This plan identifies the ways in which the Department of Communication Studies pursues its Mission, unit Learning Objectives and, and the University Undergraduate Learning Outcomes.

Department Mission Statement

The Department of Communication Studies is committed to promoting the growth of knowledge about communication and its use to achieve individual, group, and societal goals. Faculty and students investigate, produce, and disseminate relevant information about the multifaceted functions, processes, channels, and influences of communication historically and in the modern world. Our greatest challenges are to facilitate effective information exchange, intercultural sensitivity, relationship development, and social adaptation through human interaction, and to serve as active members of the larger communities of which department personnel are a part.

Department Learning Objectives

Upon completion of the Bachelor of Arts program in Communication Studies, students should be able to:

1. Define communication in interpersonal and rhetorical contexts.
2. Analyze and evaluate messages and interactions in interpersonal and rhetorical settings.
3. Identify and explain historical developments and key theories in interpersonal and rhetorical communication.
4. Recognize and explain self-reflexivity in interpersonal and rhetorical contexts.
5. Evaluate critically research studies and published articles.
6. Recognize and explain multiple perspectives in interpersonal and rhetorical communication.
7. Conduct original research in interpersonal and/or rhetorical communication at a level appropriate for undergraduate students.
8. Recognize and assess ethical vs. unethical rhetorical and interpersonal communication.

University Undergraduate Learning Outcomes

The eight Department Learning Outcomes pertain to the UULOs in the following ways:

   Intellectual Breadth and Lifelong Learning: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
Means of Assessing Student Progress

The Bachelor’s degree includes six required courses, three each at the lower and upper division levels.

Lower Division Courses (60% of the Pre-Major)

- COM 101 Oral Communication
- COM 102 Introduction to Interpersonal Communication
- COM 216 Survey of Communication Courses

Upper Division Courses

- COM 400 Human Communication Theory (required)
- COM 409 The Rhetorical Tradition (required)
- COM 408 Rhetorical Criticism or COM 435 Quantitative Research Methods

COM 408 and 435 are students’ options for the Capstone course in COM.

Assessment of student progress in these classes entails:

1. Administration of pre-test and post-test measures to evaluate comprehension of key principles, theories, and contexts in COM 101, 102, and 216.

2. For COM 101, a Public Speaking contest is held during the last few weeks of each semester. Students from every section of the class are eligible, preliminary rounds are judged by COM 101 instructors other than the students’ own teacher, and the final round is evaluated by Dean Robert Ulmer and two guest judges, usually other Deans or upper level administrators.

3. Until 2015, student achievement in COM 400, 409, 408, and 435 was measured by the percentage of students who earned a passing grade (C or better) for the course. We learned in 2014-15 Assessment training, however, that this measure was unacceptable on its own.

Beginning with calendar year 2015, therefore, the Department began to explore alternative means of assessing the program’s quality. These include:

A. Competition each semester for the Outstanding Undergraduate Research project(s).
B. Undergraduate student submissions to, and presentations at, professional conferences or other.

C. Measurable progress during the term from task to task, which progress may be linked directly to instruction (e.g., faculty comments on early papers leading to stronger written work as the term progresses).

D. Successful student applications to continue their educations in graduate school.

E. Exit surveys that give students the opportunity to comment on those facets of their degree program that they found productive or not-so-productive.

4. Faculty review all nine of the Department’s core classes as part of the ongoing Assessment process. Greatest attention is devoted to the topic at the annual Fall Retreat, which takes place the week before classes begin. The Retreat is a full day, and Assessment is one of 6-9 topics covered. Faculty also address Assessment issues during a spring faculty meeting, usually for 20-30 minutes. The spring session typically functions as “stock taking” based on where the courses are at that point, in relation to what faculty hoped to achieve in discussions at the Retreat.

Key questions examined include:

- What do we hope to achieve with the current configuration of the major?

- Do we have evidence that our goals are being attained?

- Are there alternative means for achieving these goals?

- Is it time to revise major (why or why not)?

We anticipate opportunities to revise the curriculum based on perceptions of strengths and challenges in our current approach. At the very least, though, such discussions focus attention on what we do and why we do it. As a consequence, Assessment is an ongoing process.