

Assessment Trends Report Student Learning Outcomes in Communication

November 11, 2009

The goal of this report is to evaluate the assessment of student learning outcomes in Communication. The report addresses four key questions to evaluate the quality of our assessment processes.

(1) How have we sustained the assessment effort over a multi-year period of time?

How many years have you completed an annual assessment report?

_____ 2006 2007 2008 _____ 2009

The Communication Department developed its assessment plan in 2006 and started data collection in 2007. It has sustained assessment for three years. The assessment process was reviewed in 2009 and will continue to improve.

(2) How do we systematically and comprehensively collect and analyze data about student learning?

The Communication Department has collected data to assess the following learning outcome goals:

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.

The Communication faculty have identified potential sources for collecting data, including artifacts of student performance. According to the 2009 Annual Assessment report, these potential assessment methods include: (1) student exit interviews, (2) internship evaluations, (3) student activities/experiences, and (4) capstone portfolio projects. The 2009 report summarizes 19 student exit interviews about strengths and weaknesses of the Communication program. Senior capstone portfolios were reviewed and it is noted that the student reflection pieces were "most useful." There is no rubric for evaluating artifacts in the senior capstone portfolios, so it appears that they are being used in a similar fashion as the senior exit interviews—indirect assessment data based on student opinions. Also, the internship evaluations do not have a process for internship assessment, so the report merely claims that the number and quality of internships is improving.

The department recognizes that it needs to improve data collection and rubrics for evaluating the quality of collected artifacts of student work. The program has realized that all these data are indirect and plans to collect direct artifacts such as assignment evaluations, student activities/experiences, and capstone portfolio artifacts. These data will tie more closely to the specific learning goals and lead to more systematic and comprehensive data analysis.

(3) How do we use the analysis to improve curriculum and pedagogy and to inform decisions about budgets and strategic priorities?

The 2009 annual assessment report recommends that the department needs new hires to teach courses, especially in the media area of the major. This recommendation is a result of program reforms that came out of a program review in 2006—creating new advanced studies tracks and calling for additional faculty resources. There have been no recommendations for improving pedagogy or curriculum based on assessment data or processes. The assessment reports are shared with the faculty at departmental meetings.

(4) How do we evaluate, modify, and continue to improve the student learning assessment process in this program?

Assessment is now a regular part of the annual activities for the department. It has helped to guide and to evaluate student learning and program structure as an ongoing process. A review of our assessment process in 2009 identified several needs for improvement. We plan to develop individual goals for individual tracks within the major and to develop some type of learning assessment for each track. We also plan to improve the quality and validity of our data collection and develop rubrics that enable more systematic and comprehensive analysis. We also plan to collect information from graduates on their evaluations of the programs.

Evaluation from Focus Visit Leadership Team (includes Academic Deans, Program Leaders, and Focus Visit Report Writers)

Rating: Yellow

Academic program	Goal 1 (multi-year)	Goal 2 (data collection)	Goal 3 (Use assessment to improve)	Goal 4 (improve assessment)	Total
Communication	3	1	1	3	8

Based on the four questions/criteria, the Focus Visit Leadership Team rates the Communication major assessment process as Yellow and concludes that the Communication Department has sustained assessment effort in data collection and reviewed the assessment process. Although there has been clear course mapping that shows connections between individual courses and current learning outcome goals, the analysis has not been systematic. The learning goals and assessment data collection do not reflect the development of tracks in the Communication major in 2006. Therefore, the analysis does not lead to meaningful conclusions about any one of the four tracks—public relations, organizational communication, mass media and sport communication; therefore, it is hard to base any curricular change on assessment. It is also recommended that the Communication Department improve data collection/analysis and use rubrics for data analysis to improve curriculum and pedagogy and to inform decisions and strategic priorities.