

Communication Studies Graduate Program Yearly Assessment Report: 2007-2008

I. Assessment Activities:

A. Program Goals:

The MA Communication Studies program provides an opportunity for students to develop individual programs of theory, research, and application among the areas of interpersonal, organizational, educational and public communication. The program is designed for students who seek careers as communication professionals or who intend to pursue further graduate study in the field.

The program has not revised its goals during the previous academic year.

B. Learning Outcomes/Data Collection

Comprehensive exams students completed in the Spring 2008 were used as sources for analyzing outcomes of our program objectives. Student achievement in CMM 501 is also included to implement the objective of analyzing context dependent courses. In addition grades students earned for assignments in CMM 601 (Problems and Methods in Communication Research) and CMM 606 (Studies in Communication Theory), the required graduate courses, provided additional data for analyzing related objectives and outcomes since the last report. For all objectives, the Department's goal is 80% achievement of A or B as its benchmark. While somewhat unrealistic a benchmark for our toughest courses, the 80% provides a goal to which effort can be continuously directed.

Eight students completed the comprehensive exam for Spring 2008. Broadly speaking, outcomes were positive for relevant Communication Studies Program Objectives 1-9 (see attached matrix). All 8 students passed their comprehensive exam, though three of the eight had to return and complete additional work. The exam administered by Communication Studies is partially standardized and partially adapted to each student's individual areas of emphasis. What follows is an analysis of outcomes for objectives analyzing individual comprehensive exams (n = 8) and grades for CMM 501, CMM 601 and CMM 606.

Objective 1: Distinguish among the major theoretical approaches to communication.

Outcomes: Four student were asked to compare and contrast theory paradigms on the comprehensive exam, and three satisfactorily identified major features of each paradigm and how the paradigms contrasted on issues of epistemology, ontology, and axiology. The one student who failed passed the revision. In CMM 606 (n = 17) 71% students received an overall grade of B or A. 29% received C. The course as a whole has an emphasis on distinguishing among major theoretical approaches, indicating that the class as a whole was well able to distinguish the major theoretical approaches, though not achieving the 80% benchmark.

Objective 2. Achieve mastery knowledge of a theory or program of research.

Outcomes. Two comprehensive exam questions elicit mastery knowledge of a theory for each student tested. Analysis of student answers reveals that all students cited sources at an acceptable level. Five out of eight had no problem with either of the two exam questions eliciting mastery knowledge of a theory (62%). Overall 81% of the theory related answers demonstrated mastery at an acceptable level. The three students who were called back to revise their answers to one of the theory-related questions did passable work on their revisions. In CMM 501, the term paper assignment requires mastery of an organizational communication theory or area of research, as does CMM 606. Examining term paper results for CMM 501 (n=7), 86% (n=6) received an A or B. The one student who did not make an A or B flunked because of unintentional plagiarism. (It often occurs that international students are not aware of norms concerning the proper ways to make use of outside sources. This instance of plagiarism was committed by an international student taking his first class in our program. Subsequent work has shown this student is exercising diligence to follow the discipline's norms concerning the use of outside sources.) Examining student achievement on the term paper assignment for CMM 606 (n= 17), 65% of students received a grade of B or A. 24% of students received a C, and 11% received a D.

Objective 3. Describe major theories/research programs in a communication field (e.g., interpersonal, organizational, public). Outcomes: Group presentations covering several theories discussed in a chapter provides evidence of the ability to clearly distinguish theories of a particular chapter. With a focus on accurate, clear content as well as delivery, that 100% (n=7) of the students received A or B provides evidence that students understand and can distinguish different theories of an organizational context, such as small group or organizational conflict. And as with the term paper, 86% of reaction papers received A or B. However, these reaction papers by and large focused on smaller units of content, encompassing perhaps a couple of theories. The cumulative evidence from the group presentation, term paper, and reaction paper assignments is that students can distinguish among organizational theories. While this objective is most related to courses anchored in individual contexts, reaction papers in CMM 606 can relate to different contexts in that the two required reaction paper assignments engage different chapters in the text, largely organized by type of theory or context. Thirty-four reaction papers were submitted, and 85% received B or A, 15% received C.

Objective 4. Apply theoretical knowledge of communication to a particular context or situation. Outcome. Most comprehensive questions in the students' area of study are context or situation related. For example, questions might ask the student to apply knowledge to an intercultural or a political context, or to design a strategic program to solve particular communication problems for a particular company. In this regard, students were effective at a conceptual level in applying knowledge in a particular context. 81% percent of the 16 area of emphasis answers examined were judged as passable answers.

Objective 5. Demonstrate critical thinking/listening skills. Outcomes. Students generally hold that CMM 601 and CMM 606 are conceptually the most difficult. A measure of listening skill is the accurate assimilation and appropriate application of course content evidenced in overall grades and on course tests. In CMM 606, 71% of students made a course grade of B or A, 29% made C. On the Midterm Exam, 65% made A or B, 29% made C, 6% made D. In CMM 601 (n = 13), 54% of students made A or B on the midterm examination, 46% made C. (Three students were one correct answer shy of a B-). Overall grades for CMM 601 show that 69% of students made B or A, 31% made C.

Objective 6. Communicate effectively applying standards of the communication discipline. Outcomes. CMM 501 oral presentations (group and individual) show that 100% (n=14) received either A or B. Analysis of the comprehensive exams shows that 62.5% of students achieved effective communication, and 37.5% had some difficulties. The three students who were called back to revise answers tended to suffer from not developing answers in enough detail. Given the students were expected to produce essay length answers with no aids under test conditions, lack of development was predictable as the most common problem students experience that brings them back for more work. In CMM 501 (n=7), 86% received A or B on the most demanding course assignment, the term paper, 14% received F. In CMM 606 (n=17), 65% received A or B, 24% made C, and 11% made D. For CMM 601 (n=13), 54% made A or B on the term paper proposal, 31% made C, and 14% made D.

Objective 7. Explain major communication methodologies. Outcome. CMM 601 focuses on quantitative research, so while varieties of research methods are emphasized in the course (e.g., experimental and nonexperimental methods, different methods of obtaining data), this variety is within the quantitative approach. Qualitative research, such as analysis of discourse and rhetorical analysis, is not part of the course. Within the parameters of quantitative research, student ability to distinguish quantitative methodologies is assessed on the midterm exam. As noted above for objective 5, 54% of students made A or B, 46% made C.

Objective 8. Describe the validity elements of a major communication methodology. Outcome. Students on the comprehensive exam did well in accurately describing validity and its characteristics with 75% of students writing knowledgeably on either internal validity or external validity.

Objective 9. Analyze/apply a communication research methodology in a particular communication field (e.g., interpersonal, organizational, public) and situations. Outcome. This objective is most fully realized in the term paper for CMM 601, in which students are asked to use acceptable communication research methods in mounting a communication research proposal. On this assignment (n = 13), 54% of students earned either A or B, 31% earned C, and 14% earned D.

C. Results :

1. Overall, the limited results reported in this assessment are favorable to show context dependent courses are meeting their objectives. Though the sample size is too small to generalize based on CMM 501 results, the context dependent course I am teaching currently is showing similar results with 1 ½ weeks left in the semester. Right now, all students in CMM 603 (Nonverbal Communication) would receive an A or B, including the student who committed unintentional plagiarism in CMM 501.

A. Results for the Comprehensive Exam show our objectives are largely being met, even if a little bit shy of the 80% benchmark on some measures. Students have responded favorably to recently implemented meetings which provide an overview of the comprehensive exam, lessening apprehension (somewhat) about the semester long period of preparation and examination.

B . Results for CMM 606 and 601 show the greatest discrepancy in meeting the 80% benchmark, and do so in the order of students' perception of difficulty and dread. These two courses are considered the most difficult and demanding by students, with 601 considered the most difficult of the program. Results follow this ranking, with student achievement arguably better for 606 better than for 601 at the level of individual assignments.

C. However, my belief is that by far the strongest predictor of student achievement in any of the courses or assignments is simply the aptitude and work ethic of the students. Those who are our stronger students tend to do better in all courses, while weaker students tend to have more problems. Although 69% of students, nine of 13, made A or B for CMM 601, three out of the four who did not make A or B were weak students in general in our program. The fourth student was an underachiever. That is, in a prior class, this student exhibited an A aptitude, but performed at a B level. For CMM 601, I would say this student had the aptitude to do better, but the class was too difficult to get a B without more effort than the student cared to give. One of the C students in the course, perhaps the weakest in our program actually showed great strides in effort and achievement, earning a B on the midterm exam and a C+ on the proposal assignment. I would consider this student a success story for the course, though the student's final grade was C. In the end, my belief is that the department's objectives are being satisfactorily met, though the outcomes might change from year to year. My personal knowledge of each student in usually three to four, but no less than two courses, and the comprehensive exam, leads me to the conclusion that the overriding characteristic responsible for yearly differences in benchmark outcomes is the yearly differences in the proportion of stronger to weaker students.

2. For future assessments, courses should continue to be examined focusing on individual contexts, such as interpersonal communication, organizational communication, and public communication to enhance assessment of Objectives 2-6. The n for these courses is likely to be less than the required courses, but they are worth examination to follow up on the very positive results.

3. The department is in the initial stages of proposing a Masters Degree in Health Communication Studies, contingent on the successful recruitment of a faculty major with

a health communication. Such a program would be a major boon for the Department, the graduate college and the College of Liberal Arts.

4. Practical realities constrain other revisions. For example, on examples related to methodology, only quantitative methods are taught in CMM 601. However, broadening the scope of the course is not feasible, given that the course must include 6-8 weeks' focus on using statistics in research. Adding a course in qualitative research is not feasible, given the 36 hour expectation for earning a degree is not likely to change. However, offering CMM 601 with a qualitative focus to alternate with a quantitative focus is worth exploring to further meet student interests.

II. BOT Initiative 3 Compliance: Not applicable to graduate programs.

III. Plans for the current year: The program will be collecting evidence from several other graduate courses during the fall and spring semesters. Continuing steps will be taken to forward exploration of a Health Communication MA, with an immediate emphasis on a successful search for a Health Communication faculty member.

IV. Assistance Needed: None at the moment.

IV. What one most important thing has the department/program learned through this process?

That the success of context dependent communication courses and the Comprehensive Exam in meeting benchmarks contrasts with the required courses.

Component / Course / Program Level

Student Outcome: When a student completes the graduate program in Communication Studies, she/he should be able to	Person or Office Responsible	Assessment Tool or Approach	Standards/Benchmark	Results/Analysis	Action Taken
1. Distinguish among the major theoretical approaches to communication		Comprehensive Examination CMM 606 Final Grades	All assigned students pass the question about difference in theoretical foundations. 80% of students receive an A or B for the course.	N=4. Three out of four passed this answer. N=17 71% received A or B; 29% received C.	None. None
2. Achieve mastery knowledge of a theory or program of research	Ed Woods	Comprehensive Examination	All students pass both area of emphasis questions	N=8 five students passed both answers. Three students passed one. This translates to 13 answers that achieved mastery knowledge in their answers appropriate to test conditions. All three students revised their failing essays to a passing status. This translates to an 81% initial pass rate. In 2006 and 2007, 90% of answers passed (27/30). In 2005, 75% (12/16). Cumulatively, 84% of answers passed (52/62)	Data indicated that in the three most recent years the percentage of passing answers increased beyond the 2005 year. The cumulative totals since 2005 exceeds the benchmark

Component / Course / Program Level

Student Outcome: When a student completes the graduate program in Communication Studies, she/he should be able to	Person or Office Responsible	Assessment Tool or Approach	Standards/Benchmark	Results/Analysis	Action Taken
	Ed Woods	CMM501 term paper	80% of students receive and "A" or "B" on the Term Paper	N= 7 86% received A or B; 14% received F In 2007, N=10 70% received and "A" or "B"; 10% received "C"; 10% received D, and 10% failed. Cumulative Totals (N=17) 76% received A or B; 6% received C, 6% received D, and 12% failed.	None indicated, though sample size is too small to derive credible conclusions.
	Ed Woods	CMM 606 Term Paper	80% A or B on the Term Paper	N =17 65% received A or B; 24% received C and 11% received D	At this time, the data reveal that there are too few cases to make any substantial changes at the present.

Component / Course / Program Level

Student Outcome: When a student completes the graduate program in Communication Studies, she/he should be able to	Person or Office Responsible	Assessment Tool or Approach	Standards/Benchmark	Results/Analysis	Action Taken
<p>3. Describe the major theories/research programs in a communication field.</p>	Ed Woods	Chapter Group Presentations	80 % of students receive an "A" or "B" on the presentations	N = 7 100% received A or B	None indicated, though sample size is too small to derive credible conclusions.
	Ed Woods	Reaction Papers CMM 501	80% of students receive an A or B on the reaction papers.	<p>N=7 86% received A or B, 14% received F</p> <p>In 2007, N=11 reaction papers received; 73% (n=8) received and "A" or "B"; 18% (n=2) received a "C" and 9% (n=1) <u>received an "F"</u></p>	Combined three previous years' results, the total of 140 reaction papers reveal this objective is being achieved.
	Ed Woods	Reaction Papers CMM 606	80% of students receive an A or B on the reaction papers.	<p>N=34 85% of papers received an A or B; 15% received a C.</p> <p>Cumulative totals of same instructor N=140; 81% received A or B (n=113); 16% (n=23) received a C, 1.4% (n=2) received a D, and 1.4% (n=2) failed.</p>	

Component / Course / Program Level

Student Outcome: When a student completes the graduate program in Communication Studies, she/he should be able to	Person or Office Responsible	Assessment Tool or Approach	Standards/Benchmark	Results/Analysis	Action Taken
<p>4. Apply theoretical knowledge of communication to a particular context or situation</p>	<p>Ed Woods</p>	<p>Comprehensive Examination</p>	<p>All students pass area of emphasis questions.</p>	<p>N=16 questions; 81% initially passed. In 2007, N=10 questions; 90% of the answers examined were judged as evidencing mastery appropriate to the test conditions. In 2006, 90% of answers passed (18/20). In 2005, 75% (12/16). Cumulatively, 84% of answers passed (52/62)</p>	<p>Data indicated that in the three most recent years the percentage of passing answers increased beyond the 2005 year.</p>

Component / Course / Program Level

Student Outcome: When a student completes the graduate program in Communication Studies, she/he should be able to	Person or Office Responsible	Assessment Tool or Approach	Standards/Benchmark	Results/Analysis	Action Taken
5. Demonstrate critical thinking and listening skills	Ed Woods	CMM 606 Midterm Exam	80 of students receive an "A" or "B" on Midterm exam.	N=17 midterm exams; 71% (n=12) received a grade of "A" or "B", 29% received a "C" (n=5).	None indicated, though sample size is too small to derive credible conclusions.
	Ed Woods	CMM 601 midterm exam	80% of students receive "A" or "B" on midterm exam.	N=13 exams; 54% (n=7) received A or B; 46% received C. In 2007, 64% (n=7) received "A" or "B", 18% (n=2) received "C", 18% (n=2) failed. 2005 results 60% made A or B, 30% made C, 5% made D, and 5% failed.	Although there are too few cases in order to make any substantial changes, reinforcement of understanding and applying methods that was attempted in Spring 2008 saw a decrease and not an increase in test outcomes, though in 2008 there were no Ds or Fs.

Component / Course / Program Level

Student Outcome: When a student completes the graduate program in Communication Studies, she/he should be able to	Person or Office Responsible	Assessment Tool or Approach	Standards/Benchmark	Results/Analysis	Action Taken
6. Communicate effectively applying standards of the communication discipline	Ed Woods	CMM 501 oral presentations (Group and Individual Presentations)	80% of oral presentations receive either "A" or "B" 80 % of papers receive an "A" or "B".	N=14 100% of oral assignments received either A or B.	None indicated, though sample size is too small to derive credible conclusions.
	Ed Woods	Comprehensive Exam	All students pass the examination.	N=8 62.5% had no major problem applying the standards of the discipline; 37.5% experienced problems enough they were called back to do further work; no one's exam was so deficient as to warrant an outright failure.	At this time, the data reveal that there are too few cases in order to make any substantial changes at the present.
	Ed Woods	CMM 501 Term Paper Grades	80% of term papers receive A or B	N=7; 86% received A or B; 14% failed.	None indicated, though sample size is too small to derive credible conclusions.
	Ed Woods	CMM 606 Term Papers	80% of term papers receive A or B	N=17; 65% received A or B; 24% received C, and 11% made D.	At this time, the data reveal that there are too few cases in order to make any substantial changes at the present.
	Ed Woods	CMM 601 Term Papers	80% of term papers receive A or B	N=13; 54% received A or B; 46% earned C	At this time, the data reveal that there are too few cases in order to make any substantial changes at the present.
7. Explain major communication methodologies.	Ed Woods	CMM 601 midterm exams.	80% of exams receive either "A" or "B".	N=13 exams; 54% (n=7) received "A" or "B", 46% (n=6) received "C"	Although there are too few cases in order to make any substantial changes, historically classes do not achieve the 80% benchmark.

Component / Course / Program Level					
Student Outcome: When a student completes the graduate program in Communication Studies, she/he should be able to	Person or Office Responsible	Assessment Tool or Approach	Standards/Benchmark	Results/Analysis	Action Taken
8. Describe the validity elements of a major communication methodology.	Ed Woods	Comprehensive Exam	All students be able to describe the validity elements of a major communication methodology	N=8 75% were able to describe the validity elements of a major communication methodology. 25% had significant problems. For 2007, the breakdown was 80/20. 2006 Results: N=10 70% received a passing grade or excellent, 30% had problems. 2005 Results N=11 73% (n=8) received a passing grade, 27% (n=3) did not. Cumulative results: 25 of 34 (74%) answered the validity question satisfactorily .	Though not generally at the 100% level, , the results do not suggest the need for significant changes.
9. Analyze/apply a communication research methodology in a particular communication field (e.g. interpersonal, organization, public) and situations.	Ed Woods	CMM 601 Proposal	80% of students make "A" or "B" on proposal.	N= 13 54% received A or B; 46% received C. For 2007, N=10 50% received "A" or "B"; 30% received "C"; 20% failed. Previous result (2005): N=19 68% (n=13) received "A" or "B", 26% (n=5) received C; and 6% (n=1) failed. Cumulative: N=42 60% (n=25) received "A" or "B"; 33% (n=14) received C, and 7% (n=3) failed.	A cumulative total of 60% making A or B suggests that 80% will be difficult to achieve. On the positive side, the most recent 601 offering yielded no D or F grades. This might indicate the methodology reinforcement measures are helping the weaker students.

Instructions: Under student outcomes (Column I) please list the most current student outcomes/competencies to be demonstrated by your graduates. These should be in your assessment plan.

(Column II) Person/office responsible: If someone specific has been designated to collect the various pieces of evidence, please list their names in this column.

(Column III) Assessment Tool or Approach: Here you will need to designate the assessment measures you are using to assess the particular outcome. Measures/tools may include term papers, parts of essay tests, internship results; class projects; objective tests; standardized/normed or other licensure tests, or a variety of other measures that may indicate competence in a particular objective.

(Column IV) Standards/Benchmark: Here you may indicate a particular set of standards you have set for completion or if you are developing benchmarks, please indicate what those are. If you are using a national test, what are the indicators of competence. This also pertains to BOT Initiative #3 which asks us to measure students against some national standard.

(Column V) Results/Analysis: Indicate what the results were utilizing the assessment tool/measure and applying it against the benchmarks set. Please be fairly specific here, provide relevant data and a brief analysis.

(Column VI) Action Taken: Indicate any action taken based on the results/analysis you have completed.

PLEASE REMEMBER: Not all objectives have to be measured every semester or every year. All of your objectives should be measured in a 2 to 3 year cycle. Sometimes it depends on when particular courses are offered as to when objectives can be measured. A helpful tool may be implementation of the courses/objective matrix. Some programs have completed this some have not. If you are interested in completing one for your program, please let me know and this office will supply you with the forms and assist in completing this document.