

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

By

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June 1, 2007

### **Executive Summary**

The Communication Department at Millikin University is committed to providing a market-smart, challenging, 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 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 two tool requirements to help prepare students for professional success, citizenship in a global environment, and a life of meaning and value. These two areas include: ethics and writing. A third tool requirement, computer literacy was dropped due to difficulties in assessment and consistency in application. Today, most students possess significant technology skills and those needing more specialized experience have access to instruction in areas such as radio production, video editing, and courses offered by the English Department in areas such as web design and publication design.

Students also select communication elective courses chosen for their contribution to their personal and 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. Students are also encouraged to support departmental offerings with external courses in the Tabor Business School, the English Department, and other majors who can enhance their skills and knowledge with their unique disciplinary perspectives. 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. Systematic acquisition and evaluation of this data is still in development, but individuals in the department are using this information for curricular planning and programmatic improvements.

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 4-5 adjuncts that help deliver an average of 8-10 classes per semester. We currently have 90 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 three years.

The Department of Communication in the Fall of 2006 completed a self study of its current curriculum and successfully passed through University governance a new curriculum structure to go into effect in the Fall of 2007. After thorough review of

existing classes and curriculum structure, three concentrations, or tracks, were created and adjustments were made in the curriculum in areas of writing and ethics. The impact of these changes will be discussed in the learning story section of this report as the faculty revise and improve the learning story our majors experience at Millikin.

The department has experienced the retirement of our most senior member, Dr. Mary Rivers. Dr. Rivers provided many contributions to our curriculum in areas including intercultural communication, interpersonal communication, communication theory, and our departmental methods course. She was also our department chair for many years. Her retirement will result in changes in staff, course assignments, and the loss of a valued professional colleague.

To enhance the quality of instruction in the department, two new hires were made in the Spring of 2007. Dr. Nancy Curtin-Alwardt was hired as a replacement for Dr. Rivers. She will be teaching the departmental methods course and focusing on areas of organizational communication, small group communication, gender communication, and relational communication. Dr. Curtin-Alwardt had a successful record as an adjunct instructor for our department before being hired full time.

A second hire in video production and mass media was also successfully completed with the hiring of Todd Hauser, an ABD doctoral candidate from the University of Missouri. Mr. Hauser's position will allow us to upgrade our teaching of video production coursework and mass media courses. Many of our radio and television courses have been taught by adjunct instructors. This resulted in less faculty-student contact and limited the quality of our mass media programming. With Hauser's hire we have reassigned the radio and video coursework between two full time faculty and expect to enhance the quality of instruction and popularity of the media programs. For 2006-2007 we have already experienced significant improvements in the radio station and we expect additional excellence in video in coming years.

Additional program development and definition will occur in future 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.

### **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 in 2006-2007 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.

The departmental learning story will change in some dramatic ways beginning with the 2007-2008 academic year. In the Fall of 2006, the department revised its curriculum in light of data and experience through the QPC project, self evaluation, student feedback, and industry and disciplinary trends. The new curriculum structure will offer clearer concentrations in three areas of the major, it will expand its emphasis on written communication skills in two of those areas, require an internship experience for professional development for all majors, and integrate ethical reasoning into the department's core course requirements. This new program should provide greater clarity for majors as to the professional aspirations for their major and improve the advising process for majors through a more deliberate collection of course requirements.

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, another concentration of courses may be selected 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.
- **Mass Media:** The mass media track includes concentrations in media or journalism. Media students focus on radio and/or television production in addition to theory and professional practice in the media environment. Students interested in journalism focus on writing, media law and policy, along with practical journalism experiences. Many media majors are involved with the student-run radio station, WJMU or the campus newspaper, *The Decaturian*. Both concentrations offer students experiences with professional media outlets through internships.
- **Organizational Communication:** Students in the organizational communication track develop communications skills vital for the professional workplace. Coursework in leadership, conflict management, organizational culture and small group communication prepare students for a wide range of careers. Courses in management, advertising, and other areas from the University may be incorporated into this major track.

Throughout these tracks 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 tracks including coursework from the departments of English, Psychology, and Marketing. Our students will also be 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. All of these changes will need to be assessed more carefully in coming years and future reports will discuss the successes for these new tracks.

### **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 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 Communication		X	X
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	X	X	X

Communication			
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 Communication Professionals	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 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

(this chart will be update in the next report to reflect curricular changes)

Based on current levels of assessment, we have compiled the following results concerning our majors. We intend to expand the quality and quantity of data to be reviewed in each successive year.

Student Exit Interviews: The chair of the department completed informal exit interviews with 8 of the 14 May graduate of the program. This experience will lead to a more formal survey of all graduating majors in both December and May graduations. A summary of comments or issues that were considered valuable and repeated or revealed in more than one interview:

- An appreciation for the quality and enthusiasm for advising in the department. Students felt that their advising needs were met effectively. Faculty follow students through their 4 years in the department providing stability and consistency in advising.

- Each student expressed appreciation for at least one favorite faculty member in the department and recognized the collegiality and support Communication faculty provide to students and to each other.

- Most students expressed a desire for a more focused program of courses in the major and professional tracks. They were introduced to the changes in the curriculum to take effect for future graduates and they felt that they were necessary and positive improvements.

- Many new graduates were still up in the air about their next step and had not made detailed plans for their immediate future. This seemed typical of past years. The department hopes that changes in the capstone process will create an earlier effort on the part of students to make plans before they leave campus.

Senior Year Capstone Portfolio: Each graduating senior is to complete a portfolio project that is to provide opportunities for reflection, assessment, and preparation for application of the Millikin experience to their professional aspirations. Some results of these portfolios include:

- Students completed an electronic portfolio that was completed and turned in on a CD-ROM for review. The department did participate in the past with a LiveText pilot but found the program to be more effort than necessary for our majors and difficult to tailor to the variety of professional goals of our students. The electronic version of the portfolios did make using them more convenient than a large paper file.

- In review of the portfolios, the reflection pieces were some of the most useful documents and showed some real effort to tie together their experiences in the major and at the University. The compilation of papers and projects was less satisfactory and meaningful. Insufficient review of past work occurred and students did not seem to process their past work into a more meaningful evaluation.

- This portfolio will be reconfigured with the future 1-credit course taken with their senior internship. It is hoped that changes will be made to generate more meaningful and clearer data from this project.

Internship Evaluations: Although internships require a portfolio and review by the internship coordinator, no formal report has been submitted by the internship coordinator. A change in that process will take effect in 2007-2008.

Curriculum Evaluation: The department reviewed its curriculum and made changes in the Fall of 2006. The new curriculum structure must be evaluated as it matures and the changes are expected to improve the department in a variety of ways in

recruitment, advising, and graduation requirements. Formal reports will be compiled each year for at least two core courses and up to four elective courses each year. These evaluations will help fuel future changes in the departmental curriculum.

Evaluation of Student Success: The department also hopes to collect assessments of student success from external sources. Further detail in the evaluation of student internships will be one valuable resource. The evaluation of student projects through academic associations, competitions, etc. will also help to assess the quality of student learning in the major. Some current data on students includes:

- Of the 14 May 2007 graduates, three finished with academic honors including two magna cum laude and one cum laude graduates.
- Three graduates also received non-departmental awards including the Reverend Robert S. and Doris Stewart Award in Religion for best religion paper and two Parent Association Achievement Awards for outstanding service and scholarship to the University.
- 100% of 2006 Millikin graduates in communication gained employment or entrance to graduate/professional school within six months of graduation.

The current level of departmental assessment is considered to be yellow as a performance indicator. We are slowly expanding our assessments but must make more systematic evaluation of student learning and improve reporting of that data. Current data is very encouraging. The program has made some important and significant adjustments to its curriculum and goals. We have new faculty and ideas for implementing our program. We will continue to evaluate the program to preserve its continued success.

### **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.