Degree: BA in Speech/Applied Communication

For Calendar Year: 2016

(Date submitted to college committee:) March 31, 2017

(Date posted on college assessment website:)

By: Kristen McIntyre and April Chatham-Carpenter

Overall Rating:

Respond to all six parts following the “Degree Program Assessment Progress Report Instructions.” Attach additional pages as needed.

(NOTE: Parts 1 through 4 can be copied from the relevant sections of your assessment plan.)

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

   Goal 1: Analyzing Messages
   Communication graduates analyze messages using communication theory.

   Goal 2: Adapting Messages
   Communication graduates adapt their messages to different purposes, audiences, and contexts, using a variety of methods.

   [Link to DRAFT ACOM BA Assessment Plan]

2. **Learning outcomes/objectives for those goals addressed this year:**

   Goal 1: Theoretical Concepts, establishing claims, interpreting evidence
   [Link to Goal 1: Analyzing Messages Scoring Rubric]

   Goal 2: Organization--oral and written, use of language, sources and evidence, communication orientation--oral only, use of mechanics--written only
   [Link to Goal 2: Adapting Messages Scoring Rubric]
(3) **Courses & activities where assessed:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPCH 2311: Introduction to Communication Research</td>
<td>(Required--entry level) Final papers and presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPCH 4300: Senior Seminar</td>
<td>(Required--Capstone) Final Papers and presentations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(4) **Methods used:**

The Department of Applied Communication participated last year in the Provost’s Program Assessment pilot. As part of our preparation going into the self-study for our program review, we spent the year revising our undergraduate learning outcomes, mapping our curriculum, identifying artifacts for assessment, and building learning outcome rubrics. Given the massive overhaul of our program assessment process, the small Spring 2016 Capstone class (3 students), and our involvement in piloting Blackboard Outcomes this past fall, we chose to focus our assessment efforts on the 17 student artifacts from fall 2016.

On Friday, January 13, 2017, the department held an assessment retreat. During the retreat, four tenure-track faculty, three full-time instructors, and one ACOM 1300 adjunct instructor normed program student learning outcome rubrics for Goals 1 and 2. In preparation for the retreat, faculty were asked to score past papers for both SPCH 2311 and SPCH 4300 on Goals 1 and 2. During the retreat, faculty talked through their respective scoring, and adjustments were made to the rubric descriptions. Faculty then broke out to score additional papers, regrouped, and discussed scoring, which resulted in stronger norming.

Faculty from the retreat were then assigned student artifacts (papers and presentations) to score from the Fall 2016 SPCH 2311 and SPCH 4300 courses through the Blackboard Outcomes platform. Scoring took place over a two-week time period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Number (Percentage of total students in class)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPCH 2311 Papers</td>
<td>10 (27% of total students in class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPCH 2311 Presentations</td>
<td>7 (19% of total students in class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPCH 4300 Papers</td>
<td>10 (59% of total students in class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPCH 4300 Presentations</td>
<td>6 (35% of total students in class)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each artifact was reviewed by two faculty members. Please see links above for descriptions of the scoring rubrics. Overall, interrater reliability was strong. Means were used to determine how well each component was being met.
(5) What are the assessment findings? How did you analyze them?

SPCH 2311 is an entry level course in our program, so a score of 2 (out of 4) or better was expected for the assessed components for Goals 1 and 2 in both papers and presentations. SPCH 4300 is our senior capstone course, so a score of 4 (out of 4) was set as the expectation for the assessed components for Goals 1 and 2 in both papers and presentations. Means were used to determine how well each component was being met.

See link below for the results.
Link to Results Tables for Goals 1 & 2

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

Conclusions:
Overall, we felt our program is working well at both the entry-level and Capstone level with regard to meeting our respective learning outcome benchmarks.

Entry-level
Students are meeting, or closely approaching, all outcomes at the set benchmark.

- Students are exceeding the benchmark (2) in the following areas for PLOs 1 & 2: Organization-2.4 (oral & written), Use of Language (presentation)-2.8, Control of Mechanics-2.45, and Communication Orientation-2.3.

- Students are meeting the benchmark (2) in the following areas: Concepts-2.14, Use of Language (paper)-2.15, and Sources & Evidence-1.9.

- Students are performing inconsistently with regard to making Claims and Interpretation of Evidence with regard to the paper and presentation artifacts. Students are much stronger in both areas (2.07, 2.29) in their presentations versus their papers (1.55, 1.7).

Capstone
Students are meeting, or approaching, the majority of outcomes at the set benchmark.

- Students are meeting, or approaching, the benchmark (4) in the following areas for PLOs 1 & 2: Organization-3.7 (oral & written), Use of Language (presentation)-3.9, Sources & Evidence (presentation)-3.7, Concepts (paper)-3.7, Concepts (presentation)-3.9, Claims (paper)-3.55, Claims (presentation)-3.67, Interpretation of Evidence (paper)-3.55, and Interpretation of Evidence (presentation)-3.67.
Students are struggling to meet the benchmark in the following areas: Use of Language (paper)-3.2, Interpretation of Evidence (paper)-3.15, Communication Orientation (oral)-3.2, and Control of Mechanics (written)-3.1.

Students are performing inconsistently across the paper and presentation with regard to Use of Language and Sources & Evidence. Students are much stronger in both areas (3.9, 3.7) in their presentations versus their papers (3.2, 3.15).

Comparisons
It was interesting to us that students in both 2311 and 4300 were much stronger in their presentations, in general, than in their papers. In discussing this with the Student Success & Curriculum sub-committee faculty members, we wondered if it is easier to use effective language when adapting to a live audience than when writing to a perceived audience. We also wondered if the difference was related to varying rater expectations for use of language in an academic paper. Also, we highly emphasize the oral citation of evidence and sources for students’ 20 minute capstone presentations, and although we stress APA in-text citations for their papers, those may not be as noticeable as a reviewer when reading 20 page papers. Students also work with a mentor for their presentation and overall have more practice giving presentations than writing research papers in our program, so that could be another reason for the differences in their scores between the two genres.

Closing the loop:
Given that our program has currently revised our program goals and piloted new assessment processes, we are using the results of this assessment cycle to inform our assessment processes moving forward. Specifically, we are working on ensuring that all courses mapped for curriculum have single-attempt assignment submission boxes for collecting student artifacts in course Blackboard shells. We are also working with the Blackboard Outcomes team to streamline user friendliness as well as reporting of the types and level of data.

We identified the following areas needing follow-up faculty discussions related to assessment and curriculum, and have already started these discussions in our Student Success & Curriculum (SSC) sub-committee.

- **Revisit our rubric descriptions** for Use of Language and Control of Mechanics. Currently, Use of Language is written to capture both written and oral artifacts. However, the difference between the 2311 and 4300 paper and presentation means caused us to wonder if the description needs to be separated into two distinct categories (oral and written), like we do with Organization. With regard to Control of Mechanics we felt that the descriptions may not be capturing fully what we’d really like to be assessing here, specifically in relation to APA style.
Undergraduate Degree Program Assessment Progress Report Cover Sheet

- **Revisit the benchmark (4/4) for all Capstone outcomes.** In making sense of our results we wondered if it wouldn’t be more realistic to set different benchmarks for each respective outcome. While a rating of 4 is ideal, a 3 on many of the outcomes would be commendable.

- **Develop consistency in public presentation expectations.** The presentations given in 2311 did not require an audience (students presented to their webcams); however, the presentations in 4300 were presented live, in front of faculty, external stakeholders, students, as well as family and friends of the presenters, which would most likely account for the lower score (3.2) for *Communication Orientation* in the 4300 presentations. Currently, we have no consistent expectations for a “live audience” for online student presentations. We feel this is an important conversation as we have observed that our face-to-face students tend to present much more confidently than our online students in a live audience situation. Conversely, we want to discuss ways to strengthen both face-to-face and online students’ abilities to present well via webcam, as this is a common form of conferencing and presenting in the workplace.

- **Develop consistency in claim development.** Students learn to make claims primarily in our required Advanced Public Speaking class. However, many of the students in the 2311 course have not yet had that class or are taking it concurrently with the Advanced Public Speaking class. In discussing these findings as part of our ongoing Student Success and Curriculum sub-committee discussions, we realized that we need to build in more opportunities for students in our 2310 and 2311 required classes to make claims using theory and case study research, to better prepare them for the higher expectations of doing this at our capstone level, and to support what is being done in the Advanced Public Speaking class.

- **Develop consistency in source requirement expectations.** In discussing our findings for *Sources & Evidence*, we confirmed that we do not have consistent source requirements across our entry-level and Capstone required courses. We believe it would be beneficial to develop a scaffolding approach to building students’ competencies with source identification and inclusion, particularly in written work.

**Stakeholder Involvement:**

We involved our Alumni/Development Advisory Board, as well as selected students, in looking at our prospective new undergraduate learning outcomes. They made suggested changes, which our Student Success & Curriculum subcommittee brought back to the faculty for consideration. We involved two graduate students to help us develop and norm rubrics across multiple artifacts for each of these learning outcomes.
Our program underwent Program Review this past year. In preparation, we conducted a survey with our current students and alumni. We shared results of this survey with our Alumni/Development Advisory Board.

In line with our program assessment of PLOs 1 & 2 this cycle, our current undergraduate students (48/120, 40% response rate) stated, on average, that they believed that their skills and knowledge have been improved in the following areas related to our learning outcomes, with averages ranging from 4.16 to 4.52 (on a scale of 1-5, not at all improved to very much improved).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Undergraduate student average</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using communication theory to effectively analyze messages.</td>
<td>4.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating &amp; adapting messages for different contexts.</td>
<td>4.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing potential breakdowns in communication.</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generating communication recommendations for self &amp; others.</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in teams to problem-solve situations.</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embracing differences between others via active listening and positive communication.</td>
<td>4.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing the discourse of others by advocating for positive communication.</td>
<td>4.41</td>
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</tbody>
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Additionally, results of both the Blackboard Outcomes pilot experience, as well as program assessment, were shared in multiple departmental meetings. Additionally, Dr. April Chatham-Carpenter presented on our Blackboard Outcomes pilot in a two-day University of Arkansas System Blackboard Outcomes retreat. Dr. McIntyre and Dr. Chatham-Carpenter also serve as mentors for the Assessment Mentoring Program and have shared the department’s program assessment journey with mentees over the past year.

As we become more familiar with Blackboard Outcomes, we foresee inviting members of
our advisory board, BA and MA alums, to participate in our program assessment. Currently, alums continue to participate in our on-campus Capstone day, scoring presentations using the grading rubric from the course to provide external feedback. However, we are exploring ways to also involve them in the formal assessment of program artifacts.