 questions or criteria each on sliding scale from 1-5 where 1 indicated “poor” and 5 “excellent”. Thus a student could receive a maximum of 110 points for a speech.

The questions/criteria upon which each student was assessment were as follows:

1. Did the speaker limit the topic appropriately?
2. Did the speaker have a clearly defined specific purpose?
3. Did the speaker use an introduction effectively to gain the attention of the audience?
4. Did the speaker use transitions between main points effectively?
5. Did the speaker have clearly recognizable subunits to the speech?
6. Did the speaker use a variety of effective proofs to justify the subunits?
7. Did the speaker appear knowledgeable about the topic?
8. Did the speaker use vocal and other nonverbal delivery techniques to emphasize important points?
9. Did the speaker conclude the speech effectively?
10. Did the speaker attempt successfully to relate the information and/or persuasive content of the speech to the needs of the audience?
11. Did the speaker establish, through eye contact and communicative delivery, a good rapport with the audience?

The following mathematical system was used to assess the results:

A thorough facility at public speaking required that a student receive at least 4 points from each evaluator across all 11 criteria, that is 88 points.

An adequate facility at public speaking required that a student receive at least at one 3 from an evaluator and no more than one 2 from an evaluator on each criteria, this is at least 64 points.

A student with an inadequate facility at public speaking would receive less than 64 points.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Public Speaking Student | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| Total Eval 1 | 44 | 46 | 47 | 45 | 45 | 46 | 52 | 54 | 52 | 44 | 54 | 45 |
| Total Eval 2 | 41 | 43 | 43 | 48 | 50 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 52 | 49 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Total | 85 | 89 | 90 | 93 | 95 | 94 | 100 | 102 | 100 | 92 | 106 | 94 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | # | % |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Thorough Facility | 11 | 92% |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Adequate Facility | 1 | 8% |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| No Facility | 0 | 0% |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Across the 12 students selected at random from sections taught by two different instructors we found that 100% gained at least an adequate facility with the skill of public speaking and 92% had recognizably gained a thorough facility with the skill. There were no students who gained zero facility with public speaking.

Learning Goal 3

*Students will develop the ability to understand, evaluate, and apply organizational communication theories.*

This learning goal is assessed through the following question embedded in the COMM 203 (Small Group and Organizational Communication) midterm exam.

Think about an organization you are familiar with that uses both human relations and human resources principles in its management and communication practices. Describe these practices and discuss the impact of these practices on organizational outcomes such as productivity and worker satisfaction. Does one approach seem to work better than the other? How would you summarize the “up side” and the “down side” of human relations and human resources management? **(20 Points)**

Data for this question were collected from COMM 203 students during Fall semester 2010. Students who were seen as demonstrating a thorough ability to understand, evaluate and apply the theories received scores of 17-20 (3.0 – 4.0). Students who were seen as demonstrating an adequate ability to understand, evaluate and apply the theories received scores of 14 – 16 (1.7 – 2.7). Finally, students who were seen as demonstrating an inadequate ability to understand, evaluate and apply the theories received scores 13 and below (0 – 1.3).

Based on these criteria, 13 students demonstrated a thorough ability to understand, evaluate and apply the theories, 11 students demonstrated an adequate ability to understand, evaluate and apply the theories, and 1 student demonstrated an inadequate ability to understand, evaluate and apply the theories.

Learning Goal 4

*Students will develop the ability to understand, evaluate, and apply interpersonal communication theories.*

This goal was assessed using the following question embedded in the COMM 202 (Interpersonal and Family Communication) final exam.

Of the theories we have discussed this semester, select one. Explain in which area of interpersonal or family communication you believe this theory would be most useful. Explain this theory as you would to a college student who has not taken this course so that the theory is understandable to them. Include in your explanation: (a) the focus or goal(s) of the theory; (b) the key assumption of the theory; (c) what the theory describes, predicts, etc.; (d) an example of the sort of thing the theory tries to examine; and (e) a strength and a weakness of the theory.

Data for this question were collected from COMM 202 students during Fall semester 2010. The question was worth 25 points. Students who were seen as demonstrating a thorough ability to understand and evaluate the theories received scores of 21 - 25 (3.0 – 4.0). Students who were seen as demonstrating an adequate ability to understand and evaluate the theories received scores of 18 – 22 (1.7 – 2.7). Finally, students who were seen as demonstrating an inadequate ability to understand and evaluate the theories received scores 17 and below (0 – 1.3).

Based on these criteria, 17 students demonstrated a thorough ability to understand and apply the theories, 11 students demonstrated an adequate ability to understand and apply the theories, and 0 students demonstrated an inadequate ability to understand and apply the theories.

Learning Goal 5

*Students will develop the ability to understand, evaluate, and apply theories of mass mediated communication.*

This goal was assessed using a task embedded in COMM 365 (Media Theory) final assignments. Throughout the semester students are required to complete two assignments. Data was collected for the first assignment, and data for the second assignment will provide insight after it is graded following finals week Spring 2011. The assignment is as follows:

You will complete an outline that connects media phenomena to relevant media theories.

The outline contains three major sections. 1) Phenomenon, 2) media theory, and 3) combining phenomenon with theory. Section one should be a concise and accurate description of a specific media event, program, or occurrence. Section two should be a concise and accurate explanation of the major aspects of a media theory discussed in class. Section three should contain no new information regarding either the phenomenon or the theory, but should be where you match specific tenets of the media theory to specific aspects of the media phenomenon. A short explanatory sentence with each match is also required – why do these parts match up?

Data for this question were collected from COMM 365 students during the Spring semester of 2011.  Students who were seen as demonstrating a thorough ability to understand and apply the theories received scores of 83-100 (3.0 – 4.0). Students who were seen as demonstrating an adequate ability to understand and apply the theories received scores of 70-82 (1.7 – 2.7).  Finally, students who were seen as demonstrating an inadequate ability to understand and apply the theories received scores 69 and below (0 – 1.3).

When both assignments are completed, the scores on the assignments will be averaged for each student providing an overall metric for this assessment. The present data is the single, mid-term grade.

Based on these criteria, 11 students demonstrated a thorough ability to understand and apply the theories, 5 students demonstrated an adequate ability to understand and apply the theories, and 4 students demonstrated an inadequate ability to understand and apply the theories.

Learning Goal 6

*Students will develop a clear understanding of mass mediated communication consumption and production processes.*

This learning goal is assessed through the following questions embedded in two of the COMM 205 (Mass Communication) exams. They were the first of four questions on a midterm exam and a final exam. Both questions were designed to tap into the same underlying construct as specified by the learning goal:

One of the key points in class thus far has been the changing nature of mediated communication and how the nature of change impacts individuals and society.  Particularly we have focused on the ways in which technological advancement changes media production, dissemination, and production.  Your job is to choose two technological advancements in media any time history, briefly describe how the innovation was an improvement over the previous technology, and explain how the advancement changed production and consumption and what overall impact it had on society relative to culture.  ***(3-5 pages)***

One of the key points in class thus far has been the changing nature of mediated communication and how the nature of change impacts individuals and society.  Particularly we have focused on the ways in which technological advancement changes media production, dissemination, and production.  Your job is to conduct the same analysis you did in exam 1, but with 2 new technologies.  Choose 2 of the new communication technologies provided below and for each: briefly describe if and how the innovation is an improvement over current technology and explain how the advancement will change production and consumption and the potential overall effects on society relative to culture. ***(2-3 pages)***

Location-aware social media websites

Foursquare, Gowalla, Facebook places

Augmented reality

Digital display over reality

3D Visual media

3D movies & TV

Perfect instantaneous foreign language translation

Text and/or speech

Citizen journalists

Unpaid people reporting on news events

Infinite portable digital storage

Full access to the entire internet, your music/TV/Movie/Picture library everywhere you go

Instantaneous download speeds

Click-got-it immediately

Thought-controlled computer input devices

No hands – think double-click and it double-clicks

(This is real by the way and exists today)

Natural language processing

Being able to talk to computers and have them understand what you mean

Data for this question were collected from 26 COMM 205 students during Fall semester.  Exam grades were averaged for each student to create an index of performance on the learning goal specified above. Students who were seen as demonstrating a thorough understanding of the concepts received scores of 83-100 (3.0 – 4.0). Students who were seen as demonstrating an adequate understanding of the concepts received scores of 70-82 (1.7 – 2.7).  Finally, students who were seen as demonstrating an inadequate understanding of the concepts received scores 69 and below (0 – 1.3).  Based on these criteria, 22 students demonstrated a thorough understanding of the basic concepts and processes, 2 students demonstrated an adequate understanding of the basic concepts and processes, and 2 students demonstrated an inadequate understanding of the basic concepts and processes.

These data clearly indicate that few students complete the COMM 205 course without at the least an adequate understanding of mass mediated communication consumption and production processes, and most students complete the course with a thorough understanding.

Learning Goal 7

*Students will develop both a basic understanding of the research process and the ability to apply that understanding to a personal research project.*

This learning goal was assessed through the final assignment in the capstone COMM 322 (Communication Theory and Research) course. For this assignment, students are required to develop a research proposal on a communication-based topic of their choosing. Specifically, they must develop a set of hypotheses and/or research questions related to that topic, assemble a literature review and rationale for those hypotheses/questions, develop proposed methods and procedures to test the questions/hypotheses, and present their project to their classmates during an oral presentation.

Data for this goal were collected during both Fall semester 2010 and Spring semester 2011. However, at the time this report was assembled, Spring proposals had not yet been completed, so only the Fall data are reported. During Fall, 19 students completed the research proposal assignment. Students who were seen as demonstrating a thorough understanding of the research process and received scores of 83-100 (3.0 – 4.0). Students who were seen as demonstrating an adequate understanding of the research process received scores of 70-82 (1.7 – 2.7).  Finally, students who were seen as demonstrating an inadequate understanding of the research process received scores 69 and below (0 – 1.3).  Based on these criteria, 15 students demonstrated a thorough understanding of the basic concepts and processes, 4 students demonstrated an adequate understanding of the basic concepts and processes, and 0 students demonstrated an inadequate understanding of the basic concepts and processes.

These data indicate that by the time they complete the capstone course, virtually all of our students have developed an understanding of the research process and the ability to design a research proposal on a topic of their choosing

**SECTION 4.**

**CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the evidence collected, the general conclusion is that the Department of Communication Studies is successfully completing all of the learning goals it has identified. Examining the data carefully, there are a number of specific observations that are noteworthy in this report as well. First, it is worthy of note that every student included in the assessment of our capstone course exhibited at least an adequate ability to develop an independent research project. That is a data point we did not have available in previous assessment reports and it reflects very well on the effectiveness of our curriculum as a whole. Both the knowledge base and holistic, critical thinking necessary to develop a research proposal are built through a series of courses, not just one. Second, the replacement of the general goal focused simply on application of communication theory that was included in previous reports with a series of focused goals associated with our three major tracks has given us a much more targeted picture of our effectiveness and the our preliminary data on these goals is very positive. While assessment of these targeted goals is an area we can continue to develop (see below), our initial assessment indicates that we are meeting our learning goals in these areas. Finally, as discussed in last year’s report, our faculty have a clear, shared understanding of our departmental learning goals and each of is continually mindful of those goals as we develop courses. As a result, everyone recognizes the value of assessment and is committed to developing a culture of assessment in the department.

**IMPROVEMENTS**

In spite of our commitment to effective assessment, no assessment plan is perfect and we have identified several areas of improvement on which to focus in the future. First, in last year’s report we discussed the development of an exit survey to be completed by our outgoing seniors. We essentially piloted a version of this survey last year, learned several things from that pilot, and have revamped the survey for this year. The new version explicitly questions outgoing seniors regarding the effectiveness of the department at accomplishing each of our seven learning goals. We will include the results in our 2011-2012 report. One shortcoming of our current assessment method is that multiple courses can meet the major/minor requirement of taking at least one course in each of the three emphasis areas. Common assessment is comparatively easy in our common core courses because all majors and minors must take these specific courses. Therefore Goals 1, 2, and 7 are assessed using measures that apply equally to all students. The remaining, track-specific goals are more complicated to assess. The senior exit survey data will provide indicators of our effectiveness in these targeted areas that will apply to all majors and minors equally (similar to what we have for the common core goals). It should be noted, however, that this was the first year for assessment of those targeted goals and some learning curve should be expected.

In addition to the use of the senior exit survey, we plan to continually evaluate our indicators and to make changes when we feel they are warranted. One area we plan to evaluate next year is our use of embedded questions. While these have worked well in the past, we plan to explore the use of other assignments and more comprehensive measures for future assessment. We will also continue to work on developing additional indicators for the new learning goals that were implemented this year. Finally, we hope to continue to work toward tracking alumni and monitoring post-graduation effectiveness. Over the past two years we have really started working toward this goal, but it does take time to really establish effective systems for that type of tracking. Hopefully, data gathered through our senior surveys will aid in this.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

As a first time chair preparing this report, I felt I had little guidance. When I looked over assessment reports from other departments, there seemed to be little consistency from one to the next. Personally, I would like to receive more guidance regarding the structure and content of these reports. Perhaps some sort of common form would be helpful. If these resources already exist, I apologize and regret that I was unable to find them.

**Submitted by: Jeremy L. Osborn**

**Date: April 28, 2011**