

FRAMINGHAM STATE UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION ARTS
ASSESSMENT REPORT AY 2015-2016

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Overview:

In 2015-2016 Academic year, the department Assessment Committee, in consultation with the University's Director of Assessment, Dr. Mark Nicholas, decided to review the assessment activities implemented over the previous four years. This decision was made after considering the difficulty of using the departmental capstone course (Seminar in Communication Arts, COMM 450), as a site for assessing learning outcomes. The intention, as always, is to maximize the utility of the assessment process in aligning institutional, departmental, and course goals. Particularly given the hybrid nature of the Communication Arts department, and the diverse concentrations grouped under a single major, the process of assessment itself has emerged as a challenge and something for the committee to study. Assessment activities have had the following constructive outcomes:

1. Revising course descriptions so that they more accurately reflect content of courses and their contribution to Program Learning objectives (PLOs)
2. Ongoing discussion within the department about the Communication Arts program and core courses, with a focus (at the moment) on Introduction to Visual Communication (COMM 130) and the capstone course Seminar in Communication Arts (COMM 450)
3. Ongoing revision of Program Assessment Plan, including a rich conversation informed by data.

Key Accomplishments 2015-2016.

- Communication Arts Assessment Committee (formed in 2014-2015) met regularly throughout the year, establishing a robust and productive dialogue about assessment with other faculty in the department.
- Communication Arts Assessment Committee brought all full time department faculty together with Dr. Mark Nicholas, for a four-hour meeting in which we revised the department mission statement, and Program Learning Objectives (PLOs), merging the objectives of "communication theory" and "media theory" into one objective, and reducing the number of PLOs from six to five.
- Communication Arts Assessment Committee revised the curriculum map.
- Dr. Niall Stephens completed the Certificate in Program Assessment in the spring of 2016, so that a total of two faculty in the department (Dr Stephens and Dr. Audrey Kali) have completed this valuable training in program assessment.
- The department identified Introduction to Visual Communication (COMM 130) as the only place where all majors learn about Visual Studies (PLO #2), and identified this course as the most urgent Learning Objective for assessment.

Key Accomplishments 2011-2015

- Designed, implemented, and adapted original Program Assessment plan over the course of this four-year period.
- Built map of program curriculum.
- Used student assignments to assess six Program Learning Objectives (PLOs).
- Administered surveys of students in COMM 450 (Seminar in Communication Arts) in the spring of 2013 and 2014. Survey results were analyzed with NVIVO, providing indirect assessment data on program effectiveness.
- Conducted two focus groups with students in the spring of 2012, another indirect assessment of program effectiveness.
- Established the departmental Communication Arts Assessment Committee in AY 2014-2015.

The department's most recent program review was completed and submitted on March 15, 2013.

1. Degree Program & Learning Objectives

The Communication Arts Department grants one degree: **BA in Communication Arts**.

Students earning this degree can do so through four different concentrations:

1. General Communication Studies (CMG)
2. Integrated Visual Media (IVM)
3. Organization and Corporate Communication (CMC)
4. Theater (CMH)

There are four core courses for all Communication Arts majors, regardless of their concentration:

1. Introduction to Speech Communication (COMM 115)
2. Introduction to Visual Communication (COMM 130)
3. Media/Society/Self (COMM 250)
4. Seminar in Communication Arts (COMM 450)

Apart from these core courses, the requirements for each of our four concentrations vary. For this reason, students in different concentrations receive different levels of instruction in each of our five (formerly six) Program Learning Objectives (PLOs). Additionally, this core of four classes means that there are currently only four places in our program where we are guaranteed the opportunity to assess the work of students in all four concentrations. This is one of several challenges posed for assessment by the structure of our department and programs.

The Program Learning Objectives (PLOs) for this program are published on our department website:

<https://www.framingham.edu/academics/colleges/arts-and-humanities/communication-arts/program-information/mission>

2: Evidence used to determine achievement of objectives.

Over the period discussed in this report, we have measured the achievement of all Program Learning Objectives through artifacts collected from courses throughout our curriculum. Pursuing indirect assessment measures, we have also administered surveys to students in our capstone course (COMM 450, Seminar in Communication Arts), and conducted two focus group sessions (Spring 2012). Our use of indirect measures here reflects one of the challenges we continue to grapple with: how (or whether) to use artifacts from the capstone course as a direct measure of student achievement of all learning objectives.

Over the period reviewed in this report (2011-2016), the Communication Arts Department assessed each of the original six PLOs. The six original PLOs (since reduced to five) were:

1. Communication Theory
2. Visual Studies
3. Performance Competence
4. Writing Competence
5. Visual Production
6. Media Studies

Summary of direct assessment measures: 2011-2015:

Communication Theory (Fall 2013)

Using an assessment rubric, 11 artifacts from anonymous students in unspecified classes were quantitatively assessed by Dr. Audrey Kali and Dr. Derrick TePaske. All components were rated on a score of 0 to 4.

Combined median scores: (after norming session)

Theory and Components	2.9
Theory Development	1.9
Application of theory	2.5
Connection and Integration	2.4

CURRICULUM RECOMMENDATION:

- Discuss communication theory Learning Objectives in detail at department meeting.

ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS:

- clarify assessment rubric language;
- provide faculty submitting artifacts with copy of Communication Theory assessment rubric.

Visual Studies (Spring 2014)

Using an assessment rubric, 10 artifacts from anonymous students in unspecified classes were quantitatively assessed by Dr. Kali and Dr. TePaske. All components were rated on a score of 0 to 4.

Combined median scores: (after norming session)

Visual Process Research	3.0
Idea and Concept Development	2.4
Visual Content	3.1

CURRICULUM RECOMMENDATION:

- Discuss visual studies Learning Objectives in detail at department meeting.

ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATION:

- Provide faculty submitting artifacts with copy of Visual Studies assessment rubric.

Performance Competence (Fall 2013)

Dr. TePaske and Dr. Kali reviewed video recordings of performances: 10 oral interpretations, 10 impromptu speeches, and 10 informative speeches, for a total of 30 video recordings. Outcomes were scored according to a rubric, with all components coded on a score of 0 to 4. Both reviewers tended to coincide in their assessment of each artifact (high inter-coder reliability).

Combined Median Scores: (no norming session)

Engagement:	2.5
Movement Quality	2.4
Vocal Quality	2.4
Communication of Meaning	2.4

CURRICULUM RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Consider adjustments in the curriculum, in order to give students more opportunities to develop and improve performance competence. (Limitations on the time and energy devoted to the development of performance, imposed by both class sizes – often over 25 students – and the hybrid nature of the course from which artifacts were taken, restricted the amount of time and energy dedicated to performance).
- Discuss Performance Competence Learning Objectives in detail at department meeting.

Writing Competence (Spring 2014)

Dr. Kali and Dr. TePaske reviewed a total of 37 artifacts – screenplays, short arguments, media critiques, and reading response papers – from anonymous students in a range of classes.

Combined Median Scores: (no norming session)

Thematic Focus and Purpose:	3.4
Language and style	3.2
Structural Integrity	2.9
Mechanics	3.0

CURRICULUM RECOMMENDATION:

- faculty discussion of standards and parameters to which students are held for “structural integrity” of writing.

ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATION:

- only thesis-driven writing should be included in future assessments of writing competence (this recommendation is now being reconsidered).

Visual Production (AY 2014/2015)

Professors Christopher Bowen and Niall Stephens assessed 94 artifacts in a variety of forms – short pieces of fiction video, segments of studio-based television programming, animated Public Service Announcements, graphic design logos, functional, multi-page web site designs, and movie poster designs.

Combined median Scores: (after norming session)

Design	2.74
Demonstrate Technological Competency	2.75
Apply Design Principles	2.66

CURRICULUM RECOMMENDATION:

- Seek new opportunities for students to develop visual production skills.

ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATION:

- Explore options (perhaps in rubric language) on how to best assess more “interpretive” or “artistic” artifacts such as emotion or concept based photographic prints.

Media Studies (AY 2014/2015)

Professors Bowen and Stephens assessed 19 short pieces of writing on media studies from anonymous students in unspecified classes.

Combined median scores: (after norming session)

Explore interactions	2.58
Demonstrate historical knowledge of media	1.96
Identify historical-cultural context	2.57

CURRICULUM RECOMMENDATION:

- None (though students' lack of historical knowledge was noted).

ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATION:

- Consider removing language from rubric specifying that students must cite specific theories.

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In addition to the assessments of Program Learning Objectives via the direct methods described above, Dr. Audrey Kali conducted open response surveys, in the spring of 2013 and 2014, of students enrolled in the capstone course, COMM 450, Seminar in Communication Arts (taught by Dr. TePaske in 2013, and by Professor Robert Alter in 2014). Results were analyzed using NVIVO, which enabled Dr. Kali to extract themes and common concerns from student responses.

Dr. Kali also conducted two focus group sessions in the spring of 2012, with students from COMM 322, Persuasion and Social Influence. Transcriptions were submitted to the Assessment Office.

3. Results and outcomes of program assessment AY 2015-2016

During the last assessment cycle (AY 2015-2016), and in consultation with the University Office of Institutional Effectiveness, our department began to revise our Program Assessment Plan. To initiate this process, full time faculty met with director of Assessment Mark Nicholas for a full afternoon in May, 2016. At this meeting we revised the Communication Arts Department’s mission statement.

Mission Statement (Revised May, 2016)

The mission of the Communication Arts department is to prepare students to become critical thinkers and effective communicators. We combine the theoretical foundations and practical applications of human communication, exposing students to a wide range of experiences in visual studies and production, speech, and theatre. This integrated curriculum prepares students for post-graduate study or professional careers.

Additionally, at the May 2016 meeting, Program Learning Objectives (PLOs) were revised and reduced in number from six to five. These five PLOs are listed below, broken down into more discrete sub-objectives that are amenable to empirical assessment.

The first PLO represents the merging of “Communication” and “Media” theory – two objectives merged into one. The other PLOs and their sub-objectives have undergone more modest revisions.

Program Learning Objectives

Communication and Media Theory	
PLO1	Apply communication theories to written, oral, visual and electronically mediated texts.
PLO1a	Identify theories of perception that inform an understanding of communication
PLO1b	Differentiate concepts of persuasion as they apply to oral, visual, and written communication
PLO1c	Illustrate how theories of communication pertain to media criticism
PLO1d	Explore the interactions of mediated communication with the institutions of society and the development of the self

Visual Studies	
PLO2	Analyze visual texts using appropriate disciplinary terminologies and protocols.
PLO2a	Identify iconic concepts in history and design
PLO2b	Categorize the semantics of color in visual texts
PLO2c	Evaluate the structures of visual texts

Performance Competence	
PLO3	Communicate effectively both verbally and non-verbally.
PLO3a	Relate to an audience with focus and engagement
PLO3b	Express a message with hand gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact
PLO3c	Show incorporation of appropriate vocalics for performance context

Writing Competence	
PLO4	Develop a written message using appropriate word choice, structure, and mechanics suitable to the genre.
PLO4a	Develop a written message while maintaining a unifying idea
PLO4b	Illustrate the use of proficient word choice
PLO4c	Produce a written message that maintains the appropriate structural integrity
PLO4d	Write a message that is free of errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation

Visual Production	
PLO5	Produce a visual communication message employing a process and design strategy acceptable to the medium.
PLO5a	Design a motion, image, or graphic media piece from concept to complete artifact
PLO5b	Demonstrate competency in digital imaging technologies
PLO5c	Apply appropriate design principles for the given medium and visual genre of the artifact

The process of revising our Program Assessment Plan is ongoing. In the short term, we plan to assess the Visual Studies PLO this year, in order to determine if the core course Introduction to Visual Communication (COMM 130) provides students with sufficient training to meet the Visual Studies PLOs.

Over the course of the current academic year, we will devise a longer-term plan in order to assess the remaining learning objectives. In the process, we will continue to discuss our capstone course, Seminar in Communication Arts (COMM 450), asking how we can integrate it more thoroughly and uniformly with the curriculum it is intended to cap off. This is a difficult question, given that our program's curriculum includes four separate concentrations and four separate sets of course requirements. It is difficult also because "Communication Arts" is not a narrowly focused discipline so much as a broad field, and different faculty teaching the capstone course are likely to come from widely diverse places on this field.

4. Interpretation of assessment evidence

As illustrated in the summary of our assessment process (presented in section 2, above), evidence of completion of Program Learning Objectives (PLOs) has always been interpreted by two full time faculty from the Communication Arts department. Interpretation has been based on rubrics that enable the coding of artifacts on a scale running from 0 to 4. We intend to continue this practice going forward. Since the establishment of the department Assessment Committee in 2014-2015, the two interpreters have been members of the Assessment Committee. In most cases, the two interpreters have met before coding artifacts to conduct a norming session, to ensure strong inter-coder reliability. In all cases, we have paid attention, inter-coder reliability, and in all cases, inter-coder reliability has been above 85%. We consider conducting a pre-coding norming session to be a best practice, and will endeavor to follow this practice going forward.

5. Changes made as a result of assessment

The process described here has led to a rich conversation among the faculty of the Communication Arts Department about our program and curriculum. The process was led from the beginning by Dr. Audrey Kali, and has benefited enormously from Dr. Kali's determination to implement a rigorous program assessment. Since the establishment of the department Assessment Committee in AY 2014-2015, department-wide conversation about our program objectives and curriculum has become more systematic, focused, and productive. This in itself is a change, and for the better. Three additional changes are being made as a result of our assessment efforts so far.

- Revision of course descriptions. In coordination with our department's Curriculum Committee, we are revising the course descriptions of many of our courses, including all of our core courses (with the exception of Introduction to Speech Communication, COMM 115). This process of making our course descriptions more accurate is an opportunity to discuss how each course serves our Program Learning Objectives.
- Reconsideration of our core courses, beginning with an evaluation of Introduction to Visual Communication (COMM 130). Implementing the original assessment plan gave us the insight that this course is the only element of our curriculum that guarantees students will be exposed to material that will allow them to meet our Visual Studies Learning Objectives. We now have to determine whether this exposure is sufficient, or whether we need to add another course to our curriculum or otherwise adapt our program to meet our Visual Studies Learning Objectives. To that end, the next round of assessment, conducted this academic year (2016-2017) will focus on artifacts from COMM 130 and Program Learning Objective (PLO) 2, Visual Studies.

- Reconsideration of our capstone course, Seminar in Communication Arts (COMM 450). While the course is intended as a culminating and summative experience for our majors at the end of their studies, it is not necessarily a place where each of our five Program Learning Objectives can be assessed. Although different faculty approach Seminar differently, they tend to treat it more as a prospective course, with a focus on the future (resume building, cover-letter writing, etc.), than as a retrospective review of program learning objectives. We need to ask if there is a way we can balance this prospective approach with a more retrospective review of program learning.

7. Conclusion:

The curricular challenges posed by Seminar in Communication Arts (COMM 450) reflect a more general challenge for assessment in our department. If the assessment process accentuates this challenge, it will also help us meet it.

The biggest difficulty for assessment in the Communication Arts department is the department's "hybrid" nature. The curriculum of our department includes elements from social science, humanities, artistic creation, and performance. Our students are not trained in a single discipline, but in a variety of disciplines. We believe this breadth is a strength of our program. When it comes to assessment, however, it poses some complications:

1. Because of the wide range of faculty expertise, corresponding to a range of skills and competencies taught by our department, no single faculty member is necessarily competent to evaluate all artifacts submitted for assessment. By the same token, no single faculty member is necessarily competent to assess students' achievement of all Program Learning Objective (PLOs) in the capstone course.
2. For reasons just adduced, our faculty are not always competent to evaluate the outcomes and artifacts generated by students in classes taught by other faculty. This poses obvious challenges for assessment.
3. Students earning the same degree with different concentrations achieve different learning objectives to different levels. How can we assess all students on the same level? How much divergence in skill levels should we expect and/or accept between different concentrators? It seems reasonable to expect, for example, that concentrators in Integrated Visual Media will tend to achieve greater levels of proficiency in PLOs 2 and 5 than other students. How can we reconcile such expectations with the goal of a single, unified program assessment plan?

Such are the questions we face in assessing the Communication Arts program. Working to answer them on both theoretical and practical pedagogical levels will undoubtedly improve our curriculum.