

Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report

Program: Communication

Department: Communication

Degree or Certificate Level: M.A.

College/School: College of Arts and Sciences

Date (Month/Year): September 2021

Primary Assessment Contact: Dan Kozlowski, Chair

In what year was the data upon which this report is based collected? 2021

In what year was the program's assessment plan most recently reviewed/updated? 2015

1. Student Learning Outcomes

Which of the program's student learning outcomes were assessed in this annual assessment cycle?

We collected data for two PLOs:

PLO 3: Students will apply communication theories to address problems in a broader context.

PLO 6: Students will analyze the ethical implications of communication and apply ethical principles.

We also sent an exit survey to graduating students in Summer 2021 as an indirect assessment of all of our PLOs.

2. Assessment Methods: Artifacts of Student Learning

Which artifacts of student learning were used to determine if students achieved the outcome(s)? Please identify the course(s) in which these artifacts were collected. Clarify if any such courses were offered a) online, b) at the Madrid campus, or c) at any other off-campus location.

Students' culminating project (thesis, applied project, or comprehensive exam) along with their responses during their oral defense were the artifacts used to assess PLO3 and PLO6.

As mentioned, in Summer 2021, graduating M.A. students were sent an exit survey measuring their perceptions of learning across all PLOs.

The Madrid campus does not have a graduate program, so they are not included in the learning assessment for the M.A. program.

3. Assessment Methods: Evaluation Process

What process was used to evaluate the artifacts of student learning, and by whom? Please identify the tools(s) (e.g., a rubric) used in the process and include them in/with this report.

DIRECT ASSESSMENT DATA collected this year focused on:

PLO 3: Students will apply communication theories to address problems in a broader context.

PLO 6: Students will analyze the ethical implications of communication and apply ethical principles.

Culminating projects (thesis, applied project, or comprehensive exam) and oral defenses for each graduating student were evaluated using the rubrics from our assessment plan (see assessment plan attached). All three committee members for each student jointly evaluated the culminating projects and oral defenses after the oral defense, except in the case where the third committee member was not a faculty member in the Department of Communication. In that case, only the two committee members who are faculty members in the Department completed the assessment.

Committees submitted a single assessment of each student's project and defense to the graduate program coordinator. Seven students completed applied projects, theses, or comprehensive exams in 2021. All seven committees completed assessment rubrics.

PERCEPTUAL ASSESSMENT DATA were collected through an exit survey of graduating M.A. students and used to assess students' perceptions of learning across all PLOs. Three of seven students completed the survey.

4. Data/Results

What were the results of the assessment of the learning outcome(s)? Please be specific. Does achievement differ by teaching modality (e.g., online vs. face-to-face) or on-ground location (e.g., STL campus, Madrid campus, other off-campus site)?

DIRECT ASSESSMENT DATA

For PLO 3 (Students will apply communication theories to address problems in a broader context) five of the seven students performed at the advanced intermediate level or Capstone level on this PLO.¹

For PLO 6 (Students will analyze the ethical implications of communication and apply ethical principles) six of the seven students demonstrated advanced intermediate or Capstone level work related to this PLO.

PERCEPTUAL ASSESSMENT DATA

Data from the exit survey provided perceptual data on all six PLOs.² Less than half of the students completed the exit survey (three out of seven). As such, the data collected is informative for understanding three students' individual perceptions, but we cannot conclude that the responses are representative.

Two questions asked respondents to rate their level of agreement that they had acquired knowledge related to PLO3. The average across the three respondents for these two questions was 3.50/5.00. The responses to the two questions gathering information about PLO 3 were notably different. The first question – "I am able to apply communication theory to explain and analyze everyday situations" – yielded an average of 3.0, SD=.82. Among the three students who responded to this question, there is variance. Responses for the second question – The program consistently emphasized the importance of communication theory – were consistent; all respondents agreed with the statement.

These results suggest that students agree that the program consistently emphasizes the importance of communication theory. However, the three students' responses with regard to applying communication theory to explain and analyze everyday situations appear to be more varied. More data is needed to understand students' perceptions in this area.

With regard to PLO6, two questions assessed the extent to which students felt confident that the program helped them to analyze the ethical implications of communication and apply ethical principles. The average across these items

for the three respondents was 4.00/5.00, suggesting that the three respondents agreed that the program consistently prepared them to analyze the ethical implications of communication and apply ethical principles. However, as mentioned before, this data should not be considered representative of the graduating class given the low response rate to the exit survey. The responses to the individual questions suggest that the students who completed the survey feel that while they are able to make ethical judgments and take action based on broad knowledge (M=4.33, SD=.47), students' perceptions of the consistency of the program in emphasizing the importance of ethics were lower and more varied (M=3.67; SD=1.25).

¹See attached report for aggregate data on student performance for each PLO.

²See attached report on means and standard deviations for each item on the exit survey.

5. Findings: Interpretations & Conclusions

What have you learned from these results? What does the data tell you?

The data collected this year suggests students' capstone projects (theses, applied projects, and comprehensive exams) are appropriate artifacts for assessment. Students' final capstone projects appear to demonstrate the knowledge they acquired in the program with regard to PLO3 and PLO6. Additionally, the data suggests that most students demonstrate learning at the advanced intermediate or capstone level for both PLOs.

We have now collected direct assessment data for PLO3 and PLO6 on two occasions (the previous time was 2018). Given the direct assessment data from both cycles, our program appears to consistently support student learning with regard to PLO3, as the assessment results are consistent from the two cycles. With regard to PLO6, in 2018 five out of eight committees indicated that the artifacts assessed were not sufficient to assess student learning in this area. Although all committees during the 2021 cycle completed the assessment and the results suggest that most students are analyzing and applying ethical principles to their work at the advanced intermediate or Capstone level, when reviewing assessment processes for our MA program we should consider whether the artifacts assessed are the most useful for addressing PLO6.

The perceptual data gathered in 2021 was informative with regard to students' individual perceptions. However, the survey was completed by less than half of the graduating class and should not be considered representative. In the future, incentivizing the students with a gift card may help to improve the response rate.

Examining the perceptual data from both 2018 and 2021 with regard to PLO6 is informative, however. The results from both cycles were consistent. They suggest that students are confident that they are able to make ethical judgments and take action based on broad knowledge. However, students' perceptions of the consistency of the program in emphasizing the importance of ethics were lower and more varied. This is valuable to consider moving forward in refining our approach to teaching ethics.

6. Closing the Loop: Dissemination and Use of Current Assessment Findings

A. When and how did your program faculty share and discuss these results and findings from this cycle of assessment?

These assessment results were collected in summer 2021. They will be shared with the department's Graduate Committee and faculty this academic year. We will discuss the results at a faculty meeting.

B. How specifically have you decided to use these findings to improve teaching and learning in your program? For example, perhaps you've initiated one or more of the following:

Changes to the Curriculum or Pedagogies

- Course content
- Teaching techniques
- Improvements in technology
- Prerequisites

- Course sequence
- New courses
- Deletion of courses
- Changes in frequency or scheduling of course offerings

Changes to the Assessment Plan

- Student learning outcomes
- Artifacts of student learning
- Evaluation process

- Evaluation tools (e.g., rubrics)
- Data collection methods
- Frequency of data collection

Please describe the actions you are taking as a result of these findings.

The Graduate Committee is in the process of developing a revision to our assessment process, especially given recent changes to our graduate curriculum, which are described below.

If no changes are being made, please explain why.

7. Closing the Loop: Review of Previous Assessment Findings and Changes

A. What is at least one change your program has implemented in recent years as a result of assessment data?

During the FA19 – SP20 academic year, we significantly revised the graduate curriculum in light of past assessment reports. We learned that by taking only one research methods course, graduate students in our department were not gaining enough knowledge and experience in research methods and data analysis to complete the best quality work for their culminating theses and applied projects. Furthermore, recent graduates during exit interviews indicated that additional coursework in research methodology would be beneficial for their professional goals after graduation. As such, we shifted our graduate curriculum requirements from students taking two introductory courses (CMM 5000 - Graduate Study of Communication and CMM 5010 - Reading Foundations in Communication Theory) and one research methods course (CMM 5800 - Research Methods in Communication) to two research methods courses (CMM 5801 Quantitative Research Methods for Communication and CMM 5802 Qualitative Inquiry for Communication and Social Justice) and one introductory course in (CMM 5000).

This was an important curricular change, made in response to previous assessment reports, that we hope improved our program for our students. The results of this current assessment cycle give us information about students' experiences who did not have a chance to benefit from our curricular changes. We are looking forward to learning more from the current cohort of students who will have completed the new curriculum in Spring of 2022.

B. How has this change/have these changes been assessed?

The curricular change was implemented in Fall 2020. We will assess the curricular change after the first cohort of students in the revised curriculum graduates in Spring 2022.

C. What were the findings of the assessment?

We will be able to assess the impact of these curricular changes after the present cohort graduates in Spring 2022.

D. How do you plan to (continue to) use this information moving forward?

After gathering assessment data from students graduating in Spring 2022, we will have information to review the effects of the curricular changes on learning outcomes and make any needed adjustments accordingly.

IMPORTANT: Please submit any assessment tools and/or revised/updated assessment plans along with this report.

I. Direct Assessment Data of PLOs 3 and 6

For each outcome, 1 = Benchmark, 2 = Intermediate Level of Achievement, 3 = Advanced-Intermediate Level of Achievement, 4 = Capstone.

PLO 3: Students will apply communication theories to address problems in a broader context.

	Capstone			Benchmark
Level of Achievement	4	3	2	1
Total	3	2	2	0

Capstone: Gives a sophisticated summarization of a theory that displays a nuanced understanding of the concepts and assumptions of the theory and its connection to research in the field. Applies a theory to broader contexts in unique ways that yield new knowledge and contributions. Shows expert understanding of a theory's implications and limitations and possibilities for expanding or enriching the field.

PLO6 Students will analyze the ethical implications of communication and apply ethical principles.

	Capstone			Benchmark
Level of Achievement	4	3	2	1
Total	3	3	1	0

Capstone: Gives a sophisticated summarization of communication ethics that displays a nuanced understanding of ethical principles and their application. Applies (and critiques) ethical principles to broader contexts in unique ways that yield novel opportunities for ethical action. Shows an expert understanding of ethics, action, and possibilities for expanding or enriching human communication.

II. Perceptual Assessment

Outcome Dimensions and Items	M	SD
<i>PLO 1 Students will communicate effective messages for scholarly and public audiences.</i>		
The program encouraged me to develop my written communication skills.	3.67	.47
I have writing skills that will allow me to communicate effectively and independently in a variety of situations.	4.0	.82
The program encouraged me to develop my oral communication and presentation skills.	3.67	.47
I have oral communication skills that will allow me to communicate effectively and independently in a variety of situations.	4.3	.47
<i>PLO 2: Students will conduct and evaluate communication research.</i>		
The program encouraged me to develop my research skills.	4.0	.82
I am able to gather information from multiple sources and make critical judgments about the value of that information.	4.3	.47
The program helped me understand the relationship between research paradigm and methodological choices.	4.3	.94
The program taught me the appropriate criteria for evaluating communication research.	3.33	.47
<i>PLO 3: Students will apply communication theories to address problems in a broader context.</i>		
I am able to apply communication theory to explain and analyze everyday situations.	3.0	.82
The program consistently emphasized the importance of communication theory.	4.0	.00
<i>PLO 4: Students will demonstrate intercultural communication competence.</i>		
The program consistently emphasized the importance of culture and diversity.	4.33	.47
I have an understanding of cultures other than my own.	4.33	.47
<i>PLO 5: Students will apply theories and/or practices of social justice and civic engagement.</i>		
The program consistently emphasized the importance of social justice.	4.67	.47
I recognize the various ways communicative practices contribute to and detract from justice in society.	4.67	.47
I understand my civic responsibilities as a local and global citizen.	4.67	.47
<i>PLO 6: Students will analyze the ethical implications of communication and apply ethical principles.</i>		
The program consistently emphasized the importance of ethics.	3.67	1.25
I am able to make ethical judgments and take action based on broad knowledge.	4.33	.47