**ASSESSMENT REPORT**

**IDENTIFYING INFORMATION**

### **ASSESSMENT AREA**

Department of Communication Studies, major AND minor report

**ACADEMIC YEAR**

2009-2010

**ASSESSMENT TEAM MEMBERS**

 All members of the assessment team are from the Department of Communication Studies.

Dr. Karen Erlandson (department chair)

Dr. Jeremy Osborn

Dr. Yuxia Qian

Dr. Any Boyan

Ellen Brubaker

# **SECTION 1.**

# **LEARNING GOALS**

1. Students will master a clear understanding of the fundamental

concepts and processes of human communication.

1. Students will gain a facility with public speaking.
2. Students will graduate with an ability to understand,

evaluate, and apply contemporary communication theory.

**SECTION 2.**

**QUANTITATIVE MEASURES AND/OR QUALITATIVE INDICATORS**

**First**, a question that measures the department’s success at achieving Learning Goal 1 as

identified in the previous section is asked as embedded questions in tests in COMM 101

(Introduction to Human Communication). This is a required course for both Communication Studies majors and Communication Studies minors. It has recently been taught by either Dr. Osborn, Ellen Brubaker, or Dr. Qian. Included are data from both sections of COMM 101 from Spring 2009.

**Second**, in order to assess Learning Goal 2, students’ final speech from

COMM 241 (Public Speaking) was taped. Two professors (Dr. Yuxia Qian and Dr. Karen Erlandson) taught sections of this course last semester (Spring 2010). Both taped students giving a final speech. This is a course required by other programs on campus.

Therefore there are many students who take this course who cannot be considered to be

“Communication Studies” students. However, **all** students who graduate as

Communication Studies majors or minors are required to take this course. Consequently

professors treat all students as possible majors or minors while not all students think of

themselves in this fashion.

Because of the large number of students who take this course every semester and the

varying nature of their relationship with the discipline we do a sample rather than a

census of the final speeches. The selected speeches were evaluated by two

professors (Dr. Erlandson and Dr. Qian) who used a five point scale on twelve

questions to assess the students. The questions are included in Section 3 of this report.

**Third***,* in order to assess Learning Goal 3, students were required to answer an embedded

question in a theory course (COMM 351 and COMM 365) and in SPCH 322 (Communication Theory) which is a required course for all major and minors.

**SECTION 3.**

**SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE COLLECTED**

 Learning Goal 1

*Students will master a clear understanding of the fundamental*

*concepts and processes of human communication*

This learning goal is assessed through the following question embedded in one of the COMM 101 (Introduction to Human Communication) exams:

One of the key points in class thus far has been the complexity and the multifaceted nature of the communication process. Early in the semester I asked you to define communication. For this question you must revisit that idea and, given what we have discussed in class so far, define communication. In your answer you should address the different processes and components involved with the communication process and how these components fit together as a cohesive whole. ***(30 points)***

Data for this question were collected from COMM 101 students during Fall semester 2009 and Spring semester of 2010.  Students who were seen as demonstrating a thorough understanding of the concepts received scores of 83-100 (3.0 – 4.0). Students who were seen as demonstrating an adequate understanding of the concepts received scores of 70-82 (1.7 – 2.7).  Finally, students who were seen as demonstrating an inadequate understanding of the concepts received scores 69 and below (0 – 1.3).  Based on these criteria, 118 (76 Fall; 42 Spring) students demonstrated a thorough understanding of the basic concepts and processes, 10 (4 Fall; 6 Spring) students demonstrated an adequate understanding of the basic concepts and processes, and 6 (3 Fall; 2 Spring) students demonstrated an inadequate understanding of the basic concepts and processes.

These data clearly indicate that very few students complete the introductory, COMM 101 course without at the least an adequate understanding of the basic concepts and processes that comprise human communication and most students complete the course with a thorough understanding.

Two of the inadequate understanding students are students that failed to turn in any work for the exam question or missed an excessive number of classes, leaving them with a score of zero.

Learning Goal 2

*Students will gain a facility with public speaking*

Two instructors (Dr. Erlandson and Dr. Young) examined videotapes of COMM 241

students doing their final speech. Each graded each speech on a series of 12

questions or criteria each on sliding scale from 1-5 where 1 indicated “poor” and 5

“excellent”. Thus a student could receive a maximum of 120 points for a speech.

The questions/criteria upon which each student was assessment were as follows:

 1. Did the speaker limit the topic appropriately?

 2. Did the speaker have a clearly defined specific purpose?

 3. Did the speaker use an introduction effectively to gain the attention of the audience?

 4. Did the speaker use transitions between main points effectively?

 5. Did the speaker have clearly recognizable subunits to the speech?

 6. Did the speaker use a variety of effective proofs to justify the subunits?

 7. Did the speaker appear knowledgeable about the topic?

 8. Did the speaker use vocal and other nonverbal delivery techniques to emphasize

 important points?

 9. Did the speaker conclude the speech effectively?

10. Did the speaker attempt successfully to relate the information and/or persuasive

 content of the speech to the needs of the audience?

11. Did the speaker, in a persuasive speech, make appropriate choices concerning the

 persuasive approach to the topic?

12. Did the speaker establish, through eye contact and communicative delivery, a good

 rapport with the audience?

The following mathematical system was used to assess the results:

A thorough facility at public speaking required that a student receive at least 4 points

from each evaluator across all 12 criteria, that is 96 points.

An adequate facility at public speaking required that a student receive at least at one 3

from an evaluator and no more than one 2 from an evaluator on each criteria, this is at

least 60 points.

A student with an inadequate facility at public speaking would receive less than 60

points.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Public Speaknig Student | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| total eval 1 | 60 | 35 | 52 | 47 | 47 | 52 | 45 | 55 | 48 | 51 | 39 | 45 |
| total eval 2 | 58 | 38 | 48 | 44 | 51 | 56 | 45 | 56 | 50 | 53 | 41 | 43 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| total | 118 | 73 | 100 | 91 | 98 | 108 | 90 | 111 | 98 | 104 | 80 | 88 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | # | % |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Thorough Facility | 8 | 67% |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Adequate Facility | 4 | 33% |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| No Facility | 0 | 0% |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Across the 12 students selected at random from sections taught by two different

instructors we found that approximately 100% gained at least an adequate facility with

 the skill of public speaking, 67% had recognizably gained a thorough facility with

the skill. There were no students who gained zero facility with public speaking.

Learning Goal 3

*Students will graduate with an ability to understand, evaluate, and apply contemporary communication theory.*

This learning goal is currently assessed in three courses (COMM 351, COMM 322, and COMM 365). However, since COMM 351 was not offered during the 2008-2009 academic year. Additionally, we cannot evaluate COMM 351 either as Dr. Young who taught this class has resigned and did not leave this information behind. Therefore, we can only present data from 1 of the three courses.

**First**, the following question is embedded in the COMM 351 (Persuasion) final exam:

We have discussed many theories and concepts this semester that can help you improve your ability to persuade others. For this question I want you to pick the three theories from this course that you believe have the most practical value for you as a would-be persuader. In other words which three theories we have discussed can be most useful to you as you engage in persuasive attempts in the future. In your answer be sure to explain the basic concepts of each theory and your rationale for each choice. This question is worth **30 points.**

Data for this question were collected from COMM 351 students during Spring semester 2010. Students who were seen as demonstrating a thorough ability to understand and apply the theories received scores of 25 - 30 (3.0 – 4.0). Students who were seen as demonstrating an adequate ability to understand and apply the theories received scores of 21 – 24 (1.7 – 2.7). Finally, students who were seen as demonstrating an inadequate ability to understand and apply the theories received scores 20 and below (0 – 1.3).

Based on these criteria, 23 students demonstrated a thorough ability to understand and apply the theories, 3 students demonstrated an adequate ability to understand and apply the theories, and 1 student demonstrated an inadequate ability to understand and apply the theories.

**Second**, the following question is embedded in the COMM 322 (Communication Theory) final exam:

Many of the individual theories and approaches we have examined have fallen within the sociopsychological tradition. Considering what you know about the general characteristics of this tradition and the specific theories we have discussed (for example, the Theory of Reasoned Action, trait approaches, Social Judgment Theory, The Elaboration Likelihood Model, etc.) analyze the utility of the tradition as a whole. Specifically, begin by discussing the areas of communication that the tradition is capable of explaining. What are some examples of communication questions sociopsychological research would seek to answer? Finally, discuss in general the scientific and practical usefulness of this approach. Some questions to consider might be: Do these theories accurately represent human behavior, communication, and reasoning? Do they help advance scientific inquiry in a useful way? Does knowing them help you understand the actions of those around you?

Data for this question were collected from COMM 322 students during Spring semester 2010. The question was worth 25 points. Students who were seen as demonstrating a thorough ability to understand and evaluate the theories received scores of 21 - 25 (3.0 – 4.0). Students who were seen as demonstrating an adequate ability to understand and evaluate the theories received scores of 18 – 22 (1.7 – 2.7). Finally, students who were seen as demonstrating an inadequate ability to understand and evaluate the theories received scores 17 and below (0 – 1.3).

Based on these criteria, 9 students demonstrated a thorough ability to understand and apply the theories, 11 students demonstrated an adequate ability to understand and apply the theories, and 0 students demonstrated an inadequate ability to understand and apply the theories.

**Third**, a task embedded in COMM 365 (Media Theory) final assignments. Throughout the semester students are required to complete no less than 2 assignments and no more than 4. Most students completed 2 assignments, and 3 completed 3.

You will complete an outline that connects media phenomena to relevant media theories.

The outline contains three major sections. 1) Phenomenon, 2) media theory, and 3) combining phenomenon with theory. Section one should be a concise and accurate description of a specific media event, program, or occurrence. Section two should be a concise and accurate explanation of the major aspects of a media theory discussed in class. Section three should contain no new information regarding either the phenomenon or the theory, but should be where you match specific tenets of the media theory to specific aspects of the media phenomenon. A short explanatory sentence with each match is also required – why do these parts match up?

Data for this question were collected from COMM 365 students during the Spring semester of 2010.  Students who were seen as demonstrating a thorough ability to understand and apply the theories received scores of 80-100 (3.0 – 4.0). Students who were seen as demonstrating an adequate ability to understand and apply the theories received scores of 60-79 (1.7 – 2.7).  Finally, students who were seen as demonstrating an inadequate ability to understand and apply the theories received scores 59 and below (0 – 1.3).

The scores on the assignments were averaged for each student providing an overall metric for this assessment.

Based on these criteria, 11 students demonstrated a thorough ability to understand and apply the theories, 3 students demonstrated an adequate ability to understand and apply the theories, and 1 student demonstrated an inadequate ability to understand and apply the theories.

***Fourth,*** the following question is embedded in the COMM 202 (Interpersonal and Family Communication) final exam

Of the theories we have discussed this semester, select one. Explain in

which area of interpersonal or family communication you believe this theory would be most useful. Explain this theory as you would to a college

student who has not taken this course so that the theory is understandable

to them. Include in your explanation: (a) the focus or goal(s) of the theory;

(b) the key assumption of the theory; (c) what the theory describes,

predicts, etc.; (d) an example of the sort of thing the theory tries to

examine; and (e) a strength and a weakness of the theory.

Data for this question were collected from COMM 202 students during Fall semester 2009. The question was worth 25 points. Students who were seen as demonstrating a thorough ability to understand and evaluate the theories received scores of 21 - 25 (3.0 – 4.0). Students who were seen as demonstrating an adequate ability to understand and evaluate the theories received scores of 18 – 22 (1.7 – 2.7). Finally, students who were seen as demonstrating an inadequate ability to understand and evaluate the theories received scores 17 and below (0 – 1.3).

Based on these criteria, 16 students demonstrated a thorough ability to understand and apply the theories, 10 students demonstrated an adequate ability to understand and apply the theories, and 0 students demonstrated an inadequate ability to understand and apply the theories.

**SECTION 4.**

**CONCLUSIONS**

 Based on the evidence collected, the Department of Communication Studies is

successfully completing all of the learning goals it has identified.

Faculty who have been in the department for some period of time have embedded questions and procedures into the courses they teach and thus not only find it comparatively easy to carry out assessment but are also most likely and able to teach learning outcomes with intentionality. That is, rather than having a number of professors with disparate conceptions of what a graduate of our department should have learned, we have a set of outcomes upon which we have, as a group, agreed and which all of us keep in mind in all of our classes.

**IMPROVEMENTS**

As part of our ongoing commitment to assessment we are working to continually refine our embedded questions and instruments in an attempt to best evaluate our effectiveness. One future change we plan to make involves the replacement of the current embedded question from Communication Theory with a new embedded question beginning in the Fall of 2010. This course was recently designated as the capstone course in the major and reflective of this we feel a more comprehensive and broad embedded question will be more effective. As a result, the question discussed above will be replaced with the following:

As you reflect on all the theories we have examined this semester there are probably some that you found more compelling than others. For this final question you must pick the five theories, ideas, and/or approaches that you consider to be the most important from among all of the material we covered this semester. You may use any criteria you like in your definition of “importance,” but I expect your rationales to be explained and argued effectively. Your answer should be approximately 5 pages and is worth 50 points.

For this assessment period, all instructors who teach Public Speaking received a copy of the outcome criteria by which its students will be judged. This has allowed instructors to intentionally include all of these elements into their syllabi and testing procedures. This further facilitated the assessment process.

As a result of the curriculum changes, the department now divides the major into three tracks (interpersonal, organizational and media) to make sure that all students who major or minor in the department will gain a level of competence in each of these areas.

Thus, we now need to develop an assessment tool for each of these tracks. It has not been possible to initiate all of these changes yet as we have not filled all of the positions related to the tracks. We lost one of these tracks as a result of recent BOT decisions and have not been told when, if ever, this line will be replaced. We also lost an adjunct who taught many of our Intro sections. A culture of assessment is hard to maintain when a small department like ours is not given the resources required to maintain a sense of continuity from year to year in any given line, and when the courses we do offer are over-enrolled to accommodate cancelled courses.

We also initiated an exit survey for our graduating seniors this year and plan to do a follow-up survey in two years. We have been in the process of developing an assessment measure for alumni.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Our department needs more resources. Assessment is difficult when the department must rely on visiting help for major tracks of the department, since visiting professors are not typically involved in long-term planning. It is also difficult for faculty members to do additional work on existing courses when they are consistently asked to teach course overloads and classes in-load that are over-enrolled to meet student needs for Communication courses. This department is the fifth largest major on campus yet it has only four full time faculty members. We did have a visiting line converted to a much needed tenure-track line this year, but one of our major tracks is still represented by a visiting position (Mass Communication). Given the importance of this position, it should be a tenure-track line. Under ideal conditions, the department would consist of five tenure-track lines. This would allow more of the courses in the department to be regularly taught by the same professor. As a result each professor would be able to develop and measure assessment needs and outcomes more effectively.

If we are granted another tenure-track line we may be able to work on a common and more specific way of evaluating our learning outcomes.

**Submitted by: Karen Erlandson**

**Date: May 24, 2010**