

**Millikin University**  
**Student Learning in the Communication Major**

By

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### **Executive Summary**

Communication is about the construction of meaning between people and their various audiences: 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.

The Communication Department has developed three learning goals for our students:

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 relevant communication contexts.

Students in the Communication major take 16-hours of foundation courses. These courses introduce students to the learning goals of the major through an introduction to theory, practice, and critical thinking skills. The core also includes a capstone experience and portfolio project designed to integrate these learning goals together in preparation for graduation.

In addition to the foundation courses, students are also required to complete three tool requirements to help prepare students for professional success, citizenship in a global environment, and a life of meaning and value. These three areas include: ethics, writing, and computer literacy.

Students also select communication elective courses chosen for their contribution to their professional communication goals. Some students choose courses recommended for particular professional tracks: corporate communication, public relations, media, human relations, and speech communication. Other students may choose to take a personalized

set of courses reflecting their own communication objectives. All students are encouraged to pursue an internship experience for professional development purposes.

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. Departmental assessment has been sporadic, a reflection of the general assessment environment at Millikin University. Although our national association has considered some form of accreditation, to date the communication discipline has no accreditation system that is applicable to the major offered at Millikin University. As a department, one of our future departmental objectives is to initiate a consistent culture of assessment of our major and its learning goals.

Students who graduate from Millikin University with a degree in Communication find success in a wide variety of professional contexts. Our students enter careers in human services, media, sales, counseling, training and development, public relations, business, publishing, radio and television broadcasting, graduate and law school, and many other areas. One strength of the communication major is its value to many different employers and businesses.

### **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 community, and a personal life of meaning and value is accomplished through a variety of discipline-specific learning objectives. Graduates with a Communication B.A. 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 onto careers in the human services, media, sales, counseling, training and development, public relations, 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, trading commodities, 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 currently consists of 4 full-time faculty and an average of 5-7 adjuncts that help deliver an average of 10 classes per semester. We currently have 100 students listed as 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 social sciences, the culture track, and sequential elements (University Seminar). Students are also required to take communication courses by the Tabor School of Business and for the 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. Many students who graduate with the Interdepartmental degree option have communication as one of their primary "departments" in their major. Communication faculty also serve the PACE adult degree completion program by providing

courses in the Organizational Leadership and Criminal Justice majors. During the academic year, we offer approximately 60 courses.

The Communication department currently occupies 5 offices on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Shilling Hall and shares a secretary with the Modern Languages 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. Equipment and software have been upgraded in the two facilities in the past two years.

Recently, the department has made modest changes to elective options for communication majors. Two course revisions were made. CO 425-Media Law and Public Policy, was revised to broaden the scope and content of the course. CO 222-Radio-TV Newswriting was replaced with CO 351-Topics in Writing for Communication Professions, to expand that course rubric to encompass multiple writing intensive courses offered by the department. These courses might include broadcast media writing, public relations writing, speech writing, etc. A new course, CO 406-Persuasion and Social Movements was created to fill a gap in the major. A final new course, CO 306-Topics in Discourse Studies was created to include critical studies of discourse in social contexts such as corporate advocacy, legal communication, popular culture, and media portrayals of issues such as ethnic minorities.

New initiatives planned for the communication major in the coming years focus on areas of recruitment, advising, assessment, and program development/definition. Communication is a broad field that presents many students with unique and different career options. This strength is also a weakness when it is time to recruit and advise students into the major. In conjunction with the first revision to our website in 2005, we plan additional changes to help focus the major and to better represent ourselves to external audiences. The tracks available to majors will undergo additional scrutiny, clarification, and promotion to provide prospective majors and minors direction into our program. This will assist us in recruiting incoming freshmen, transfer students, and internal student changes of major. We also hope to upgrade our admission profile and promotion of the program to students with an interest in communication careers. In past years we have sent cards to interested admitted students and have tried to track their process towards our major. We have also tried to track how students come into our department and how well they progressed through it. More assessment of our current students may be called for.

Advising will be improved by our efforts to provide clear direction to the options available to the major and by a better-informed student entering into the advising process. The department currently assigns individual advisors to majors and that individual follows the student throughout their career at Millikin. Our personal and direct advising focus will be improved with more information for the student. We have attempted to track advisee progress at the end of each year, and we should be considering ways to better follow their development in the major.

Expanded assessment will continue to be a priority as we improve the quality and consistency of programmatic assessment in the department. We are currently experimenting with the LiveText electronic portfolio for our capstone students. Academic year 2005-2006 has been our year to experiment with the program and continued assessment of that tool will help us to create a capstone assessment instrument for our students. We also expect to create an assessment schedule to allow our learning goals to be evaluated across a variety of core and elective courses and also in our experiential areas such as labs and internships.

Additional program development and definition will occur in the coming years as we evaluate the outcomes of assessment efforts. The results of the University-wide assessment and accreditation might yield useful information for our own program development. Recent staff changes in our radio program and anticipated faculty changes will offer an opportunity to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the program and to inform changes in personnel and course offerings.

### **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. 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 is intentionally designed to challenge everyday assumptions about communication in a rapidly changing world.

The Communication major consists of a minimum of 34 credit hours, consisting of 16 hours in the foundation and 18 Communication electives, 9 of which should be numbered 300 or above. Students must also take nine hours of tool courses in ethics, writing, and computer literacy. 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 editing, and media courses. Majors are encouraged to use an internship experience to round out their classroom experience. To that end, the department has a communication 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 incoming freshmen, transfer student, changes of major, second major, and 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.

### **Assessment Methods & Analysis of Assessment Results**

The Communication department plans to assess student skills and knowledge using a variety of techniques. Part of our assessment plan 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 faculty advisors evaluate 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 Ethics Bowl team is a co-curricular program that prepares students for ethical decision-making and evaluation. The student radio station provides on-campus media experience to students, both majors and non-majors. Student organizations including Lambda Pi Eta and PRSSA (in the future) provide 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.

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 The Rhetorical Act	x	x	
CO 204 Investigative Methods in		x	x

Communication			
CO 470 Communication Portfolio	x		x
CO 480 Communication Criticism: Senior Capstone	x	x	x
<b>Elective Courses</b>			
CO 100 Interpersonal Communication	x	x	
CO 110 Introduction to Radio Industry	x		x
CO 181-5 Communication Practicum	x		
CO 214 Advanced Audio Production	x		x
CO 220 Introduction to Video Production	x	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 308 Communication Ethics & Freedom of Expression		x	x
CO 310 Small Group Communication	x	x	
CO 324 Advanced Video Production	x		
CO 325 Issues in Mass Media		x	x
CO 331 Relational Communication	x	x	x
CO 332 Gendered Communication	x	x	x
CO 336 Social Cognition	x	x	x
CO 341 Organizational Culture	x	x	
CO 343 Communication and Conflict	x		x
CO 344 Leadership	x	x	
CO 351 Topics in Writing for	x	x	x

Communication Professionals			
CO 360 Seminar in Communication		x	x
CO 371-4 Communication Internship	x		x
CO 391-4 Independent Study		x	x
CO 401 Persuasion Theory and Practice		x	x
CO 406 Persuasion and Social Movements	x	x	x
CO 424 Media Law and Society		x	x
CO 432 Intercultural Communication	x	x	x
CO 456 Applications in Public Relations	x	x	x

The Department of Communication has not pursued a complete assessment program although many of its components have been worked with in the past. The Department Chair or Acting-Chair has occasionally employed exit interviews. Conversations with groups of students in Lambda Pi Eta have also been held. Our faculty have shared some of their course materials with one another for developmental purposes. Formal use of these assessment data has not been brought to bear. The internship coordinator has information about interns and their past successes and failures. Although the coordinator compiles internship data annually, no formal assessment report of the program has been produced. The department has also been piloting the LiveText portfolio option and hopes to create an appropriate rubric for assessment. Overall, the department would use a performance indicator of yellow for its current assessment efforts. The components are there, data can be made available, and a more formal processing of the data by the department must take place to extract useful information from the program. Like the University as a whole, a more systematic, consistent, and accountable assessment program by the department will enhance the performance level of our assessment efforts.

### **Improvement Plan for the Department of Communication**

A number of changes are planned to bring the assessment process into the department's culture, and to use this information for upcoming decision-making. An assessment rubric for assignments, syllabi, and portfolios will be developed to ease the process and to make more consistent the results of assessment efforts. Internships, interviews, and organizational assessments will also be more standardized with a set of common questions and measures. A schedule and plan will be developed to insure that all components in the major are assessed over a set period of time. These data will be reported on, with the red-yellow-green light scale, to the department faculty, the Dean of Arts & Sciences, and the University Assessment coordinator.

The Department of Communication anticipates using these data for more effective curricular, programmatic, and staffing decisions.