

Millikin University
Student Learning in the Communication Major
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Executive Summary

The Department of Communication at Millikin University is committed to providing a market-smart, challenging, and high quality major to students with a variety of professional and personal aspirations. We celebrate and inform our students about the wide variety of ways a major in communication can prepare them for a future life of meaning and value.

Communication is about the construction of meaning between people and their various stakeholders: friends, families, professional colleagues, communities, and more. The study of communication focuses on understanding the symbols and the processes that construct those meanings, whether the symbol is a word, a gesture, a song, a billboard, a website, or any other meaning-generating object in our world. We also examine the relationship of those symbols to the people who use them. We examine the pragmatic and ethical principles that guide people's communicative choices. We apply this learning to our personal and professional lives.

Consequently, the University's goals of professional success, citizenship in a global environment, and a life of personal meaning and value are manifest in the Communication department's goal to enable students to become effective problem-solvers, critics, and practitioners in their personal and professional communities. This is accomplished through classroom learning, research projects and practical application of service learning, internship projects, and media lab activities that help make these abstract ideas come alive.

Student skills and knowledge are assessed using a variety of techniques in the Department of Communication. Information is gathered through various sources and contexts: student exit interviews, internship evaluations, course evaluations, assignment evaluations, and the senior year capstone course and portfolio.

This past year work focused on four areas: 1) Curriculum review and redesign and 2) Development of an introductory video production class; 3) Exploration of moving WJMU to the forthcoming new student center; 4) Assessment of CO 101.

First, the department continued the work of a curriculum review and redesign. The redesigned curriculum was completed, proposed and approved by all the requisite university constituents. To recap, the Communication Department initiated a curriculum review starting in January 2014. Since the curriculum was last revised in 2006 and implemented in 2007, the new chair as of 2013, Dr. Nancy Curtin, determined it was time to conduct another curriculum review with the help of the full-time faculty. The curriculum will be completely implemented in August 2015 for all new majors.

Secondly, as stated in last year's assessment report (2013-2014), the video equipment was inadequate and thus, the lack of adequate camera equipment was considered a significant threat to the video production area of the major. There have been plans to resurrect the course

in spring 2015. This plan was accomplished. Dr. Curtin proposed to the Provost a need for video equipment and request for money to purchase video equipment. Through the Provost's work, the Provost awarded \$3000 to the Communication Department to purchase video equipment. Five digital cameras and accessories were purchased with this money. The spring 2015 introductory to video class enrolled 13 students, just two students short of the the maximum amount for this class.

Third, the Provost and the WJMU General Manager begun discussions about possible future location sites for WJMU since the current location will be re-purposed for another, yet to be determined use. The latest plan is for WJMU to re-locate to the new forthcoming student center.

Finally, this report includes new assessment data of CO 101, an assesement that has not been done in the recent past. This assessment of CO 101 is delineated and discussed on page 12 of this report.

Communication Department Goals

The drive to communicate forms the basis for human social behavior and is a critical element of any organization or field of employment, regardless of technological advancement or changes. Our department's commitment to the University mission of preparing students for professional success, democratic citizenship in a global environment, and a personal life of meaning and value is accomplished through a variety of discipline-specific learning objectives. Graduates with a Communication degree achieve the goal of professional success by becoming effective problem-solvers, critics, and practitioners in their professional communities. Our objective in addressing democratic citizenship in a global environment is to help students develop an appreciation for the power of symbols, awareness of the complexity of ethical choices in communication endeavors, and an understanding of the opportunities and constraints of technology. Classroom experiences, service learning, and internships are designed to challenge everyday assumptions about communication in a rapidly changing world. Finally, our objective in addressing a personal life of meaning and value is to enable students to become effective problem-solvers, critics, and practitioners in their personal communities.

More precisely, upon graduation, students who major in Communication will be able to demonstrate communicative competence in three areas:

1. Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate in personal, scholarly, and professional contexts through appropriate verbal, nonverbal, and mediated formats before diverse and varied audiences.
2. Students will distinguish the theories pertinent to communication studies and demonstrate the skills needed to create, present, analyze, and evaluate messages in relevant contexts.
3. Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills when generating, consuming, and evaluating messages in communication contexts.

Successful majors in Communication move into careers in media, sales, training and development, public relations, recruiting, human resources, business, and publishing. Recent graduates are currently pursuing graduate work, working for radio and TV stations, planning media events, working in universities, organizing PR campaigns, etc. A strong liberal arts background and intensive work in all aspects of communication uniquely qualify communication graduates for these positions. We expect that majors who have mastered the program learning objectives will, at a minimum, be successfully employed in their chosen field and/or successfully perform in any master's or doctoral program.

These departmental learning goals match well with Millikin's University-wide learning goals:

1. Millikin students will prepare for professional success.
2. Millikin students will actively engage in the responsibilities of citizenship in their communities.
3. Millikin students will discover and develop a personal life of meaning and value.

The table below shows how Communication Department learning goals relate to the University-wide learning goals:

Learning Goal	Corresponding MU Learning Goal Number(s)
Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate in personal, scholarly, and/or professional contexts through appropriate verbal, nonverbal, and mediated formats.	1, 3
Students will distinguish the theories pertinent to communication studies and demonstrate the skills needed to create, present, analyze, and evaluate messages in relevant contexts.	1, 2
Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills when generating, consuming, and evaluating messages in relevant communication contexts.	2, 3

Communication Department Snapshot

The Communication department in 2013-2014 consisted of 4 full-time faculty and 5 adjuncts that helped deliver approximately 60 traditional and PACE classes for the year. We ended the Spring 2015 semester with about 100 majors. In addition to majors and minors, we also service students throughout the University who take our courses to satisfy their general education requirements in public speaking, and sequential elements (University Seminar). Students are also required to take communication courses by the Tabor School of Business and for the secondary language arts degree requirements in the School of Education. Various faculty and programs often encourage students to take communication courses for enrichment or remedial purposes. In addition to courses in the major, Communication faculty also taught courses listed

in IN 251 U.S. Studies, International Cultures and Structures, January and May immersion courses, and in the PACE adult degree completion program by providing courses for the Organizational Leadership major and general education needs.

The Communication department currently occupies offices on the 4th floor of Shilling Hall and shares a secretary with the Political Science Department and Math Department. In addition, the Communication Department has a video-editing lab in the basement of Staley Library and a radio broadcast facility in the basement of the Richards Treat University Center, including office space for a faculty member who also serves as general manager for the radio station. Editing equipment and software have been upgraded in the two facilities in the past five years including automation hardware/software for the radio station in January 2009.

The Communication Major

The Department of Communication completed this past year a self-study of its current curriculum and successfully passed through University governance a new curriculum structure that goes into effect in Fall 2015. After thorough review of existing classes and curriculum structure, three concentrations were modified and adjustments were made in the curriculum in areas of writing and ethics. The three concentrations (Media Studies, Public Relations, and Organizational Communication) now reflect a stronger, diverse, flexible and more in-depth curriculum targeted to that concentration. The diversity and choice of course options allows some flexibility for majors to complete a concentration even if they declare the major relatively late in their college tenure.

We dropped a fourth concentration, Sports Communication. Given the number of faculty and their teaching expertise, it was not feasible to offer a quality, in-depth Sports Communication concentration.

As of Spring 2015, there were 98 majors with over 50% declaring a concentration (55 majors). The breakdown of students in those tracks shows the distribution of interest in each track although students are taking courses throughout the Communication department curriculum in electives and for other professional reasons. The group ending in Spring 2015 (which does not reflect graduating Spring 2015 seniors or incoming Fall 2015 freshman) included: 30 Public Relations; 6 Organizational Communication; 16 Mass Media; 4 Sport Communication; and 42 without a track designation. Many students do not identify a track until late in the process, but the current distribution shows where the bulk of the students see their professional aspirations heading.

As of Fall 2011, Communication majors have the opportunity to complete their communication program with a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) or Bachelor of Sciences (B.S.) degree. This option was created to allow students access to a degree program that was more appropriate to their skills, professional aspirations, and academic preparation. This option is also seen as an advantage to students transferring into the department from other universities/colleges or other majors at Millikin. This change has been very successful for student access to the major. The 2014-15 group of majors have approximately 36 students with the B.S. degree, and 62 with the B.A. Other double majors might have a program in another college.

Oral Communication: General Education Requirement

In the Fall of 2007, the Millikin University faculty passed a new curricular structure including general education requirements. All students must now have an oral communication course under the new general education requirements. This requirement began with students entering Millikin University in the Fall of 2008. Thus, the university is entering into its 7th year with this requirement.

The Department offered 22 sections of oral communication courses (CO 200 and CO 242) in the 2014-2015 school year between the traditional program and PACE. The breakdown is as follows:

- Fall 2014: 2 sections of CO 242; 9 sections of CO 200
- Spring 2015: 2 sections of CO 242; 7 sections of CO 200
- PACE: 2 sections (1 each) of CO 242 in Fall 2014 and Spring 2015

Part-time, adjunct teachers taught all sections, with the exception of one section, of the oral communication requirement. The number of sections decreased from the previous year, reflecting lower enrollment numbers at the university. Employing part-time faculty allowed the department to quickly and easily contract the number of sections, which enabled flexibility in the number of sections delivered. Even though this approach to deliver the oral communication program is seemingly cost-effective, it is not without other "costs" or ramifications.

Although the department values the quality and commitment of its adjunct faculty, the lack of administrative support for full-time faculty to help teach this general education requirement does not demonstrate strong commitment to this general education requirement. In comparison, full-time, tenure line or tenured faculty teach a majority of all other general education courses. A review of the assessment reports by the other general education areas will confirm this observation.

The current full time faculty cannot contribute significantly to the oral communication requirement teaching load without further eroding the access students in the major have to terminal degreed faculty. The department is simply understaffed for the FTE it generates. Adjunct faculty are currently teaching the equivalent of five additional full time faculty for the department. A department of this size and with this level of contribution should not have one half of its coursework taught by adjunct faculty.

The internship requirement is also an important part of the learning process for our majors. This requirement contributes to developing the student's goal of achieving professional success after graduation. It also supports the University's mission of performance learning. Our students practice their communication training in real life situations and for actual organizations. The department generates significant credit hours through internship experiences. For 2014-2015 (summer and fall 2014; spring 2015), students generated 109 credit hours for internships. This requirement is unique on this campus and it has been an asset for students seeking employment after graduation.

Communication Department Learning Story

The Communication Department combines diverse perspectives to investigate the social creation and management of meaning through delivery of the Communication major, B.A. or B.S. degree. The major in communication builds upon a critical foundation that blends theory, methodology, and practice to prepare students for more serious study in their own area of interest. We study the interplay of messages and audience in a variety of contexts. Students develop an appreciation for the power of symbols, awareness of the complexity of ethical choices in communication endeavors, and an understanding of the opportunities and constraints of technology. Course work in theory and methods central to the investigation and understanding of communication processes provides majors with tools for more intensive study in areas such as media production, public relations, relational communication, organizational culture, and social issues. Thus, our curriculum and its corresponding pedagogy fully incorporate the University's mission of professionalism, citizenship, and a life of meaning and value, and it is intentionally designed to challenge everyday assumptions about communication in a rapidly changing world.

The Communication major ending in spring 2014 consists of a minimum of 34 credit hours, consisting of 16 hours in the foundation and 18 hours of Communication electives, 9 of which should be numbered 300 or above. All communication majors begin their studies with an introduction to communication theory, after which they may select any required and elective course work, provided the prerequisites for the higher-level courses are completed. Our curriculum uses a non-hierarchical organization schema that allows for maximal flexibility in designing individualized plans of study. There are a few courses that do build onto each other in stages, for example: multiple public relations, video or radio production, organizational communication, and media courses. Majors are required to use an internship experience to round out their classroom experience. To that end, the department has a communication department internship coordinator who assists students in fulfilling this objective. Thus, communication majors are able to tailor their major both to explore their interests and construct a plan of study germane to their intellectual and career interests.

Students join the communication major at many different times during a Millikin University experience. As an incoming freshman, transfer student, change of major, second major, or interdisciplinary student; our majors have a variety of demands to make on our curriculum. With its flexibility, and as a small department with limited offerings, we are able to advise and teach students at all stages of their Millikin University experience.

As stated earlier, the department revised its curriculum in 2014-2015 in light of data and experience through self-evaluation, student feedback, and industry and disciplinary trends. The new curriculum structure offers clear concentrations in three areas of the major, it expands its emphasis on written communication skills, requires an internship experience for the professional development of all majors, and integrates ethical reasoning into the department's core course requirements. Our concentration programs have been a way to improve our major in the following ways:

- Students have a stronger identity for their major and professional goals.
- The concentrations have aided in the process of advising majors.

- The concentrations have directed students to take more advanced coursework in their areas instead of a general set of choices.
- The concentrations also help to recruit new students. Many of our applicants identify a specific concentration in their admissions profile.

The three tracks are designed to help students find greater meaning and interconnectedness in their curricular choices. Any students, for whom these tracks do not fully meet their requirements, may choose another combination of courses with the consent of their advisor and the department chair. The tracks and their professional intentions include:

- **Public Relations:** Communication careers in public relations include a wide variety of professional settings in corporations, non-profit organizations, professional associations, government agencies, and public relations firms. Students combine coursework in public relations, organizational communication, advanced writing courses, and applied internship experiences to prepare them for successful careers.
- **Media Studies:** Media students focus on radio and/or television production in addition to theory and professional practice in the media environment. Many media majors are involved with the student-run radio station, WJMU or the campus newspaper, *The Decaturian*.
- **Organizational Communication:** Students in the organizational communication track develop communications skills vital for the professional workplace. Coursework in leadership, conflict management, organizational communication and small group communication prepare students for a wide range of careers. Courses in management, marketing, and other areas from the University may be incorporated into this major track.

Throughout these concentrations we have expanded the writing requirements for many majors, incorporated a senior-level internship experience, and approved inclusion of courses from other departments that might enhance our own concentrations including coursework from the departments of Art, English, Psychology, Entrepreneurship and Marketing. Our students are also required to complete a 1-credit capstone course in conjunction with the internship experience designed to provide reflection, assessment, and preparation for future professional activities.

A communication program in the twenty-first century must be prepared to engage every facet of communicative competency from the physiology of sign production to the politics of institution formation and legitimation. A fully functional university program in communication must provide:

- First courses, non-remedial first courses, appropriate to the maturity and self-reflective habits of traditional university aged students and adult learners, instilling meta-vocabularies of risk, effects, and critique
- Skill courses, especially in the arts of public communication
- Intermediate and advanced courses, with special support for skill building, in interpersonal, small group, and organizational communication
- Initial and advanced courses in media production

- Specific preparation for the norms and standards of specific communication professions and industries
- Research methods training
- Creative outlets for student performance
- Courses in discourse in historical and comparative contexts, especially as related to the dominant institutions of society
- Ample opportunities to practice communication skills and knowledge in real world settings, to engage in performance learning in the spirit of the Millikin University mission
- Developing leadership for communication industries

The Millikin Department of Communication has done all of these things, and the current faculty see tremendous demand that it does these things more, and in increasingly sophisticated market-driven ways, and that there are extraordinary opportunities that remain to express leadership in communication education and win the rewards that go with that leadership.

Assessment Methods & Analysis of Assessment Results

The Communication Department assesses student skills and knowledge using a variety of techniques. One of our assessment goals is to create a consistent, ongoing assessment process to improve the quality and quantity of data useful to our department for program development and growth. Assessment data will be gathered from the following sources and contexts:

- **Student Interviews:** A random sample of students is interviewed each year. These have included exit interviews for graduating seniors, discussions held with student leadership, and student feedback provided in the capstone course.
- **Internship Evaluations:** Communication majors are encouraged to have at least one internship experience. At the end of the internship, students, supervisors, and the faculty advisor evaluates the intern's performance. These evaluations will provide us with data from several different perspectives about the students' professional competence and their ability to apply coursework in the professional arena. The internship advisor also collects informal data as she places student interns and checks in with employers.
- **Assignment Evaluations:** Assessment of particular assignments to track implementation of learning goals is planned. Each year, a select set of courses and assignments will be evaluated for their contribution to the major and to student learning.
- **Student Activities/Experiences:** Assessment of experiential activities will also take place at regular intervals to assess the contributions of departmental opportunities outside of the traditional classroom. The student radio station provides on-campus media experience to students, both majors and non-majors. Lambda Pi Eta provides students with professional exposure and networking opportunities.
- **Capstone Project/Course:** All graduating seniors are to prepare a portfolio of their work at Millikin with a focus on their major. The department plans to assess these portfolios as an individual assignment and as a measure of meeting the goals of the department. Additional assignments in the capstone course may also be assessed.

Based on our departmental learning goals, a curriculum map has been created to illustrate the contributions of individual courses to student learning.

Core Courses	Learning Goal #1 Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate in personal, scholarly, and/or professional contexts through appropriate verbal, nonverbal, and mediated formats.	Learning Goal #2 Students will distinguish the theories pertinent to communication studies and demonstrate the skills needed to create, present, analyze, and evaluate messages in relevant contexts	Learning Goal #3 Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills when generating, consuming, and evaluating messages in relevant communication contexts.
CO 101 Introduction to Communication Theory		x	
CO 104 Argument and Social Issues	x		x
CO 200 Public Speaking	x	x	
CO 204 Investigative Methods in Communication		x	x
CO 308 Communication Ethics & Freedom of Expression		x	x
CO 47x Communication Internship	x	x	x
CO 480 Capstone Experiential Learning Seminar (1 credit)	x		x

Elective Courses	Learning Goal #1 Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate in personal, scholarly, and/or professional contexts through appropriate verbal, nonverbal, and	Learning Goal #2 Students will distinguish the theories pertinent to communication studies and demonstrate the skills needed to create, present, analyze, and evaluate messages in	Learning Goal #3 Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills when generating, consuming, and evaluating messages in relevant communication contexts.
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	mediated formats.	relevant contexts	
CO 100 Interpersonal Communication	x	x	
CO 110 Introduction to Radio Industry	x		x
CO 120 Media Aesthetics		x	x
CO 181-5 Communication Practicum	x		
CO 220 Introduction to Video Production	x	x	x
CO 225 Issues in Mass Media		x	x
CO 242 Business and Professional Communication	x	x	
CO 251 Introduction to Public Relations	x	x	
CO 260 Seminar in Communication		x	x
CO 306 Topics in Discourse Studies		x	x
CO 310 Small Group Communication	x	x	
CO 314 Advanced Radio Production and Performance	x		x
CO 324 Advanced Video Production	x		
CO 331 Relational Communication	x	x	x

Elective Courses	Learning Goal #1 Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate in personal, scholarly, and/or professional contexts through appropriate verbal, nonverbal, and mediated formats.	Learning Goal #2 Students will distinguish the theories pertinent to communication studies and demonstrate the skills needed to create, present, analyze, and evaluate messages in relevant contexts	Learning Goal #3 Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills when generating, consuming, and evaluating messages in relevant communication contexts.
CO 332 Gendered Communication	x	x	x
CO 341 Organizational Culture	x	x	
CO 342 Applications in Organizational Comm	x	x	x
CO 343 Communication and Conflict	x		x
CO 344 Leadership	x	x	
CO 351 Topics in Writing for Communication Professions	x	x	x
CO 360 Seminar in Communication		x	x
CO 371-4 Communication Internship	x		x
CO 391-4 Independent Study		x	x
CO 401 Topics in Persuasion		x	x
CO 425 Media Law and Policy		x	x
CO 432 Intercultural Communication	x	x	x
CO 456 Applications in Public Relations	x	x	x

An Initial Assessment of CO101

Beginning in Autumn 2015 the Department of Communication will require six experiences of every major: Introduction to Communication Theory, Research Methods in Communication, an advanced writing course beyond the all-University IN150/151 requirement, an ethics course (for most of our majors, by far, in recent years, Communication Ethics and Freedom of Expression), and a combined senior internship and capstone. It is time to begin assessing, where feasible, these experiences. Toward this end, we have made initial steps in assessing CO101 Introduction to Communication Theory in 2014-2015.

The Millikin Plan for Student Learning asked every instructional unit of the University to begin undergraduate majors with a theory course, require at least one course in research methods, provide at least one off-campus learning opportunity, and conclude with a capstone experience. The Department of Communication was one of the earliest and remains one of the purest adopters of this plan. Since 1999 all majors have been required to complete as their first course CO101 Introduction to Communication Theory. This is not the norm in U.S. higher education among Communication departments. Indeed, it is rare. Many Communication programs still begin undergraduate majors with public speaking or a "hybrid" performance course that requires public speaking, small group, and interpersonal experiences. Some others require an "introduction to communication" which combines a tour of the field as academic specialties and / or as a set of careers. Some Departments have several places to begin their undergraduate major. The Millikin Department of Communication has been fairly disciplined about CO101 being the first thing students take, making it a pre-requisite for almost all other Communication courses, and making it required even for transfers who may believe they have taken something equivalent at her or his previous school. Introduction to Communication Theory is an experience Millikin Communication majors have "in common."

There are plain limits in this first attempt to assess learning in CO101. Different instructors teach the course, and teach varying contents when they do. Instructors in the course evaluate students in different ways. We would never want to violate our teachers' autonomy in what they teach and how they evaluate their students, so likely will never have data for assessment that provides strict comparability over time and / or measure against an externally recognized standard. Outsiders looking in might be surprised to learn that university-level teachers of communication do not agree on the subject matter of communication theory. Some think of communication theory as specific propositions about communication behaviors in context, about which generalizations may be verified experimentally. There are a great many such theories. Some who teach the course might think of it as the field of communication's conversation about communication theory, with special emphasis on the thought of leading thinkers and key terminology. Others might think of communication theory as a relatively discrete set of questions about the function of communication in the lives of human beings; this might include moral / critical consideration of the mis-, mal-, and non-function of communication. A few communication teachers might take communication theory as an endeavor of *thaumazein*—"wonder"—interrogating the experience of communication and speculating boldly on why there is communication in the universe, how it is possible, and what are its constituents. Such a course might pose more questions than it reveals answers. Given such a wide variety of approaches, there is no hope of obtaining strict comparability in assessment in a course entitled "Introduction to Communication Theory."

But if we cannot achieve comparability, then we can achieve responsibility in assessment: honestly saying what we have taught, asking colleagues if it is useful to have this foundation, looking at artifacts of student learning to see if the students *understood* the material, are able to *apply* the ideas in novel situations, and *elaborate* on its implications. We expect students to ask of a communication theory (1) if it fits all and only the data of actual human communication, (2) if it is useful in making effective choices in applied communication situations, and (3) what are the moral implications of living under the horizon of seeing communication among human beings through the lens of this generalization.

We tend to assume students *understand* what we have taught unless there is a reason to believe they have not understood, and we think students are most likely to *apply* theory beyond discussion in subsequent courses and later in life. In this course we are very interested in our student's ability to *elaborate* communication theory. The word "elaboration" is itself an important term in communication theory. In the shortest possible version, human communication competency is not "repeating" but adding a novel example, making a contrast, drawing a distinction, seeing an exception, making a qualification, developing an analogy, evaluating the confidence with which can make a statement, expressing one's own limitations in understanding and expressing, etc., through a variety of speech acts. The highly competent student of communication theory is able to do these things, not as a matter of verbal formula, but in substantially advancing the understanding of the material taught or the question asked.

In 2014-2015 Introduction to Communication Theory was taught by one instructor on a syllabus that changed only slightly from Fall to Spring terms. In a very drastic reduction the content of the course was: sophistry, the meaning of "rhetoric," the enthymeme and audience centered discourse, Aristotle on inquiry, judgment and typologies of discourse, an Aristotelian communication model, the information processing "feedback" model of communication, Jakobson's functional model of communication, theories of the origin of language, formality and informality in wholesome and degraded information environments, elocutionist performative theories of communication, "effects" in communication research, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and the problem of incommensurability, general semantics and language reform, the Marx-Freud synthesis in critical communication theory, McLuhan on the meaning of "media" and the history of communication technology, Burke on motivations behind symbolism, Watzlawick's axioms, Goffmann's interaction rituals, and postmodernity as a communication problem. In addition, some academic terms there are considerations of the communication definition of intimacy, possible differences in the communication of women and men, disagreement and contradiction as access points to communicative competency, ambiguity, the so-called "spiral of silence," basic semiotic concepts, ideology, and the possibility of "dialogue" or qualitatively better communication. The Millikin Program for Student Learning asked instructors to use real books and research articles rather than textbooks, so in this instructor's version of CO101 students read Aristotle, Jakobson, Rosenstock-Huessy, Horkheimer and Adorno, Burke, McLuhan, Watzlawick, etc.

With all this in mind we went through the final essay examinations of the students in Introduction to Communication Theory in Spring 2015. Did the student writing "come up" to what had been taught? That is, were they able to "jump off" from course concepts and use those concepts competently and comfortably, applying / challenging / improving the ideas as they wrote? Did the students grasp the importance of what was taught, its reach into their daily lives and the lives of other people? Were student answers informed by the ethos of

communication studies in the figures of the sophist, social scientist, critic, and content producer / programmer?

In Spring 2015 the final examination for CO101 consisted of six essays, of which the students answered two in one hour, and then an oral examination in which students answered their own questions they had submitted, in front of the class. Two of the essay questions were:

McLuhan says the media is the message. The basic feedback model of communication says this is nonsense. Who is correct, McLuhan or the feedback model, and why, and why is it important to answer this question properly?

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in *The Spiral of Silence* asserts that each of us has an "internal" public opinion checker that measures the relative safety we would enjoy in expressing a political or other preference publicly. If you have one of these devices, elaborate an example of how this has worked for you. If you do not have one of these checkers, elaborate an example of how you have been clueless about what other people think about a potentially controversial matter, and how that played out for you.

Comments in bold assess the elaboration in student answers. Spelling, capitalization, usage, paragraphing, and punctuation have been retained from the original artifacts.

A strong answer to the McLuhan question:

Both McLuhan and the feedback model have a valid point. McLuhan's idea that media is the message might be a bit extreme, assuming the content of the message is not important at all. **A mis-characterization of McLuhan, motivated by the instructor's explanation of the "medium is the message" aphorism.** He does, however, give us the idea that while watching television, we get a different experience than listening to radio or reading a book. **The vocabulary of "experience" is a sophisticated one.**

It is important to recognize the flaw's in McLuhan's theory, because it can lead to negative or even disastrous thoughts. **We want to see students signal the importance of what they are writing, especially if they can follow through.** If media is the message, then the technology around us dictates who we are. This idea of technological determinism is a negative, false statement. **The notion of technological determinism *is* a profound one, and a surprise to find it in this student answer since it was only addressed briefly in class.** It is in the feedback model where we find salvation, because we are able to participate in communication. We have a say in how we respond to messages (feedback) and are not dictated by what we consume. Indeed, this is more enlightening and empowering than McLuhan's theories. **Most of us teachers like to see the thought completed, advanced, in this case from a threatening to a promising language. The answer is *not* strong in explanation, but handles the theory taught confidently with a clear focus on the significance of the ideas.**

Here is an answer to the same question that loses focus on the theory and wanders into defuse complaints that may be about the mass media or may have something to do with the question asked.

McLuhan says the media is the message and the feedback model of communication says this is nonsense. So, who is right? **In this course the instructor works to get students to stop arguing in questions. Here and in what follows it is easy to see the emptiness of this attempt at exposition.** When people read a newspaper all they get out of it is newspaperness. **This explanation is taught in the course.** They don't get anything more. **This is not taught in the course, is not true, and undermines rest of the answer.** When someone talks about the media, it is a given they are talking about tv, radio, or text. People watch or listen or read media everyday but is that communicating? **Here and following, an assumption about quality communication haunts this answer, and brings the student to say a series of obviously untrue things, and to say them righteously.** There isn't a deeper meaning behind the media. They aren't communicating back to what might be communicating to them. I think the feedback model is right. People might become informed after reading the newspaper. But there is no real communicating going on. When reading the newspaper all one gets out of it is newspaperness. For one to think watching the news is communicating they are wrong. How many times have I seen my dad watch the news and fall asleep in his chair? This happens because there isn't any communicating going on. He stares at the screen and listens, but he doesn't have any response back. It is important to know that media is not the message. Everyone is so fixated on the media that they turn to it for everything. **The student probably needs a "uses and gratifications" theory to get out of the *cul de sac* in which she or he circles. But this is not a complete course in "media theory," and the student does not have this resource.** Well that shouldn't be the case. Media gives you nothing. You can't communicate with it, and it doesn't give you anything with depth. So with that being said the feedback model is correct. It is nonsense to think media is the message. **The final two sentences pretend to be a strong conclusion, but in the absence of an explication of what "media" and "message" mean in the feedback model, they are *non sequitur*.**

Here is an excellent answer to the Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann question.

When we learned about Elisabeth Noelle Neumann's "internal public opinion checker" I could very much relate to her idea on why we stay silent about certain subjects. I feel that I have a very strong checker in me, whether it is because I am part of the millennial generation or some inborn temperament of not wanting to "rock the boat." **The *origin* of this phenomenon had not been broached in the class; both explanations are original to the student and aside from the question asked.**

A lot of the time the reason I think my public opinion checker goes into high gear depends on stimuli from metacommunication. Along with what people verbally tell me about their beliefs my public opinion checker takes into account the situation I am in. It takes into account the facial expressions and body language of the person I am talking to and the situation in which I am placed. **It is gratifying to see the course concept of "meta-communication" make an appearance in this answer, though not an overemphasis on meta-communications in non-verbal communication. The student is not mistaken to make this connection, but errs in thinking the one thing is central to the other.** Most of the time when I am speaking with someone that I know won't judge me too harshly or without justifiable cause or I am in a room or situation where I am comfortable speaking my internal opinion checker takes a back seat.

For example, with some of my friends I would not choose to talk about politics. Many of my friends are of the opposite political party than I so if they are speaking about the democratic candidate running for election my internal checker will notify me this is a hostile situation in which to question their beliefs or even bring up a republican candidate without even an attempt at any insult. Even bringing up another opinion isn't a good idea.

However, even when speaking of a controversial topic with someone like my family, my radar of her opinion is usually disregarded. For example, my mother and I have different opinions on homosexuality (my mother being extremely against it). But I don't stay silent for fear of insulting her even if she does get angry. Perhaps this may be due to the fact that I know that though my family and I have different opinions we are rarely the type to break ties over those opinions. **The family example can be a problem for this theory, because it is a theory of public opinion.** There is also a sort of external indicator depending on the media and peers that keep us silent and we use these external forces in our internal judgment of public opinion through what our friends say and what the news tells us, relying on what "they" think when we don't even know who "they" are. **This last sentence shows the student understands the truly public character of the theory and the paradoxical nature of the phenomenon in which people act out of the fear of other people who they do not know and do not know what those other people think.**

I think at some points it is important to know when to turn this public opinion monitor off to be able to spark debate and conversation. Otherwise we will end up going in circles through, as the title of Noelle Neuman's book states—"the spiral of silence." **This last thought, a mischaracterization of Noelle-Neumann's spiral which is always in motion, is a worthwhile homily on resisting conformity.**

Here is an answer to the Noelle Neumann question that confuses the theory's address of the problem of public conformity with family conflict.

I most definitely have an internal opinion. **The student does not begin with the correct vocabulary of the theory, sloppily addressing something broader and less focused than the theory.** There are dozens of times when in an argument with a group, I have an excellent point to get across but I don't speak up and let everyone else do the talking. **A number of things might cause not speaking in these student conversations, and it is unclear if the reason in his case has anything to do with the phenomenon Noelle-Neumann describes.** This actually tends to happen a lot in my life. For a very personal example, the fights I have with my parents about sexism and unfairness in the house with my sister. This has been an ongoing fight for probably a good 7 years. My sister is 4 years older than me yet she does little work because she is deemed the angel of the family. It leaves me to do all the cores and work around the house. When speaking up, the issue resolves with me losing but also my father's rebuttal of, she does other things. Which I know is a lie. The amount of times I'd like to call my father out for being sexist is quite a lot but I feel no matter what I'll say I'll lose the battle anyway. I know my reasons for being angry are right but it doesn't matter and I get put in the position I was before. Sure, I may get some weight lifted off my chest if I say it but that's about the only reward I'll get. **Apparently in this family scenario the student does speak up, does disagree vocally; this a description of**

losing a conflict, not the public communication conformity the theory was meant to describe.

Working through these and other final exam items illustrates that some of the students in CO101 are well on their way to understanding, applying, and elaborating the concepts read and discussed in class; others are on a path toward these goals. In some cases the disciplines of mind to use the vocabulary of the theories, see examples of a theory in one's own experience, ask questions about the sufficiency of the theory, draw distinctions among possible instances of a theory, and anticipate the implications and importance of the theory—all speak to a student's preparation for theoretical thinking before they take the class, before they come to Millikin. Improving Introduction to Communication Theory may depend on making students more self-conscious about these theoretical "moves" as much or more as getting them to know "more" theory or theories.

Synopsis

Based on current levels of assessment, we have compiled the following results concerning our majors. Our assessment efforts rate a yellow on the Red-Yellow-Green scale being used to evaluate assessment efforts. We have a strong grasp of our program's strengths and weaknesses. Our assessment resources and experience are limited. Progress has been made on assessment of our delivery of the oral communication requirement. We have three years of more developed assessment and the results from that assessment are encouraging. The data from that assessment is provided in a separate report for general education purposes. From the department's perspective, one of the greatest dangers facing the program's quality is the absence of full-time faculty teaching including assessment experience for the program. Other general education programs have full-time faculty teaching and a program coordinator with release time and support for program assessment. This general education requirement does not have the same resources allocated to its teaching or assessment.

We have experienced a wide range of feedback from students about the communication program. Some if it is beyond the control of the department and reflect shortfalls of administrated support in the areas of faculty and equipment. One example would be video equipment. For four-five years requests have been made to upgrade and develop these resources and those requests have been denied. Another example, no member of the department has release time to perform assessment responsibilities. The small size and limited faculty size makes assessment difficult. The department size has also been further reduced many years for a variety of reasons, for example, in the last four of five years, the Department has had one faculty member teaching for Millikin University in London or on a sabbatical leave for a semester. New teaching and advising duties were the priority for the department during these short-handed periods. In the Spring of 2010, both senior faculty members taught a fifth course in response to the University's financial crisis concerning instructional resources. Faculty are advising 30-40 students each and spend significant time helping to advise and mentor student majors. Time, resources, and opportunities for assessment are limited. Results of current assessment efforts include:

Student Exit Interviews

The chair of the department conducted interviews with approximately 25 students enrolled in the capstone course and planning to graduate from the department in December 2014, May 2015, or anticipating graduation in August 2015. Students were generally positive about their overall experience with the University and the Department of Communication. These interviews have been valuable sources of information on our students. Many of the changes made over the years in the department have started with student recommendations that occurred with the capstone interview or reflection paper. This process has resulted in almost every student being interviewed prior to graduation. Some of the more frequent and valuable comments are summarized below:

- Advising was highly praised by graduates from the major. On average, students were pleased that the department made an effort to help them graduate on time and that curricular and advising resources were available to make that possible. Students felt that their departmental advisor, the department secretary, and Registrar's office were meeting their advising needs. Ordinarily, freshmen receive an advisor who follows them through their four years in the major. Many students reported getting help on advising issues from multiple members of the Communication faculty, not just a single advisor. All full-time faculty are prepared for and expected to assist students with advising issues during their time in the department. Students described the advising experience in our department much more favorably than other departments they had transferred from prior to becoming communication majors. Many students mentioned that they have had multiple meetings during the semester with their advisor and that advising extended well beyond scheduling. Students received assistance in their career planning, with issues concerning their courses and university services, study abroad, graduate school, and with other academic and personal challenges. This success has been possible despite communication faculty advising as many as 30 or more advisees each semester.
- Many students referenced at least one favorite faculty member and/or course in the department and recognized the collegiality and support Communication faculty provide to students and to each other. The variety of courses and faculty described demonstrated a breadth of courses and teaching styles that students found attractive and that helped them to succeed. Students in the major usually have at the minimum three of our full-time faculty in their major program, many have all of us at one time or another as they move through the program. The range of courses was interesting. The individual courses were important but so was their teaching style and success at contributing to student learning. Many of the core courses were included in their comments, students seem to appreciate, if only later in the process, the central theory and knowledge the core contributed to their preparation. Those courses included: CO 101 Introduction to Communication Theory, CO 107 Argument and Social Issues, and CO 204 Investigative Methods in Communication. Popular elective courses included: CO 432 Intercultural Communication, CO 332 Gendered Communication, and CO 343 Communication and Conflict.
- Students who have selected a track in their major were generally pleased with that option and outcome. Most would like even more upper-level coursework in their individual track areas—to deepen the amount of coursework in each track. This seem particularly true for students entering the major their freshmen year. The longer a student is a major in the department, the

more our limitations become evident. Offering a variety of topics courses, including immersion courses, is helping this situation. However, with a limited faculty size, a heavy core course demand, and a significant number of majors, variety is going to be limited.

- Students in the media track were particularly critical of the options available to them at this time. Video production is limited to a reliance on instruction with an adjunct teacher. That position has been held by three different adjuncts in the last four years, making any development or improvement in that program difficult. Such turnover prevents the relationships needed for effective advising, independent study, or mentoring in this area of the major. Equipment limitations have compounded this problem. With only two limited use cameras for a class of 10-15 students, the Millikin University mission of hands on learning and performance learning is impossible to adequately develop. As long as the media area is not supported sufficiently, it is not delivering on our promise of education. Further information is later in this report as we assess the potential and practice of student learning in this area of our curriculum.
- The study abroad was referred to as a unique and positive experience during exit interviews. One popular program has been a London Semester program. Student experiences in the London Semester were rated exceptional and the students were extremely pleased to have had the experience and opportunity to study abroad. Other students have used their language skills, immersion courses and general education requirements to experience learning off campus. More options and types of opportunities for such learning were recommended.
- Students would like to see more activities outside of the classroom beyond the radio station. Our student honorary, Lambda Pi Eta, needs to become more active. Students also attended events hosted by the Public Relations Society of America Central Illinois Chapter. These quarterly meetings give PR majors the chance to interact with PR professionals and students at other universities. Eventual growth into a PRSSA organization would be beneficial. Events for majors both semesters went well and students are hungry for additional opportunities to gather. Our majors have also been active in other non-Communication organizations including the Greek system, student life, student government, DECA, and the Decaturian student newspaper. Our majors have traditionally participated effectively in student organizations and have held positions of leadership in many of them. Exit interviews reinforced the benefits and enjoyment that our majors had from their involvement in campus organizations.
- When asked about improvements to be made to the major, many of the interviews reiterated the same few issues in a variety of ways:
 - Better resources for video production and hands-on media work.
 - More advanced courses with a focus on applied and real world experiences.
 - Better quality classroom experiences with fewer underprepared or unmotivated students. Students have advocated for either a selective admission into some advanced courses or a GPA requirement for majors. Both options are being investigated for the future. Students would like more hands on courses and better quality of overall participation by those enrolled. This is an ongoing discussion topic with our faculty.

Internship Evaluations: Consistent with the mission of the university for performance learning, the departmental requirement for student internships has been a successful one. Student internships were located in a variety of places, both on campus and in the community at large. Summer internships also included experiences outside of the Decatur community. Students worked with campus organizations, corporate organizations, small businesses, and not-for-profit organizations. Examples of sites for internships over the past year include: WAND TV, DCC Marketing, St. Mary's Hospital, Decatur Public Schools, Partners in Education, Disney World, United Way, An Affair to Remember, Macon Resources, Neuhoff Media, Cromwell Media, YMCA, Investment Planners, and other locations on campus, in the community, and beyond.

The Department continues to have an internship advisor who has been instrumental at getting students meaningful and interesting learning positions. The students complete a learning contract, submit a portfolio, certify their hours, and receive feedback from the internship site. It takes a lot of time and effort to implement the department's internship requirement. However, it has been a valuable experience and distinctive requirement for our majors.

Curriculum Evaluation: As stated earlier, the department is conducting a curriculum review. Identifying the needs of current and future students in preparing them for life after Millikin University is a focus of the curriculum. Furthermore, for multiple reasons, it is imperative the Communication Department define its identity and focus—who it is, who it is not, what it can be and what it cannot be. Stated simply, the Communication Department cannot be all things to all people. For that reason, the curriculum review process will define and identify a focused curriculum that is feasible, strong, and transformative for students and for faculty to deliver to prepare students.

Assessment Summary: The current level of departmental assessment is considered to be yellow as a performance indicator. We are expanding and improving on the range and quality of assessment and have plans to continue improvements. Current data is very encouraging for continued growth and potential for the department. The program has made some important and significant adjustments to its curriculum and goals. Student activity in the classroom and outside of courses indicates that the learning goals we have set for majors are being pursued and accomplished.

Improvement Plan for the Department of Communication

The 2015-2016 academic year promises new challenges, dangers, and opportunities for the Department of Communication. A summary of concerns and goals include:

- Adequate staffing for the department continues to be a danger. The loss of our media production faculty member, four years ago, threatens to limit our ability to grow and develop that portion of the major. In the short-term, we plan to hire a video production adjunct instructor. Further evaluation of staffing needs will occur with the curriculum revisions. With only 4 full-time faculty and consistently more than 100 majors and general education commitments, our department is too small to provide the level of curriculum necessary to meet the need. The major deserves resources commensurate with its contribution to enrollments and University graduation rates.

- Development of the public speaking requirement is too limited due to resource restrictions. A full-time hire for a basic course director who can also contribute to at least one other curricular track is needed, thus, the position would have ¼ or ½ release time for basic course direction. The position would allow for better-informed assessment of this general education requirement, adjunct training and mentoring, and course development. An additional lecturer or instructor hire(s) would also improve the quality and consistency of the general education requirement. The first effort to begin assessment of this program has begun with the help of an adjunct with minimal support, but more should be done. This general education requirement needs to be supported as have others at the University.
- Resource needs in addition to faculty also limit the department's ability to meet University mission goals. Theory to practice, and performance learning is difficult to accomplish when the department's resources include only two cameras for a video production course. Students are not being afforded sufficient time to work hands-on with the equipment. The addition to the department's responsibilities of the oral communication requirement has also occurred without any resources improvements in staffing, equipment, office space, or office expenses. The current departmental budget cannot handle these expanded expectations without new resources.

The Communication Department has accomplished a great deal over the years. We expect to continue to function as a successful department with interesting courses and valuable experiences that are appealing to students at Millikin University.

Highlights from this academic year as a department include the following:

- A curriculum review process, which started in January 2014, was completed, proposed and approved by all the requisite university constituents. Implementation of the new curriculum will begin in Fall 2015.
- All four full-time faculty in the department contribute their scholarship to regional, national, or international conferences and to publications. One adjunct faculty member was also active in research.
- Dr. Tom Duncanson completed a successful study abroad program in London with a large number of majors.
- The Communication Department continues to collaborate with Tabor School of Business on creating, modifying and cross-listing courses that serve both constituencies. Furthermore, some of communication courses are required and recommended for the new Integrated Marketing Communication minor, offered through Tabor School of Business' Marketing Department.

WJMU, the student-run campus radio station, highlights:

- The WJMU 2014 Holiday Special was a student concept and script that were brought to fruition by the student executive team. The 25 minute program included characters from classic and contemporary Christmas/Holiday specials, and focused on the message that both new and old holiday traditions should be respected and cherished. The program was nominated as a finalist for the 2015 Intercollegiate Broadcasting System award for "Best Radio

Drama."

- The Student Executive Board was able to travel to New York City in early March to attend the IBS Awards and National Conference. We had some woes concerning travel logistics, but the trip to NYC proved to be both a great time and a real opportunity for WJMU executives to liaise with and learn from other student radio workers from around the US and Canada.
- In conjunction with the School of Music, WJMU is launching a new feature series to be titled "MU Artist Conversations." The series consists of six vignettes made up of Millikin student musicians talking about their influences and favorite pieces of music, and then a culminating 20-minute audio documentary about these musicians coming together to write and record an original song in a two hour window. Kevin Guarnieri was instrumental in coordinating this programming, and he and I both are anxious for it to air in the Fall semester, and to hopefully reboot this project.
- Also with the School of music, WJMU is broadcasting a portion of the result of an archiving project assigned as a senior seminar for music business majors. MU student and faculty performances from the past 60 years have been recorded, but are in desperate need of digital archiving. This process both further preserves these performances, and makes them much easier to access and share. Senior students involved in the project took DJ shifts during the Spring semester to host a program which featured some of their favorite pieces they had converted and archived.