

School of Communications Assessment Report 2004-2005

Introduction

The School of Communications was established in 2000 as the umbrella for the Communication and Journalism programs in the College of Social Sciences. The mission of the School is to be “the primary resource for the people of Hawai‘i, through an integrated program of excellence in teaching, research and application, to meet the challenges and opportunities of Communication and Journalism in the emerging technological, multicultural, and international context of the twenty-first century.”

During the 2004-2005 Academic Year, there are more than 350 undergraduate majors in Communication, and more than 50 students in the graduate program leading to a M.A. degree in Communication. The Journalism Program had about 100 undergraduate majors.

Undergraduate Assessment by Degree Program

The University of Hawai‘i catalog provides a general description of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for both the Communication and Journalism undergraduate programs. Student Learning Outcomes are defined by student performance. Each program implements methods for assessing student learning in terms of the following objectives:

- **Knowledge** (familiarity and understanding of the basic theories, policies, and methods of inquiry of the areas of emphasis or discipline in our program, e.g., intercultural communication, telecommunication, multimedia, Journalism)
- **Application** (ability to apply, integrate, and/or synthesize that knowledge as appropriate to a topic or topics relevant to the students’ personal or career interests and goals).
- **Inquiry** (ability to engage in inquiry designed to further the students’ understanding of issues within a topic or discipline using appropriate methodology).
- **Presentation/Articulation** (the ability to present the objectives, methods and findings of their inquiry in an effective manner appropriate to the relevant audience of their work).

A. Communication Undergraduate Program

A Senior Thesis Project (COM 490) is required for all majors in their final semester of the undergraduate program. Typically, two sections of the course designated “Writing

Intensive” with 20 students in each section is offered every semester. The course is designed as an assessment tool and *capstone course* to:

1. Give students the opportunity to synthesize and integrate their learning across the curriculum and apply it to an issue of personal and professional interest in a Communication topic, and
2. Provide a basis for the faculty to assess effectiveness in helping students achieve learning objectives for that curriculum.

The thesis project is a student initiated and managed activity. Each student selects a topic of the thesis project, reflecting the student’s interest in a Communication problem. A thesis may take a conventional form that is “research-based” or an alternative form such as a video production, a multimedia production or a script (areas covered in the Communication curriculum).

The Communication faculty endeavors to rotate teaching of the course through as many faculty as resources allow to familiarize each member of the faculty with the quality of student development across the curriculum. Instructors monitor and provide feedback throughout the course as a means of interaction and assessment of student work. Copies of the work are collected at the end of the semester for evaluation the following semester.

The School has implemented a procedure in which random samples of these projects are evaluated each year in terms of the criteria contained in the SLOs. This mechanism is intended to provide a random sampling of all graduating majors. The reviewers consist of faculty in the Communication Program other than the instructor of record, faculty from academic units outside the Program, and professionals from relevant professions in the community. The goal of the evaluation is to identify what each reviewer perceives to be the strengths and weaknesses of the Program as reflected in the students’ performance in the thesis course. Students include in the written submission of their project a preface in which they are asked to describe what they have learned and provide some self-evaluation of themselves personally and culturally as well as a summing up of their career goals. This provides some measure of the students’ perceptions of the program and their experiences with the faculty. Students are required to provide samples of their work and an evaluation that are left in the School of Communications office at the end of the semester.

Assessment data is used to review instructional practices and update curriculum. Individual faculty members have the opportunity to fine-tune their courses in response to the evaluations. The data provides a feedback mechanism for lower-level courses to recalibrate what they do and how they do it. For example, if the quality of writing is seen as a problem, the program can make changes by giving greater emphasis to writing in courses. The assessment also serves as a form of “consumer research” in terms of program administration. Through the projects that they select, students decide what they think is relevant, interesting and important in Communication studies. If, for example, student projects heavily emphasize video screenplays, which may indicate more courses

or emphasis in that area. Similarly, if thesis indicates a decided interest in Organizational Communication, then that is an indicator of the direction of student interests in the field of Communication.

B. JOURNALISM UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM

In Fall 2004, the Journalism faculty initiated the first major curriculum change in the program in more than 20 years. The curricular changes were designed to meet the needs of students in the 21st Century. These changes underscore integration of Journalism knowledge, skills and values, with the technological convergence of information gathering, retrieval, delivery and dissemination. Emphasis is on collaborative teaching and learning. Selective admission was imposed through the use of an admission exam and a 3.0 GPA requirement for undergraduates with Junior standing. Enrollment is limited to 40 students each Fall.

Despite these changes, student performance remains the cornerstone of assessment in the Journalism Program. The Journalism faculty uses a portfolio program for assessing undergraduate education in the new “convergence” curriculum. This approach reflects the professionally oriented goals of the undergraduate program within the context of mission of the School of Communications.

Students build portfolios with samples of work from key classes in their major course sequence. The completed portfolios will be used for program assessment; portfolios may serve instructors as diagnostic assessments of student levels of learning as students progress through the curriculum, and evidence of professional development for students themselves to use in starting their careers. Portfolios permit the faculty to periodically review student work for purposes of evaluation of the student and assessment of the courses.

Major revisions in the Journalism curriculum were inaugurated in Fall 2004 and as a result, Journalism is fine-tuning portfolio assessment within the context of the new curriculum. As part of this process, assessment is inextricably tied to instruction. This involves course-based assessment by examinations or writing projects. Effective instruction the “convergence” model of teaching Journalism requires the faculty to constantly monitor student progress for purposes of adjustment and adaptation of courses in the new curriculum to meet SLOs.

Students are encouraged but not required to publish works in outlets such as the student newspaper, magazines and newsletters. Such published works provide students with feedback from “readers” outside the context of the classroom. Students are also encouraged to do internships with media-related companies to provide exposure to working in a newsroom environment. Students have gone on to successful careers in newspapers and television as a result of such internships. Since Journalism is a professional program, the ultimate means of assessing student achievement is measuring the numbers of graduates who are working journalists. By that measure, Journalism has been effective, with graduates working in newsrooms locally and nationally. Some have

become editors, producers and news anchors. Others have entered public service as press spokesmen for the Honolulu mayor and Hawaii's U.S. senators.

Graduate Assessment by Degree Program

There are currently 54 students enrolled in the School of Communications' two-year Masters of Arts Degree. In the Communication MA program, there is continuous assessment of student learning and progress toward a degree. Throughout their tenure in the graduate program, students are evaluated in their performance and timely completion of required coursework. Consistent with the SLOs articulated above, students are assessed in their ability to conceive of and conduct original, scholarly research and their ability to apply communication theories and practices in the professional field.

A. ASSESSMENT IN STUDENTS' FIRST YEAR

Students are required to take two foundation courses during their first semester: Communication 611 and Communication 612. The objective of Com 611 is to ensure that students have a solid and comprehensive understanding of the communication theories. The course focuses on the evolution of communication theories in the historical transitions from pre-modern to modern and post-modern societies. Students are expected to present, discuss and debate theoretical issues. Their understanding of these issues is assessed through weekly oral presentations as well as three written response essays. Students are also expected to develop their own argument, thesis, or theory and substantiate their views with facts, logic, and reference to existing theories. Students must earn a grade of "B" or better in the course

Com 612 provides a graduate-level introduction to communication research methods. This course establishes the skills and knowledge necessary to conduct independent, scholarly research. Students are expected to develop a comprehensive written research proposal as well as present and defend the proposal orally.

At the end of their first semester, students can apply to be admitted to candidacy. The University's Graduate Division and the graduate chair of the School of Communications review the student's progress toward her degree. To be admitted to candidacy, students are assessed in terms of meeting a set of clear objectives:

- Completing Com 611 successfully by earning a "B" or better
- Achieving at least a 3.0 overall GPA in all completed coursework
- Removing any academic deficiencies.

B. ASSESSMENT IN THE STUDENTS' SECOND YEAR: THESIS OR PRACTICUM

In their second year, students are assessed through their continued coursework and their progress towards completing the required courses. The program provides guidance to students interested in focusing on an area of specialization in Communication. Course requirements require provide continuous evaluation and assessment of student work. Requirements include:

- Completion of 36 credits in the program to be eligible for graduation.
- Course of study must include:
 - two foundation courses (Com 611 and 612)
 - two area specialization courses (i.e., Organizational/Intercultural Communication—Com 623 and 643; Telecommunication – Com 633 and 634; Global Communication – Com 644 and 645)
 - two seminars (Com 691 and/or 692, and/or 680 from the Graduate Certificate Program in Telecommunication and Information Resource Management (TIRM))
 - completion of at least 12 credits selected from regular graduate work in the program (Com 623 to 646, 650, 660, 691, 692, and/or TIRM courses.
 - completion of at least six (6) credits of Com 700 Thesis or Com 695 Practicum

Students are assessed through their performance in a thesis or practicum project. The proposal and research evaluate student’s ability to develop, propose, and conduct original, scholarly research.

Before conducting thesis research or practicum, most graduate faculty advisers require students to defend their research or practicum proposals in a committee consisting of at least three graduate faculty members. Once the proposal is approved, the chair of the committee works with the student to supervise the continuity, timeliness, and the quality of the thesis or practicum experience.

Students must defend the thesis in the final oral exam. The oral exam requires students to demonstrate to the thesis committee satisfactory command of all aspects of the work presented. For a practicum, a final product and public presentation is required.

C. STUDENT CONTRIBUTION TO DISCIPLINE/ACADEMIC AREA

Graduate students are encouraged to present their work to academic conferences whenever possible. Given the cost of travel to and from Hawaii, this is frequently a financial burden. The School has been fortunate in recent years to be able to provide funds from the Louise Hess Miller Endowment Fund to support student study and research travel grants. For example, in November, an MA degree student will be attending the SIETAR (Society for Intercultural Training, Education and Research) USA conference in New Jersey for a presentation entitled: “Family Communication Patterns and The Development of Ethnic Identity in Multiethnic Filipino-Americans.” Another

MA degree candidate was awarded a grant for a trip to Bangladesh for research on her thesis topic: “The Gender Difference in the Communication Process of the Undergraduate Students in Bangladesh, Influencing Their Major Selection.”

The School does not have a regular mechanism for monitoring graduates. But an informal network has been formed through the bond between students and their advisers and mentors. It is difficult to quantify, but many students have used the MA Program as a steppingstone to entering Doctoral programs at UH and other institutions. In terms of chosen professions and careers, Communication have taken on a variety of jobs. For example, a graduate serves as a television executive in Korea, another is an administrator/instructor in the Pacific-wide Satellite Consortium, the Dean, School of Communications, Thailand, software engineer/designer and public relations director.

Conclusion

The School of Communications continues to monitor its programs and students to maintain standards of excellence in its undergraduate and graduate programs. The faculty is committed to working with each other, students, colleagues in the University and the broader community to accomplishing its mission of achieving high standards of excellence in teaching, research and application.