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RE: Draft Outcomes Assessment Plan

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A. Educational Mission and Goals of the Department

The Department of Communication’s mission is to create a learning environment in which students develop the skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary to use communication to create a more civil and humane world. By civil and humane the Department means a way of communicating that is rooted in an acceptance and appreciation of others and that involves communicating in ways that express
respect for and acknowledgment of others regardless of their station in life, wealth or lack of it, politics, religion, ethnicity, race, or any other quality.

To pursue this mission and consistent with the Department’s latest revision of its undergraduate degree program (BA), the Department will assess learning outcomes in relation to five goals:

1. **Creation of Community**: Through their communication, students must demonstrate the ability to create community and collaborative working relationships beyond the university.

2. **Communication Within and Across Systems**: Students must demonstrate the ability to understand, evaluate, communicate effectively within, and mediate among diverse cultural, social, public, and professional systems and enable change to occur within and among these systems in ways that are civil and respectful of all perspectives.

3. **Analysis of Communication**: Students must demonstrate the ability to analyze and evaluate communication both for its causes and consequences and do so by critically engaging with multiple scholarly paradigms for inquiry, theory, and research within the communication discipline.

4. **Production of Communication**: Students must demonstrate the ability to produce effective oral, written, virtual, and mediated communication and to develop solutions to complex communication exigencies that show a comprehensive and coherent integration of diverse communication media and processes.

5. **Professional Advancement**: Students must demonstrate the extension and appreciation of the skills and knowledge acquired during their communication studies in their careers beyond the university or in the continuation of their education.

**B. Learning Objectives & Measurement Methods for the B.A. in Communication**

Enabling students to reach the five broad goals outlined above requires that students be assessed formatively and summatively. They are assessed formatively during and as part of the classes they take. They are assessed summatively as they approach the final semester of their program. The learning objectives specified below attempt to balance cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions of competence in communication, as recommended in the assessment resources of the National Communication Association (NCA) (www.natcom.org/). These objectives also support the goals of the CLAS Assessment Plan and Graduation Requirements (Draft: 10/10/08).
Importantly, the Communication Department believes that these five goals are relevant to and addressed in all of the courses the Department offers. However, the Department also recognizes that not every course in its curriculum will address every objective to the same degree. Thus, one over-arching purpose behind our proposed plan is that it will enable the Department to better understand which courses may need to be altered so that all five objectives are better addressed in them.

**Resources**

The proposed measurement methods for the undergraduate degree program described below should be a good fit for the Department’s resources and not place too much demand on individual faculty. By September 2009, for instance, the Communication Department expects to have a total of 10 regular faculty members (7 tenured, 3 tenure-track), to serve the needs of approximately 375 undergraduate majors. Generally, in any given year, the Department will not attempt to assess every graduating senior in the major. Instead, the measurement methods described below will require the Department to evaluate annually a total sample of 30 students, which is the equivalent of approximately 32% of the average number of communication majors (93) graduating each calendar year.

At the same time, the Department will not evaluate all five goals every year but will rotate its focus. For instance, in AY 09-10, the Department will evaluate its performance in meeting its goals for the “Creation of Community” (Goal 1), for “Communication Within and Across Systems” (Goal 2), and “Professional Advancement” (Goal 5). Then, in AY 2010-11, the Department will evaluate its performance in meeting its goals for the “Analysis of Communication” (Goal 3), “Production of Communication” (Goal 4), and “Professional Advancement” (Goal 5). In AY 2011-12, the Department will again evaluate Goals 1, 2, and 5. This alternating approach should help to keep the assessment task manageable.

At the start of each year, the Department Chair will appoint three-to-four faculty members to serve on the Outcomes Assessment Committee (OAC). These faculty members will be responsible (1) for developing or revising the rubrics used for assessment, (2) for evaluating the student (raw) data collected, and (3) for compiling the annual Outcomes Assessment Report for submission to the College.

**Course and Student Sampling Method**

To secure its total sample of 30 graduating seniors, each spring the Department will randomly sample the work of (5) graduating senior students enrolled in each of five of the Department’s 4000 level classes, plus five (5) graduating students in one class chosen from the Department’s list of specially designated exit courses,
which includes CMMU 3939 Internship.  All majors are required to take at least one of these exit classes prior to graduating with the B.A. degree. For example, in Spring 2009, the Department will be offering the following exit courses: 

- CMMU 3939 Internship
- CMMU 4710 Research Project
- CMMU 4510 Usability Testing
- CMMU 4688 Transitioning from College to Career
- CMMU 4710 Communication, Prison, and Social Justice
- CMMU 4995 Narratives of the New China: Engagement & Exploration (travel course)

To conduct outcomes assessment in 2009, the Department would randomly choose five 4000-level courses, plus one of the above designated exit courses. From the resulting list of six courses the Department will draw its sample of graduating seniors’ work for data analysis. In subsequent years, the same random selection process for choosing courses would be repeated, but courses selected the previous year would not be selected again (i.e., we will use sampling without replacement). Our goal would be to continue this process in future years until every 4000-level course and every exit course has been sampled. In any given year, if one of the instructors of these courses is concurrently serving on the OAC, then that instructor will not be allowed to evaluate any students’ work from his or her own classes for outcomes assessment purposes.

In the sections that follow below, we describe the learning objectives that correspond to each of the five Department goals above, together with the specific measurement methods to be used for assessing how well the Department and its undergraduate communication majors are meeting them.

By the time students complete the major in communication, they must satisfy the following objectives associated with each of the five departmental goals:

**1. Creation of Community**

Graduating students must provide tangible evidence from at least one of the Department’s 4000-level classes or from a formal, credit-earning internship (i.e., in CMMU 3939) that they have constructively applied their communication knowledge and skills to an external community’s

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1 If a student happened to be randomly chosen twice because he or she was taking two of the six chosen courses, his or her work from the second course would not be used and another student would be randomly selected in his/her place. In this way, we would insure that no student’s work would be represented twice in the total sample of 30, i.e., sampling students without replacement.

2 The Department currently has 8-10 courses designated as exit courses, which require students to participate in some type of community collaboration that is part of their graded coursework.
need or problem. Such application must be evidenced specifically by records or materials produced during collaborative activity with community members. Collaborative activities may include but are not limited to such things as conducting field research or data collection for a client or organization; participating in data interpretation (e.g., for audience or stakeholder analysis); community event leadership/planning; co-authoring feasibility report(s); developing a public relations campaign or message; serving as a meeting, roundtable, or conference moderator; and the like. In particular, this objective requires students to present records or materials that clearly show they have contributed to increased civility in the external community’s communication or otherwise improved communication and understanding within the community situation in which they have intervened.

Method  The six courses selected for sampling (as per the general method described above) will provide the raw data to be evaluated, i.e., 5 students’ work from each course, for a total draw of 30 assignments for blind review by the OAC. While it is expected that the nature of these assignments will vary from course to course, each will be evaluated by OAC members who did not teach the courses in which the assignments were produced. To evaluate the degree to which these assignments meet the “Creation of Community” learning objectives, OAC members will use a single scoring rubric containing 3-6 items (total). To develop this rubric, by the start of AY 2009-10, OAC members and faculty members teaching that year’s selected courses will co-design the rubric to be used. This rubric will combine items from the major assignment rubric already used by the instructors in the six courses with additional or revised items agreed upon by the committee. The rubric will evaluate the degree to which the selected projects have contributed to increased civility in the external community’s communication or otherwise improved communication and understanding in the community situation in which they have intervened. Pilot data for constructing the rubric will be sampled from 4000-level courses and the Internship course (CMMU 3939) offered in Spring 09. As a secondary source of data for evaluating this objective, the attached Undergraduate Exit Questionnaire asks students to answer two questions concerning the degree to which they have learned to foster civility through communication in communities (see questions 1 and 2 in the attached questionnaire).

2. Communication within Systems  Graduating students must provide tangible evidence from at least one of the Department’s 4000-level classes or from a formal, credit-earning internship (i.e., in CMMU 3939) that they can do all of the following:
(a) they can understand, evaluate, communicate effectively within, and mediate among, particular cultural, social, public, or professional systems different from those in which the student had experience before attending the university;

(b) they can demonstrate knowledge of the particular constraints and opportunities for civil communication within the particular system(s) they have studied—knowledge that must be grounded in a critical and historical understanding of the communication theories and research pertinent to each system;

(c) they can conceptualize and adapt communication processes that enable change to occur within and/or among these systems in ways that foster openness toward and appreciation of different perspectives held by others.

**Method** To evaluate the degree to which the 30 graduating students’ assignments meet these “Creation of Community” learning objectives, OAC members will use a single scoring rubric containing 3-6 items (total). To develop this rubric, by the start of AY 2009-10, OAC members and faculty members teaching that year’s selected courses will co-design the rubric to be used. This rubric will combine items from the major assignment rubrics already used by the instructors in the six chosen courses with additional or revised items agreed upon by the committee. The rubric will evaluate the degree to which the student papers meet the three component objectives (a, b, and c) associated with “Communication within Systems” listed above. Pilot data for constructing the rubric will be sampled from 4000-level courses and the Internship course (CMMU 3939) offered in Spring 09. As a secondary source of data for evaluating this objective, the attached Undergraduate Exit Questionnaire asks students to answer four questions concerning the degree to which they have learned cognitive and behavioral skills underlying communication within systems (see questions 3 through 6 in the attached questionnaire).

3. **Analysis of Communication** Graduating students must provide tangible evidence from at least one of the Department’s 4000-level classes or from a formal, credit-earning internship (i.e., in CMMU 3939) that they can do all of the following:

(a) analyze and evaluate, in writing, a communication for its causes as well as its consequences or effects;

(b) present such a written analysis in clear, grammatically correct, coherently organized prose;
(c) in the course of such a written analysis and evaluation, identify, apply, synthesize, or critique multiple scholarly and historical paradigms for inquiry, theory, and research that are evolving within the communication discipline’s published literature;

(d) in the course of such a written analysis and evaluation, distinguish between stated and unstated assumptions in the target communication being analyzed;

(e) in the course of such a written analysis and evaluation, distinguish between stated and unstated assumptions in the method(s), theories, or paradigms being used to analyze it;

(f) in the course of such a written analysis and evaluation, distinguish between a thesis (claim) and evidence offered in support of that claim;

(g) in the course of such a written analysis and evaluation, be able to distinguish between a research question and the theory (or theories) underlying and motivating the question;

(h) in the course of such a written analysis and evaluation be able to identify accurately any contradictions or ambiguities in the communication being analyzed.

**Method** To evaluate the degree to which the 30 graduating students’ assignments meet these “Analysis of Communication” learning objectives, OAC members will use a single scoring rubric containing approximately 8-12 items (total). To develop this rubric, by the start of AY 2009-10, OAC members and faculty members teaching that year’s exit courses will co-design the rubric to be used. This rubric will combine items from the major assignment rubrics already used by the instructors in the six chosen courses with additional or revised items agreed upon by the committee. The rubric will evaluate the degree to which the student papers meet the four component objectives (a, b, c, and d) identified above. Pilot data for constructing the rubric will be sampled from 4000-level courses and the Internship course (CMMU 3939) offered in Spring 09. As a secondary source of data for evaluating this objective, the attached Undergraduate Exit Questionnaire asks students to answer 8 questions concerning the degree to which they have learned cognitive and behavioral skills associated with the analysis of communication (see questions 7 through 14 in the attached questionnaire).

4. **Production of Communication.** Graduating students must provide tangible evidence from at least one of the Department’s 4000-level classes
or from a formal, credit-earning internship (i.e., in CMMU 3939) that they can do all of the following:

(a) they can independently produce oral, visual/graphical, written, virtual, and mediated communication in response to an actual or carefully simulated rhetorical exigency and do so in a way that meets professional quality design and editorial standards;

(b) they can develop approaches to complex rhetorical exigencies that show a comprehensive and coherent integration of two or more different communication media and processes;

(c) they can proactively seek out feedback from others concerning their communication plans, drafts, or designs, reflectively respond to such feedback (or criticism) of these when offered, and then apply such feedback in a way that measurably improves the communication approach, plan, draft, or design;

(d) they can draw reflectively upon theoretical, historical, or research resources in the communication literature to design, critique and improve their own approach to the rhetorical exigency even in the absence of criticism or feedback from others.

Method  To evaluate the degree to which the 30 graduating students’ assignments meet these “Production of Communication” learning objectives, OAC members will use a single scoring rubric again containing 4 - 8 items (total). To develop this rubric, by the start of AY 2009-10, OAC members and faculty members teaching that year’s exit courses will co-design the rubric to be used. This rubric will combine items from the major assignment rubrics already used by the instructors in the six chosen courses with additional or revised items agreed upon by the committee. The rubric will evaluate the degree to which the student papers meet the four component objectives (a, b, c, and d) identified above. Pilot data for constructing the rubric will be sampled from 4000-level courses and the Internship course (CMMU 3939) offered in Spring 09. As a secondary source of data for evaluating this objective, the attached Undergraduate Exit Questionnaire asks students to answer 4 questions concerning the degree to which they have learned cognitive and behavioral skills associated with the production of communication (see questions 15 through 18 in the attached questionnaire).

5. Professional Advancement  As evidenced in their responses to a graduation questionnaire (see attached), students demonstrate either (a) that they have secured or continue to work in a position (paid or volunteer) that enables them to further develop their communication knowledge and skills
to create a more civil and humane world; or, (b) that they have gained admission to a reputable master’s degree program that enables them to further develop their communication knowledge and skills to create a more civil and humane world.

C. Learning Objectives & Measurement Methods for the M.A. in Communication

Consistent with the Department’s mission and goals as set forth on page 1 of this plan, the M.A. in Communication degree program pursues the following four objectives:

1. Knowledge of Controversies in the Development of Communication Theory and Research

Graduate students completing the M.A. in Communication must demonstrate the following in clear, grammatical, well organized writing:

(a) critical knowledge and awareness of theoretical and research controversies in the area(s) of communication expertise they have developed through their course work. Such areas may include, but are not limited to

- interpersonal/family relationships
- technical/scientific knowledge and issues
- organizational/managerial/business environments
- community/cultural/societal issues
- governmental/legal/political issues
- intercultural/international issues
- gender and diversity issues

and

(b) the ability to recognize, distinguish, and articulate (i.e., connect) lines of inquiry and argument emerging in these controversies as they play out in published research and across courses that students have taken.

Method The Department’s current M.A. Comprehensive Examination will be used to assess students’ competence on this objective. Data for this assessment will be taken from the written portion of the Examination, and will include all of the M.A. students graduating each year. Since on average five (5) students complete the M.A. each year, this data set will not overwhelm faculty resources. Faculty serving on an individual student’s Examination Committee will be tasked with analyzing this data, as follows.

The current written examination lasts 4 and 1/2 hours. Students are given five essay questions and must answer four of them. The questions cross content areas and deal with methodological, theoretical, and application
issues in communication. They encourage students to make connections among constructs, theories, topics, and courses. Students are expected to cite relevant scholars and sources in the answers to the questions. Students may bring in a set of notes limited to both sides of an 8.5” x 11” sheet of paper.

To evaluate the degree to which students demonstrate competence in meeting both parts (a) and (b) of this objective, graduate faculty will draw upon past student written answers to M.A. examination questions to create a short rubric (2 – 4 items) for scoring students’ answers. Pilot data for constructing the scoring rubric will be sampled from student M.A. examinations completed in Spring 09. As a secondary source of data for evaluating this objective, the attached Graduate Exit Questionnaire asks students to answer three questions reflecting this objective (i.e., questions 1, 2, and 3).

2. Competence in the Interpretation and Evaluation of Published Research Graduate students completing the M.A. in Communication must demonstrate the ability (a) to comprehend published communication research; (b) to formulate constructive, relevant questions about it; (c) to critically evaluate it (i.e., present carefully grounded conclusions about its strengths and weaknesses); and (d) based upon their critical evaluations, be able to propose a research design for improving the research or for addressing questions that are closely related to the research but that remain unanswered.

Method The Department’s current M.A. Comprehensive Examination will be used to assess students’ performance on this objective. Data for this assessment will be taken from the oral portion of the examination and, as above, will include all of the M.A. students graduating each year. Faculty serving on an individual student’s Examination Committee will be tasked with analyzing this data, as follows.

The current oral examination, which lasts three hours, requires students to read a research study or scholarly article chosen by their graduate advisor. The article and research methods involved in it will be chosen by the examination committee; however, the article will reflect both the student’s self-reported area of expertise (see list in Objective 1, above) and the courses that the student has taken in the program. Students read this article during the initial hour of the oral and they are permitted to take notes. During the second hour, students first present their critical evaluation of the article together with questions they believe should be asked/raised concerning it, and then answer questions about their reading and evaluation posed by the examination committee. To evaluate the degree to which students’ critiques demonstrate competence with parts (a) through (d) of this objective, graduate faculty will draw upon past student oral examination answers to create a short rubric (3 – 6 items) for scoring
students’ answers. Pilot data for constructing the scoring rubric will be
sampled from student M.A. examinations completed in Spring 09.

As a secondary source of data for evaluating this objective, the attached
Graduate Exit Questionnaire asks students to answer three questions
reflecting this objective (i.e., questions 4, 5, and 6).

3. Competence in Oral Presentation and Interaction  Graduate students
completing the M.A. in Communication must demonstrate facility, civility, and
professionalism when making oral presentations and when engaging in critical
scholarly discussions. Specifically, graduate students must be able to (a) provide
a clear purpose and preview (forecast) statement when making a presentation;
(b) provide relevant, carefully focused content and supporting detail that is
clearly consistent with their purpose and preview statements; (c) display personal
communicative dynamism in their ethos/persona and in their non-verbal/paralinguistic behavior; (d) demonstrate respect, receptivity, sensitivity,
and authentic engagement when hearing and responding to different or contrary
viewpoints from the audience(s) they are interacting with.

Method  The oral portion of the Department’s current M.A.
Comprehensive Examination will be used to assess students’ competence
on this objective. Specifically, data for this assessment will be taken from
the student’s oral critique of a scholarly article or research study and from
their oral defense of their written examination answers (see Objectives 1
and 2, above). To evaluate the degree to which students demonstrate
competence with parts (a) through (d) of this objective, graduate faculty
will draw upon past student oral examination presentations and their
responses to faculty questions to create a short rubric (3 – 6 items) for
scoring students’ oral critique and their interaction with faculty during
dtheir oral defense. Pilot data for constructing the scoring rubric will be
sampled from student M.A. examinations completed in Spring 09. As a
secondary source of data for evaluating this objective, the attached
Graduate Exit Questionnaire asks students to answer two questions
reflecting this objective (i.e., questions 7 and 8).

4. Professional Advancement  As evidenced in their responses to a
graduation questionnaire (see attached), students graduating with the M.A. in
Communication degree demonstrate either that (a) they have secured or continue
top work a position (paid or volunteer) that enables them to further develop their
communication knowledge and skills and promote a more civil and humane
world; or, (b) that they have gained admission to a reputable doctoral program
that enables them to further develop their communication knowledge and skills
to create a more civil and humane world.


D. Feedback Loops: Use of Assessment Data in Improving Curriculum and Instruction

Carrying out the above assessment plan will provide the Department with substantial evidence and guiding questions for improving its curriculum and classroom pedagogy. Each year, objectives on which given cohorts of students perform poorly can be identified. At the same time, dissonances between students’ own perception of how they performed on a given objective (on the attached questionnaires) and the OAC members’ evaluation of student performance (on the corresponding scoring rubrics) can be identified and their possible causes explored. Importantly, the annual meeting between members of the OAC and the instructors whose courses will be sampled in the upcoming year provides an opportunity for OAC members and the instructors collaboratively to revise and update the outcomes assessment rubrics to be used going forward. For example, a weakness in particular student competencies or knowledge may nevertheless emerge from the OAC’s report and analysis which were not focused in any of the scoring rubrics used up to that point. In response to such a discovery, one or more of the rubrics might be updated to include a new item reflecting that knowledge or competency. Conversely, the irrelevance of some rubric items may become apparent, and these may be removed.

In addition, following completion of the annual written report by the OAC each spring, the Department as a whole will meet to review the OAC’s findings and to deliberate upon methods of redressing student and instructional weaknesses or data gaps uncovered in the OAC’s report. Such methods may include mandating changes to types of assignments, experiences, and evaluations of student work provided in individual courses, or, in some cases, involve more significant revision of specific courses, including their titles, focus, and goals. In this way, the Department views the foregoing assessment plan as an evolving and organic entity. It is not an inflexible doctrine etched in stone, but a heuristic and diagnostic set of practices for improving its courses and enhancing their impact on student learning.