Plan for Spoken, Visual, and Written Competencies in the Discipline

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The Department of Communication confers approximately 180 Bachelor of Arts degrees per year. Students specialize in one of four options within the major: Print and Electronic Journalism; Film and Media Theory; Public Relations; and Communication Theory.

The Department of Communication completed an audit of the undergraduate curriculum during Fall 2004 semester, analyzing course offerings on five competency areas. The competencies are: communication (speaking, writing, visual); technological skill; critical thinking and research; theoretical understanding of communication; and professionalism and ethics.

For the purposes of this report, we will focus on the first set of competencies: spoken, written, and visual communication. We approach this competency area at two levels. First, graduates from our program should develop the general communication skills expected of any Bachelor of Arts graduate. Secondly, because graduates of our program are likely to work as communication professionals, they also must develop skills appropriate for their chosen career path. The outcomes described in the following sections reflect both general and professional competencies.

Outcomes for Bachelor of Arts in Communication Graduates

Every graduate of this program should demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively in a range of contexts. Specifically, a communication degree recipient should be prepared to develop and present messages appropriate for audience and context as defined by communication theory and professional standards. Because sophisticated message development requires effective research, we include some aspects of research skill as part of the development of spoken, written, and visual communication competency. The outcomes identified below reflect recommendations.
from the National Communication Association, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Association, scholarly literature on outcomes for communication graduates, and feedback from alumni.

Foundational Skills

As students begin to navigate the university environment, they must master skills fundamental to all communication situations, including:

- Research skills: Information literacy, judicious use of databases and library
- Writing skills: Effective and accurate use of standard American English, grammar, and various formats to present information/ideas to a reader.
• Oral Communication skills: Presentation skills (individual, group), interpersonal and team-based communication skills
• Visual skills: Use of graphics and design components to effectively communicate a message including use of presentation software for public presentations, effective presentation of data in print documents, and visual support for oral presentations.

Moderate Skill

As students move into more sophisticated communication situations, they must adopt more discipline-specific communication skills, including:

• Research Skills: use of internet-based information gathering techniques; ability to conduct an effective interview; ability to conduct a focus group.
• Writing Skills: Effective use of Associated Press style for print and/or broadcast; Ability to write appropriately for different media (print, voice, or web); demonstration of effective organization, argument, and presentation of original ideas.
• Oral Communication: Ability to communicate effectively and confidently in impromptu situations; ability to provide theoretical justifications for decisions related to design of communication strategies; demonstration of effective organization, argument, and delivery of original ideas; ability to work in a team-based setting.
• Visual Communication: Ability to identify and incorporate effective design elements in print, video, web, and oral presentation aids.

Advanced Skill

The outcomes appropriate for each area of the communication major reflect the expectations for graduates seeking employment in a communication profession. Students should demonstrate these competencies in a senior-capstone course or independent capstone experience (Honors; Senior Independent Study).

Print and Electronic Journalism: Students completing this degree option should demonstrate the following skills:

• Conduct an in depth interview
• Structure messages according to standards of professional practice
• Adapt writing style appropriately for different media
• Incorporate visual support in print and web-based reporting

Those specializing in electronic journalism should exhibit the additional following skills:
• Speak effectively for studio and/or field formats
• Shoot and edit video according to the standards of professional practice
• Incorporate graphics/text in video reports

Public Relations: Students completing this degree option should demonstrate the following skills:

• Perform an individual or team-based persuasive presentation
• Identify appropriate layout and design elements for print and web-based media according to standards of professional practice
• Design messages according to theoretical principles and standards of professional practice
• Present sophisticated analysis of communication situations in both written and oral formats

Film Studies: Students completing this degree option should demonstrate the following skills:

• Written and oral presentation of an original critique of a film or original research in film history and theory based on scholarly or professional standards.
• Complete and present an original film including a film treatment or screenplay, film production and editing, and the introduction of the project to a viewing audience.

Communication Theory: Students pursuing this degree option should:

• Articulate in written and oral presentations the outcome of original research and analysis of communication problems or situations;
• Demonstrate the ability to develop messages and media strategies (written, oral, visual) according to theory and professional standards.

Rationale

The building of communication competencies cannot be substantive and long term without attention to students as learners, meaning-makers, and social beings. Consequently, we are adopting a three-tier approach to competence development. Students are introduced to a freshman learning community and empowered to take responsibility for their learning in first-year foundational courses. As they move from the collection and analysis of secondary research to the creation of primary research during their sophomore and junior years, they have multiple opportunities to share their learning and their creative projects with peers and faculty. They will learn to communicate both as educated individuals and as future communication professionals.

As students progress through the curriculum, they will be challenged to complete increasingly analytical and complicated communication analyses. Ultimately, in a capstone course, students are responsible for an analytic presentation of original research or other creative project.

Delivery Points in the Curriculum for Instruction and Practice

Students will share a first- and second-year foundational experience and then branch into specialized areas at the junior and senior levels. While this is similar to our current approach, the
restructuring shifts slightly the courses presented in the foundational areas and reorganized the advanced options. The department will propose new check sheets, beginning with the class of 2009, reflecting these changes. Appendix A presents the proposed checksheets reflecting the points of delivery for all five competency areas.

The first-year foundation experience in COMM 1015-1016 provides for groundwork for communication skills essential to college work. The skills and assignments are detailed in Appendix B.

Students then move into a second-year “disciplinary foundation” course sequence. All majors take COMM 1024 Introduction to Communication Research and will complete assignments
incorporating speaking, writing, and visual presentation appropriate for communication research. All majors also must complete COMM 2024 Media Writing as an introduction to news writing style. This course is writing intensive and will continue to meet the guidelines outlined in the previous Writing Intensive guidelines. Students also will choose one course focused primarily on visual communication (COMM 2034 Visual Media; COMM 2094 Communication, Internet, and Society; and COMM 3184 Television Production). This combination of research, writing, and visual communication courses is designed to develop student ability beyond the freshman foundation and serve as an introduction to higher-level disciplinary courses.

In the junior and senior year, students move into specialized courses related to their chosen professional career option. As noted in the charts, students in the Communication Theory, Public Relations, Electronic and Print Journalism, and Film Studies will have at least one required course meeting the communication competency goals and then additional optional courses to round out their curriculum.

Each option within the major will culminate in a capstone experience. The capstone courses will integrate all competency areas either through independent research projects or through creative and applied projects. As part of the ongoing curriculum revision, we will designate some existing courses as “capstone” and will offer Topics courses to cut across curricular areas, encouraging collaboration among students from different options.

In order to enact this plan, we will redesign some courses and add only a few new courses. The area in need of greatest consideration is Film Studies. With a new additional faculty member in this area next year, we can create a satisfactory course sequence for film students.

Assessment Plan

The department will continue with some reliable forms of assessment and add two significant new strategies. Each of the assessment approaches listed below will address the spoken, visual, and written competencies of our majors.

Ongoing assessment approaches
• Senior Surveys -- self-report of satisfaction
• Alumni information -- report of alumni, including job placement, success in the profession, suggestions
• Advisory Board -- advice from graduates who are professionals in such fields as public relations, broadcasting, and print journalism.

Occasional assessment as part of university initiatives

• Information Literacy (SCHEV) -- assessment of freshmen
• Writing competency assessment (SCHEV) -- assessment of freshmen
• Oral communication assessment (SCHEV) -- assessment of freshmen and upper-class students
• Core assessments (Area I) -- assessment of freshmen

While many of the university-wide assessments have previously addressed only the freshman classes, we expect to contribute data from upper-level courses as some of these assessments
This preponderance of data about students early in their careers provides us with minimal information about the impact of the undergraduate curriculum across the years.

New departmental and institutional assessment initiatives Capstone courses are currently being planned for all students. Although the topics of these courses will differ, a departmental template will clarify the expectations for student performance in the class, including the production of research or a creative project, an oral presentation, and a written presentation. The implementation of these capstones will enable rich data collection related to the spoken, visual, written competencies of seniors.

In Fall 2003, the Department of Communication began experimenting with the use of ePortfolios on a very limited basis. In Spring 2004, two faculty received a CEUT grant to undertake a comparative study of student attitudes toward the use of ePortfolios. Beginning in Fall 2004, the freshman majors will again use either electronic or paper portfolios, and by Spring 2005, all freshman majors will have had some degree of experience with ePortfolios.

The department expects to establish the use of ePortfolio with each incoming class so that a rich collection of materials will be available for (1) students’ personal and professional uses and (2) departmental assessment of competencies and other components of the curriculum. Work will include essays, speeches, PowerPoint, reports, and other assignments reflecting students’ communication competencies.

By Spring 2008, all majors will have collected selected assignments over the course of their undergraduate work in the department. Assessment of competencies will be conducted by sampling the portfolios and inviting internal and external reviewers to examine the students’ accomplishments. The timing of the assessment plan reflects the next scheduled outcomes assessment for the department.