

Communication Studies Program Assessment Report 2011-2012

I. Introduction of the Communication Studies Major Program

The Communication Studies program offers courses in a variety of communication contexts, including technical, rhetorical, interpersonal, group, and organizational communication. The program serves primarily Communication Studies majors, but also serves a group of students in other fields interested in communication-related course work to complement their chosen major.

II. Program Purpose, Mission Statement, and Objectives

Program Purpose, Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes

Communication faculty reviewed the current program objectives and learning outcomes to provide feedback for change to the program. All of the most recent modifications to the program mission, educational objectives, and learning outcomes are included in the sections below. Although the student learning detailed in this report was assessed in a classroom setting, students had other opportunities to demonstrate their learning in Communication student clubs, honor societies, externships, and regional academic conferences.

Communication Studies Program Mission Statement

The Communication Studies Program prepares students for the challenges of a society that is shaped by communication. As participants in the program, students develop and integrate knowledge, creativity, ethical practice, and skills. Students also examine and produce work in oral, written, and visual communication and practice skills in group and intercultural communication.

Program Education Objectives

After completion of the Communication Studies program, students should be able to:

1. Apply appropriate communication skills across settings, purposes, and audiences.
2. Demonstrate knowledge of communication theory and application.
3. Practice critical thinking to develop innovative and well-founded perspectives related to the students' emphases.
4. Build and maintain healthy and effective relationships.
5. Use technology to communicate effectively in various settings and contexts.
6. Demonstrate appropriate and professional ethical behavior.

Expected Program Student Learning Outcomes

Students with a bachelor's degree in Communication Studies should be able to:

1. Demonstrate critical and innovative thinking.
2. Display competence in oral, written, and visual communication.
3. Apply communication theories.
4. Understand opportunities in the field of communication.
5. Use current technology related to the communication field.
6. Respond effectively to cultural communication differences.
7. Communicate ethically.
8. Demonstrate positive group communication exchanges.

III. Three-Year Cycle for Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

The eight learning outcomes will be assessed, two or three each year, on a three-year cycle as demonstrated in Table 1.

Learning Outcomes	'11-'12	'12-'13	'13-'14	'14-'15	'15-'16	'16-'17
PSLO 1: Critical Thinking	•			•		
PSLO 2: Competence in Comm			•			•
PLSO 3: Communication Theory	•			•		
PSLO 4: Opportunities in Field			•			•
PSLO 5: Use of Technology			•			•
PSLO 6: Cultural Communication		•			•	
PSLO 7: Ethics		•			•	
PSLO 8: Group Communication		•			•	

Table 1. Communication Studies Assessment Cycle

IV. Summary of 2011-2012 Assessment Activities

The Communication Studies faculty will conduct formal assessment of two student learning outcomes during 2011-2012.

Student Learning Outcome 1: Students with a bachelor's degree in Communication Studies should be able to demonstrate critical and innovative thinking.

Direct Assessment

This outcome was assessed in COM 104: Introduction to Communication during fall 2011 and COM 345: Organizational Communication during winter 2012. Communication Studies faculty members reviewed individual student work using the OIT Critical Thinking rubric criteria contained in Tables 2 and 3 to measure student proficiency (See Appendix A for the critical thinking rubric). Out of 58 total majors, 28 participated in this assessment (18 in COM 104 and 17 in COM 345 with seven overlapping students).

Performance Criteria	Assessment Method	Measurement Scale	Minimum Acceptable	Results
Problem	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	44%
Context	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	44%
Perspectives	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	44%
Assumptions	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	61%
Evidence	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	44%
Implications	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	44%

Table 2. Faculty Assessment Results for Critical Thinking SLO in COM 104 in Fall 11.

Performance Criteria	Assessment Method	Measurement Scale	Minimum Acceptable	Results
Problem	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	76%
Context	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	53%
Perspectives	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	71%
Assumptions	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	71%
Evidence	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	42%
Implications	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	82%

Table 3. Faculty Assessment Results for Critical Thinking SLO in COM 345 in Winter 2012.

Areas of Competence

After analysis of the student responses, the reviewers found areas of strength in the following categories:

1. Most students in both classes were able to evaluate with moderate or great depth the assumptions associated with the assignment.
2. In the upper-division course most students were competent in the areas of understanding the problem, developing perspectives, and comprehending relevant implications.

Areas of Improvement

After analysis of the student responses, the reviewers found a need for improvement in the following categories:

1. Students in both classes struggled in the areas of context and evidence.
2. Less than half of students in the lower-division course were competent in the areas of understanding the problem, developing perspectives, and comprehending the implications of the problem or situation.

Other Areas of Consideration

After analysis of the student responses, the reviewers found other areas for consideration:

The sample size of 28 students (seven students were redundant between the two courses) represents approximately half of the Communication Studies major population. Although this is a relatively large sample, this number might not fully represent the level of proficiency of all Communication Studies majors. However, the data does cover a range of student from freshmen to seniors.

Plans for Improvement

The following plans for improvement have been discussed by Communication Studies faculty:

1. Faculty teaching lower level Communication Studies courses will encourage students to develop critical thinking skills in the areas of understanding the problem, developing perspectives, and comprehending the implications of the problem or situation.
2. Faculty teaching at all levels in the Communication Studies major will place greater emphasis on teaching students audience recognition skills, in order to help better recognize both major and minor audiences.
3. Faculty teaching at all levels in the Communication Studies major will encourage students to use stronger forms of evidence in their writing and research.
4. Faculty need to visit minimum acceptable percentage to see if adjustments need to be made.

Student Learning Outcome 3: Students with a bachelor’s degree in Communication Studies should be able to apply communication theories.

Direct Assessment

This outcome was assessed in COM 345: Organizational Communication during winter 2012. Communication Studies faculty members reviewed written assignments using the department theory rubric criteria contained in Table 4 to measure student proficiency (See Communication Studies Theory rubric in Appendix C). 17 of 58 majors participated in this assessment.

Performance Criteria	Assessment Method	Measurement Scale	Minimum Acceptable	Results
Understanding	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	53%
Development	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	59%
Application	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	65%
Integration	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	65%
Language	Questionnaire, rubric	1-4 scale	80% at 3 or 4	53%

Table 4. Faculty Assessment Results for theory SLO in COM 345 in Winter 12.

Areas of Competence

After analysis of the student responses, the reviewers found areas of strength in the following categories:

1. Many students effectively applied theory to a real-life organizational setting or situation.
2. Many students explained connections between the theory and the problem or solution involved in the situation.

Areas of Improvement

After analysis of the student responses, the reviewers found a need for improvement in the following categories:

1. Less than half of students did not sufficiently explain theory and its components when discussing the problem and solution.
2. Less than half of students did not effectively use appropriate theoretical terms and language when describing and applying theory.
3. Some students did not sufficiently describe theories with adequate research and background.

Other Area of Consideration

After analysis of the student responses, the reviewers found other areas for consideration:

The sample size of 18 students represents approximately one-third of the Communication Studies major population. Although a larger sample than used in years past, this number might not fully represent the level of proficiency of all Communication Studies majors. Also, the assignment used for this assessment did not specifically ask students to provide theoretical background, which could explain the low percentage in this category.

Plans for Improvement

The following plans for improvement have been discussed by Communication Studies faculty:

1. Faculty will encourage students to rely more heavily on theory as they learn and apply communication in class and real-world situations.
2. Faculty will encourage greater student knowledge of theory and use of theoretical language.

V. Summary of Student Learning

Student Learning Outcome 1: Students with a bachelor's degree in Communication Studies should be able to demonstrate critical and innovative thinking.

Strengths: Most students in both classes were able to evaluate with moderate or great depth the assumptions associated with the assignment. In the upper-division course most students were competent in the areas of understanding the problem, developing perspectives, and comprehending relevant implications.

Weaknesses: Students in both classes and at all levels of the major struggled in the areas of context and evidence. Less than half of students in the lower-division course were competent in the areas of understanding the problem, developing perspectives, and comprehending the implications of the problem or situation.

Plans for Improvement: Faculty teaching lower level Communication Studies courses will encourage students to develop critical thinking skills in the areas of understanding the problem, developing perspectives, and comprehending the implications of the problem or situation. Faculty teaching at all levels in the Communication Studies major will place greater emphasis on teaching students audience recognition skills, in order to help better recognize both major and minor audiences. Faculty teaching at all levels in the Communication Studies major will encourage students to use stronger forms of evidence in their writing and research. Faculty need to visit minimum acceptable percentage to see if adjustments need to be made.

Student Learning Outcome 3: Students with a bachelor's degree in Communication Studies should be able to apply communication theories.

Strengths: Many students effectively applied theory to a real-life organizational setting or situation. Likewise, many students explained connections between the theory and the problem or solution involved in the situation.

Weaknesses: Nearly half of students did not sufficiently explain theory and its components when discussing the problem and solution. Likewise, nearly half of students did not effectively use appropriate theoretical terms and language when describing and applying theory. Finally, some students did not sufficiently describe theories used with adequate research and background.

Plans for Improvement: Faculty will encourage students to rely more heavily on theory as they learn and apply communication concepts in class and in real-world situations. Likewise, faculty will encourage greater student knowledge of theory and use of theoretical language.

VI. Changes as a Result of Assessment

As a result of assessment completed during the 2010-2011 academic year, the following changes occurred during the 2011-2012 academic year:

1. Beginning fall 2011, faculty placed greater emphasis on oral communication by providing more opportunities in their classes for formal presentations by students. Further, during fall 2011 faculty increased levels of instruction and explanation about expectations for exceptional oral presentations in their course syllabi. In fall 2011, faculty also began grading speeches with greater expectations, especially in the areas of style and delivery.
2. Beginning fall 2011, faculty began to hold students to a greater level of accountability in the areas of documentation, support, style, and conventions by making these categories a more significant part of the grade for each written assignment. As part of holding students more accountable for their writing, faculty emphasized the importance of effective writing in each of their syllabi. During 2011, faculty focused exclusively on APA style in all major classes.

Appendix A: Rubrics

Institutional Student Learning Outcome #4: Critical Thinking Rubric (adapted from NE Illinois University): Approved 11-02-07

Criteria/Quality	No/Limited Proficiency (1)	Some Proficiency (2)	Proficiency (3)	High Proficiency (4)	Rating (1, 2, 3, 4 pts)
1. Identifies and explains problem/question/issue	Fails to identify, summarize, or explain the main problem or question. Represents the issues inaccurately or inappropriately.	Identifies main issues but does not summarize or explain them clearly or sufficiently.	Successfully identifies and summarizes the main issues, but does not explain why/how they are problems or create questions.	Clearly identifies and summarizes main issues and successfully explains why/how they are problems or questions; and identifies embedded or implicit issues, addressing their relationships to each other.	
2. Recognizes stakeholders and contexts (i.e., cultural, social, educational, technological, political, scientific, economic, ethical, personal experience)	Fails accurately to identify and explain any empirical or theoretical contexts for the issues. Presents problems as having no connections to other conditions or contexts.	Shows some general understanding of the influences of empirical and theoretical contexts on stakeholders, but does not identify any specific ones relevant to situation at hand.	Correctly identifies all the empirical and most of the theoretical contexts relevant to all the main stakeholders in the situation.	Not only correctly identifies all the empirical and theoretical contexts relevant to all the main stakeholders, but also finds minor stakeholders and contexts and shows the tension or conflicts of interest among them.	
3. Frames personal responses and/or acknowledges other perspectives	Fails to formulate and clearly express own point of view, (or) fails to anticipate objections to his/her point of view, (or) fails to consider other perspectives and position.	Formulates a vague and indecisive point of view, or anticipates minor but not major objections to his/her point of view, or considers weak but not strong alternative positions.	Formulates clear and precise personal point of view concerning the issue, and seriously discusses its weaknesses as well as its strengths.	Not only formulates a clear and precise personal point of view, but also acknowledges objections and rival positions and provides convincing replies to these.	
4. Evaluates assumptions	Fails to identify and evaluate any of the important assumptions behind the claims and recommendations made.	Identifies some of the most important assumptions, but does not evaluate them for plausibility or clarity.	Identifies and evaluates all the important assumptions, but not the ones deeper in the background—the more abstract ones.	Not only identifies and evaluates all the important assumptions, but also some of the more hidden, more abstract ones.	
5. Evaluates evidence	Fails to identify data and information that counts as evidence for truth-claims and fails to evaluate its credibility.	Successfully identifies data and information that counts as evidence but fails to thoroughly evaluate its credibility.	Identifies all important evidence and rigorously evaluates it.	Not only identifies and rigorously evaluates all important evidence offered, but also provides new data or information for consideration.	
6. Evaluates implications , conclusions, and consequences.	Fails to identify implications, conclusions, and consequences of the issue, or the key relationships between the other elements of the problem, such as context, assumptions, or data and evidence.	Suggests some implications, conclusions, and consequences, but without clear reference to context, assumptions, data, and evidence.	Identifies and briefly discusses implications, conclusions, and consequences considering most but not all the relevant assumptions, contexts, data, and evidence.	Identifies and thoroughly discusses implications, conclusions, and consequences, considering all relevant assumptions, contexts, data, and evidence.	

Theory Knowledge and Application Rubric

Criteria	0	1	2	3	4
Consideration of theory and its components	No reasonable attempt made to explain or discuss major components of theory.	Marginal attempt to explain theory or most of major components presented.	Adequate consideration to selected theory. All of the major components of the theory presented but not discussed.	Clear consideration of theory. All of the major components of the theory presented, discussed, and analyzed.	Theory considered with some originality. All major components of theory presented, discussed and analyzed.
Theory development (background, problems, changes or future direction)	No theoretical development considered.	Minimal theoretical development considered.	Adequate theoretical development of theory considered.	Some significant theoretical developments considered by reviewing works in the field.	Considers significant, original theoretical developments by thoroughly reviewing major works in the field.
Application of theory	Theory not applied or application is too general.	Theory minimally applied to a plausible situation or setting.	Theory applied to plausible setting or situation and application discussed.	Theory applied well to setting or situation. Appropriate discussion about theory and application.	Theory insightfully applied to plausible setting. Discussion shows how application of theory helps provide meaning to setting or situation.
Connections and integration	No connection between or integration of theory and problem or situation.	Few unwarranted connections between or integration of theory and problem or situation.	Some connection between and integration of theory and problem or solution, but connections are not significant or adequately explained.	Makes and explains appropriate connections between or integration of theory and problem or solutions.	Insightful, analytical and significant connections or distinctions between or integration of theory and problem or situation.
Use of theoretical language	Few or no uses of theoretical language.	Some use of theoretical language and terms, but used incorrectly.	Regular use of theoretical language and terms, with few incorrect uses.	Effective use of terms and language that enhance description of theory.	Theoretical language and terms used abundantly and correctly to describe theory accurately.