

ASSESSMENT PROGRESS REPORT

MASTERS DEGREE IN APPLIED COMMUNICATION STUDIES (Formerly Interpersonal & Organizational Communication)

COLLEGE OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES ANNUAL REPORT - MARCH 2008

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OVERVIEW: Our MA program continues to be guided and informed by various assessment processes. We have organized this report based on the major headings provided by the Provost's office. We are in the second year of a major change in our final project and thus we are reformulating elements of our assessment processes. Overall, student learning continues to be the focus of our efforts. Our data reveal that students are reaching major program goals. We continue to take efforts to focus students on deep learning related to the application of theory to case analysis.

(1) Student learning goal(s) addressed this year:

The primary goal of the program is to guide students in the application of communication theory to a variety of interpersonal, institutional, public, and organizational contexts. Learning outcomes associated with the following three program objectives are assessed each year. Students successfully completing the *Master of Arts in Applied Communication Studies* (MAACS) should be able to:

- A. understand and engage in applied communication research;
- B. develop ethically responsible recommendations for applied communication contexts; and
- C. make effective presentations to shape or inform communication practices.

(2) Learning outcomes addressed this year & (3) Courses & activities where assessed; & (4) Methods used.

Last year was our first year to assess the above revised set of learning goals. Prior to 2007, student projects all focused on communication training. This past year, students were encouraged to see communication training as just one option as a result of a communication case analysis/assessment. Thus, students were encouraged to explore the development of recommendations that may include training, but alternatively may result in a summary of recommendations or the development of a communication plan for a group or organization. We have developed several learning outcomes for each goal and seek to assess these each year. Table 1 captures our program goals, learning outcomes, location of assessment and methods.

Table 1: Applied Communication Studies
Goal, Outcomes, Location of Assessment & Methods

Program Goals	Learning Outcomes	Location of Assessment	Methods
A. understand and engage in applied communication research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on relevant communication theory and concepts • States a thesis that clearly articulates a position on issues in the case • Argument includes relevant examples, references & theories • Apply communication theory to case that enhances understanding of the case 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comp exam- Part of final core course • Final Project • Final Portfolio-Part of Final Project defense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Appendix C for assessment rubric for analysis of comp responses • See Appendix E for assessment rubric for final paper
B. develop ethically responsible recommendations for applied communication contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear connections to communication theory found in recommendations • Demonstrate an awareness of ethical issues in wording of recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comp exam- Part of final core course ○ Final Project ○ Final Portfolio-Part of Final Project defense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Appendix C for assessment rubric for analysis of comp responses • See Appendix E for assessment rubric for final paper
C. make effective presentations to shape or inform communication practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate effective presentation skills based on program guides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Final Project presented to professional audience approved by faculty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Post assessment of presentation by participants with instrument approved by faculty ○ See Appendix B for example instrument

Furthermore, we have created a five year plan to integrate other critical aspects of assessment, including stakeholder involvement. Again, the master's paper serves as cornerstone of our assessment effort in that during the defense of this final paper, student discuss their progress via self reflection on a collection of a papers they have placed in a portfolio, as well as feedback they gained on their final presentation. This final presentation feedback provides data from a variety of stakeholders including professionals in the field.

Five Year Assessment Plan - MAACS (2007 - 2012)		
Where Assessed/Assessment Tool	Cycle	Report Year
End of two year track: Collection of M.A. Paper, Portfolio, and Comprehensive Exam data: We have one year of data (three students from 2007) that we will examine in 2008-09 in order to have a larger group of students for program assessment (2008 class will include 14 students).	Yearly/Data combined after 2 years to note major trends	2008
Course level: Individual faculty collect data on teaching strategies and specific learning outcomes (as part of Professional Growth Contract)	Yearly	2006 & 2011
Meeting of faculty to discuss all assessment data analysis	Yearly	2008
Survey representative group of alumni	3 years	2007 & 2010
Individual faculty review data and make necessary changes in teaching strategies to effect specific learning outcomes (as part of Professional Growth Contract)	Yearly	2008 & 2010

(5) What are the assessment findings? How did you analyze them?

To summarize, the primary data for student learning assessment is found in two venues: (a) all faculty evaluate the final comprehensive exam which assesses the first two program goals; and (b) faculty committees evaluate student portfolios as part of a defense of the student's final paper. The defense includes a review of feedback received from stakeholders related to the presentation of their paper. Assessment findings are summarized below based on program goals.

Program Goal A: *understand and engage in original applied communication research;*

- Growing from first year theory and methods courses, students are prepared to collect data about communication in various contexts.
- Appendix A contains a rubric of graduate courses based program learning outcomes that reflects our commitment to case study analysis.
- Their final project requires the application of communication theory to real communication problems and issues in a context relevant to their interests or goals (e.g., community, organizational, institutional, interpersonal, and relational).
- All students completing the two year track program from 2005 to 2007 successfully completed their comprehensive exams. Appendix C contains the rubric used for assessing comps. Appendix D provides a summary of faculty feedback indicating areas of strength and possible areas for improvement. We will review this limited data set (3 students) in light of 2008 data to determine areas that may merit attention.
- Each of these students successfully defended their final paper and portfolio.

Program Goal B: develop theoretically grounded and ethically responsible recommendations for applied communication contexts

- The final project requires that recommendations are developed that will inform communication practice. Furthermore, the application of theory to real situations also occurs through case study analysis throughout the program and in their comprehensive exams.
- The focus here is on the students' ability to meaningfully connect the specifics of a situation to the relevant aspects of a particular theory or body of research.
- Again, our pass rate this year was 100% for the comprehensive exams and student performances indicated a clear grasp of theory and recommendation development in the process.
- The preliminary data (Appendix D) indicate the possible need to pay closer attention in the course setting since this area on the rubric received an overall lower mean score with more faculty rating the student on this criteria as "addressed, but not developed," ($X = 1.57$; 5. Suggestions for practical implications drawn from argument).

Program Goal C: make effective presentations to shape or inform communication practices

- A concise set of fundamental public speaking skills has been developed over the past decade. These skills are introduced early in the program and are assessed in classes and as part of the Masters project. Appendix B contains the current rubric that focuses both on content and style issues.
- The assessment data are reviewed and discussed by the faculty in an effort to monitor the extent to which our students have mastered a deep knowledge of these critical concepts and skill sets, determine the appropriateness of our objectives, and help guide us in our selection of specific teaching strategies and learning outcomes to assess.

- All of the students successfully presented their final papers to professional audiences which ranged from the Department of Defense to the National Communication Association.
- Feedback from 2007 projects will be combined with 2008 students as part of our 5 year plan.

(6) What conclusions were drawn and what decisions were made as a result? How were stakeholder groups involved?

Our assessment efforts focus on an evaluation of student performance in the final Masters Paper, portfolio, and comprehensive exams. We have been successful in documenting the students' general strengths and weaknesses in terms of our central learning outcomes. In turn, these evaluations have generated changes in both curriculum and teaching strategies. As our five-year plan indicates, we engage in a department wide discussion of our assessment data to allow us to discern trends. Based on exit interviews, last years alumni survey, student performances on projects, and trends in our field, we took action this year to assess recent program changes and to make additional changes.

1. **Initial positive support for our shift in the final project requirement and assessment process.** As mentioned earlier, while we will maintain the applied communication focus, we no longer limit students to a training project. Students completing projects this past year had the freedom to engage in case analysis that included training as well as the development of communication plans and recommendations. We have developed an initial guide for these final projects that more clearly connects the requirements of the case analysis across courses and to the smaller case analysis they complete in their comp exam (see Appendix E). In the past, faculty only provided pass/fail feedback to the program coordinator. This form will enhance faculty communication and assessment related to the deep learning we seek for our students.
2. **The change in the timing of our comprehensive exams has proven beneficial.** In the past our comprehensive exam (case study) was taken by students in June after they completed two years of course work. This time frame hindered students from graduating in May even if they had completed their final paper and for those almost finished with their paper it delayed progress on their project. For example, the most recent class to complete the degree began in the Fall of 2004. Out of 7 students, 6 have completed the program, but 5 students completed the program during the Summer or Fall of 2006 and 1 completed the following Spring of 2007. Thus, we now embed our comprehensive exam in a final semester course. We will evaluate the impact of this change over the next few years. Our preliminary review based on just one class that began in 2005 was that all students were able to finish the program by the summer of 2007.
3. **An additional shift in the process for completing the final project proposal.** In the past students did not complete a project proposal until the Fall of their second year. Based on exit interview feedback and a review of our curriculum, we

realized it made more sense to integrate a project proposal with one of our second semester, first year, methods courses. Our feedback from students and faculty has been that this shift was helpful, but also problematic. Students learned the basic format of the proposal; however students were not in a position to write a meaningful proposal because of their limited exposure to core content classes. Thus, we have now embedded the proposal process within our Spring first year and Fall second year core courses so that students will be able to build on the a case analysis completed in these core courses. We will assess the effectiveness of this shift in the coming years.

4. **Further steps toward the development of an advisory board.** This past fall several former faculty members who have contacts with alumni meet with current faculty to discuss plans for launching this group. We are currently updating our data base with plans to host a late Spring event so that we might tap into alumni energies, talents, and network to improve recruitment and assessment practices as well as exploring scholarship funding.
5. **(For Rob to update and revise!!) Faculty Growth Contracts.** We have begun the process of having individual faculty members identify specific learning outcomes and associated teaching strategies in their own courses that they would like to assess for the academic year. This process is connected with the review process conducted by our Chair, Dr. Ulmer. Over time, any given faculty member may be assessing a number of strategies and outcomes in his or her courses. It is expected that the specific outcomes and strategies selected by a faculty member will be connected to our central learning outcomes and deep learning concepts. This past year three major focus areas were reviewed as part of the growth contract: (a) deep learning by focusing on key concepts in the field of study, (B) changing student mindsets by challenging communication misconceptions, and (c) reviewing and maintaining our commitment to a case study approach to communication analysis to ensure continuity with newer faculty.

6. Faculty and Stakeholder involvement

Numerous existing and developing areas of our program demonstrate our commitment to a wide array of faculty and stakeholder involvement. We review these here as a way to provide a clearer picture of the breadth and depth of our formal and informal assessment and development activities.

- *Faculty Book Club.* In the Fall of 2007 as we had done the previous year, faculty met one time each month for 2 hours to discuss Bain's researched-based book titled, *What The Best College Teachers Do*. These discussions continue to be instrumental in enhancing our appreciation of active learning strategies and providing us with insights into how to approach the creative process of scholarship.
- *Faculty Involvement.* All tenure-track faculty teach in our graduate program. All faculty review and approve changes to our assessment plan. All faculty review

and grade the comprehensive case study exam. All faculty serve as advisor and committee members on the final project, including as committee members reading drafts of the final paper, participating in one formal meeting at the action planning stage and a presentation of the paper at the end, and as committee chairs attending and evaluating the "dress rehearsal" of the intervention, reading multiple drafts, and coordinating the final project process.

- *Exit Interviews.* All students are involved in exit interviews in which their evaluation of the program is elicited. This information will continue to be used to change course content, program structure, and to generally inform the faculty as to the changing needs of our students.
- *Class Evaluations.* Student evaluations are taken very seriously by the department. They are read by the chair and the program coordinator, and issues that arise from the class evaluations are discussed with the faculty in question. The discussion includes possible reasons for the issue of concern and potential steps to address the issue. All faculty respond well to this format and are eager to continue to improve their classes and the program in general.
- *Self-assessments.* Students engage in a self-assessment as part of their final project and write a reflective essay as a cover to their portfolio. This process requires reflection on their abilities to apply theories and concepts learned in the program.
- *Organizational clients.* Our alumni often serve as organizational clients for our students in their final projects. Because of their involvement with the program, they know what the student should be capable of and can hold him/her accountable for those competencies. Also, by serving as organizational clients, they can keep us abreast of ways to enhance our teaching content.
- *Alumni Newsletter.* We continue to expand our connection with our graduate students and solicit their feedback. Three years ago we instituted an electronic newsletter which provided information about our program and the university, alumni personal and professional news, new faculty profiles, searches for alums, and surveys.
- *Organizational stake holders.* Our stakeholders hear student presentations/trainings and are also involved in program evaluation. Their feedback is part of the data we use in evaluating the final project and is thus part of the feedback loop.

SUMMARY

We are encouraged by the continued enhancements to our graduate-level assessment process and have evidence that it has enabled us to formalize our efforts and systematize our plans for growth and development. Analysis of this year's assessment data for the graduate program has resulted in the following conclusions:

1. We have revised our five-year plan to reflect our desire to account for deep learning with a focus on case analysis throughout core courses reflected in the final paper, portfolio, and comprehensive exam process.

2. Providing students with options students for their final project has resulted in students engaging a variety of applied venues including presentations at professional conferences and with government and non profit organizations.

3. Student performances on final projects and comp exams indicate that we are reaching our program goals, yet the coming year will see enhanced reflection on student learning with the addition of the final project rubric that places program goals and learning outcomes before faculty and students for reflection.

4. Our faculty is heavily invested in virtually every aspect of our assessment process.

5. We have developed a number of ways to involve faculty, students and stakeholders in our assessment efforts with plans to enrich alumni involvement with a new advisory board.

Appendix A: Program Objectives by First Year Course

Emphasis: Extensive Somewhat Little None
Assessed: Exam Paper Project Other Not Assessed

MA Example:

		MA Program Goal: The primary goal of the program is to guide students in the application of communication theory to a variety of interpersonal, institutional, public, and organizational contexts.		
Core Course and Program year _____	How Outcomes are Addressed and Assessed	Objective A: understand and engage in applied communication research	Objective B: develop ethically responsible recommendations for applied communication contexts	Objective C: make effective presentations to shape or inform communication practices
SPCH 7321 Org. Communication Theory <hr/> First Year	Emphasis: Assessed:	Somewhat Speech; Papers	Somewhat Speech; Papers	Extensive Present case
SPCH 7301: Communication Theory <hr/> First Year	Emphasis: Assessed:	Extensive Weekly paper; exam, final paper	Somewhat Weekly papers	Somewhat Weekly papers; final paper
SPCH 73222 Comm. Cultures and Contexts <hr/> First Year	Emphasis: Assessed:	Extensive Speech; Paper, Case studies; Exams	Extensive Speech; Paper, Case studies; Exams	Extensive Present Cultural Analysis Project
SPCH 7350 Crisis Communication <hr/> First Year	Emphasis: Assessed:	Somewhat Case Study	Extensive Case Study	Extensive Present Crisis Case Analysis

SPCH 7320: Communicating Change <hr/> Second Year	Emphasis: Assessed:	Somewhat Speech; Papers	Somewhat Speech; Papers	Extensive Present case
SPCH 7302: Interpersonal Communication Theory and contexts <hr/> Second Year	Emphasis: Assessed:	Extensive Weekly paper; exam, final paper	Somewhat Weekly papers	Somewhat Weekly papers; final paper
SPCH 7351 Managerial Communication <hr/> Second Year	Emphasis: Assessed:	Extensive Speech; Paper, Case studies;	Extensive Speech; Papers	Extensive Present Draft of Final Project Presentation
SPCH 7323 Conflict Analysis <hr/> Second Year	Emphasis: Assessed:	Somewhat Case Study	Extensive Case Study	Extensive Present Case Analysis

Appendix B: Presentation/Training Facilitation Skills Rubric

PRESENTATION FEEDBACK

PLEASE INDICATE YOUR AGREEMENT WITH EACH STATEMENT, USING A SCALE OF 1-5, 1=STRONGLY DISAGREE TO 5=STRONGLY AGREE

PRESENTATION STYLE/SKILLS

The facilitator/presenter promoted participant discussion and involvement.

1 2 3 4 5

The facilitator/presenter gave clear instructions for activities.

1 2 3 4 5

The facilitator/presenter processed activities well.

1 2 3 4 5

The facilitator/presenter kept the discussion on topic and activities on track.

1 2 3 4 5

The facilitator/presenter did not appear rushed.

1 2 3 4 5

The facilitator/presenter handled participant ideas/questions effectively.

1 2 3 4 5

The facilitator/presenter displayed confidence in the role.

1 2 3 4 5

PRESENTATION CONTENT/STRUCTURE

The objectives were clear.

1 2 3 4 5

The facilitator/presenter clearly conveyed the importance of the topic

1 2 3 4 5

The facilitator/presenter appeared knowledgeable about the subject.

1 2 3 4 5

The facilitator/presenter presented information in an appropriate sequence.

1 2 3 4 5

The facilitator/presenter used transitions well.

1 2 3 4 5

The facilitator/presenter clearly indicated ways learning could be transferred to a professional/personal environment.

1 2 3 4 5

The facilitator/presenter used language appropriate to the audience.

1 2 3 4 5

The facilitator/presenter summarized the session.

1 2 3 4 5

Handouts and other materials were professional.

1 2 3 4 5

PLEASE NOTE SPECIFIC STRENGTHS

PLEASE NOTE ANY SUGGESTIONS YOU BELIEVE WOULD IMPROVE:

**Appendix C: Comprehensive Exam Assessment Rubric
Revised 2007**

Student Letter: ___ Question number: ___ Category(circle one): Org / IP / OD

MA-Applied Communication: Assessment Questions

Direction for Rubric:

Please use the following rating scale with the understanding that the rating will not be viewed by the students, but will help guide our assessment. I encourage you to fill this out as you grade each one and let your ratings guide your decision as to P or NP. Again, the students will not see your actual ratings.

Please type in your responses below and then send the form to me electronically. You may confer with another faculty if you want to fill out the form together. I am providing one electronic blank form with the idea that you can “save as” and continue to use this template for each response.

Please include the student letter (A-G) the, question number (1-3) in the name of your file along with the word “assess” and the year “07”): For example: A1assess06.doc

- 0 = criteria is not addressed
 - 1= criteria is addressed, but not developed
 - 2= criteria is clearly addressed
- To pass a student should receive a "yes" (a 1 or 2) on each of the following.

- ___ 1. Responds to each part of the question
- ___ 2. Clearly states a thesis that clearly states a position on issues in case
- ___ 3. Argument for thesis includes relevant examples, references & theories (min. 4 references)
- ___ 4. Accurate use of concepts, terminology, and theory
- ___ 5. Suggestions for practical implications drawn from argument
- ___ 6. Write in a manner that is clear (relatively free of grammar and spelling problems)
- ___ 7. Well organized (intro, previews, clear main points, summary that restates position)

Comments:

1. What was missing or not adequately developed in the response?
2. What possible patterns of learning strengths emerged?
3. What possible patterns of learning needs emerged?
4. Other comments/assessment insights?

Appendix D: 2007 Summary Data

Directions for Rubric: Please use the following rating scale with the understanding that the rating will not be viewed by the students, but will help guide our assessment. I encourage you to fill this out as you grade each one and let your ratings guide your decision as to P or NP. Again, the students will not see your actual ratings.

- 0 = criteria is not addressed
- 1= criteria is addressed, but not developed
- 2= criteria is clearly addressed

To pass a student should receive a "yes" (a 1 or 2) on each of the following.

X= 1.93 1. Responds to each part of the question
 Frequency Count: 2, 2, 2, 2, 1, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2

X= 1.86 2. Clearly states a thesis that clearly states a position on issues in case
1, 2, 2, 2, 1, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2

X= 1.86 3. Argument for thesis includes relevant examples, references & theories (min.
4 references)
Frequency Count: 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 1, 2, 2, 1, 2, 2, 2, 2

X= 1.71 4. Accurate use of concepts, terminology, and theory
Frequency Count: 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 1, 2, 2, 1, 2, 1, 1, 2

X= 1.57 5. Suggestions for practical implications drawn from argument
Frequency Count: 2, 2, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, 2

X= 1.50 6. Write in a manner that is clear (relatively free of grammar and spelling
problems)
Frequency Count: 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, 2

X= 1.93 7. Well organized (intro, previews, clear main points, summary that restates
position)
Frequency Count: 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 1, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2

This data is based on an atypical class size. Thus, while we will give attention to the
lower mean scores on items 5 and 6, we will explore these issues more closely after the
2008 comp process.

**Appendix E: Assessment Rubric for Final Paper
MA-Applied Communication
Revised 2008**

Direction for Rubric:

Please use the following rating scale with the understanding that the rating will not be
viewed by the students, but will help guide our assessment. I encourage you to fill this
out as you grade each one and let your ratings guide your decision as to P or NP. Again,
the students will not see your actual ratings.

Please type in your responses below and then send the form to me electronically. You
may confer with another faculty if you want to fill out the form together. I am providing

one electronic blank form with the idea that you can “save as” and continue to use this template for each response.

- 0 = criteria is not addressed
- 1= criteria is addressed, but not developed
- 2= criteria is clearly addressed

- To pass a student should receive a "yes" (a 1 or 2) on each of the following.

- ___ 1. Focuses on relevant communication theory and concepts
- ___ 2. States a thesis that clearly articulates a position on issues in the case
- ___ 3. Argument includes relevant examples, references & theories
- ___ 4. Apply communication theory to case that enhances understanding of the case
- ___ 5. Accurate use of concepts, terminology, and theory
- ___ 6. Practical implications drawn from argument in an ethically appropriate manner
- ___ 7. Write in a manner that is clear (relatively free of grammar and spelling problems)
- ___ 8. Well organized (intro, previews, clear main points, summary that restates position)

Comments:

1. What was missing or not adequately developed in the response?
2. What possible patterns of learning strengths emerged?
3. What possible patterns of learning needs emerged?
4. Other comments/assessment insights?