

*Report*

Department of Communication  
Assessment Progress and Results  
September 29, 2006  
04-06

*Revised  
Plan*

The Department of Communication was formed in November, 2003, and had no pre-existing assessment program. It has currently implemented the first five phases of its overall assessment program. The nine phases of the Communication assessment plan are:

- ) Before/after picture of demonstrated public speaking skills.
- ) Survey of former communication internship supervisors.
- ) Before/after picture of demonstrated media writing skills.
- ) External review of Integrated Studies theses
- ) External review of the program.
- ) Exit exams designed to evaluate media literacy.
- ) Surveys designed to evaluate communication skills of graduates.
- ) Evaluations of final broadcast packages.
- ) Graduate surveys of education satisfaction and career success.

The first phase of assessment, the "before/after picture" of demonstrated public speaking skills, was completed in the spring 2005 semester. Students from randomly chosen public speaking sections were filmed giving their first speech of the semester, and filmed a second time giving their final speech of the semester. The videos were viewed and evaluated by a committee of public speaking teachers and professional communication workers from off campus. Students' speeches were evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale according to demonstrated skills of: introduction, organization, delivery, poise, maintenance of interest, achieved purpose, conclusion, and overall reactions. All students evaluated demonstrated improvement in all areas, ranging from 7 to 24 percentage points. The average increase in "overall reaction" was 16 percentage points.

As a result of the study, an extra day of the class/curriculum has been given on addressing how to "open and end" a speech. Several of the evaluators said that though the students were adequate, how they begin and close a speech needed to be more distinct and developed.

Even though improvement in the assessment was made in the area of "time usage," it was the lowest area of improvement. Extra emphasis has been given in how students manage their time--realizing the importance of ending their speech within the time frame. Two new items have been incorporated in speech evaluations to address this issue: first, students are given a 1 minute warning with a hand signal as they are giving their speech letting them know it is time to wrap it up, and second, points are deducted for the student going over time.

The second phase of assessment, the survey of former communication internship providers, was completed during the fall 2005 semester. Only one-third of the fifteen internship providers surveyed responded to our request. Of those, all providers responded with an "excellent" rating for all dimensions rated, with a small number of "good" ratings in addition. There was a request through the survey that our public relations interns get more practice writing press releases, and learn Quark Express. The department did develop a new public relations writing class in response to these findings, which will be offered spring 2007.

The third phase of assessment, the "before/after picture" of media writing skills, was conducted during the spring and summer 2006 semesters. One assessment focused on basic grammar, while the other focused on the media writing class's learning outcomes of: lead writing, news structure, reporting tools, writing techniques, media ethics and law. Writing assignments from students in the class were collected at the beginning and end of the semester, and evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale according to demonstrated skills in those areas. General improvement was made by all students in all areas, with about one third leaving the class with the ability to write very good news articles. (Meaning that they write focused leads, with appropriate news structure, using important, telling details, and appropriate quotes.) Two thirds of the students need to improve to be considered "very good." A higher number of in-class drills will be incorporated for the fall 2007 semester to help improve their overall writing skills through more practice and critique. Daily news quizzes will also be added to encourage students to read the newspapers in the morning before class.

An assessment focused on grammar, syntax, punctuation and word choice was conducted for the media writing class during the summer 2006 semester. A 50 question pre-test was devised by a journalist and included the most common errors seen by professionals. The students scored quite low in the pre-test, mostly in the "D" range. A post-test conducted during the last week of the session increased by a disappointing 10%, or one letter grade. The professors are currently discussing how to respond to the low scores.

The fourth phase of assessment, the external review of integrated studies theses, was positive, indicating that all theses reviewed demonstrated basic content knowledge and integration and synthesis of that knowledge. We have no changes to make regarding preparation for Integrated Studies theses at this time.

The fifth phase of assessment, the external review of the bachelor degree curriculum, was begun in 2005, and completed in 2006. An outside advisory committee was created in early 2005 during the formative stages of the degree proposal. Members included Tad Walch, the Utah County Bureau Chief of *The Deseret Morning News*, Barbara Smith, an anchor from KSL-TV, and John Petersen, the director of community relations for Nu-Skin Enterprises. That group contributed the inclusion of professional internships as part of the core curriculum, as well as the addition of more writing-intensive courses for the program's journalism and public relations emphases.

The final degree curriculum was reviewed by four professors from three institutions across the country, including a chair, a former chair, and a nationally-renowned historian of journalism. All reviews gave unqualified endorsements of the program. Barbara Harville, the former chair of the Department of Communication at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, a school similar to UVSC in size, open-enrollment admissions, and dual-mission of associate and baccalaureate degree granting, praised the proposal for how practical and forward-looking it is.

Barbara Wilson, the chair of one of the highest-ranked communication departments in the country at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, called the UVSC communication proposal "thorough and well-integrated," and noted that she was "particularly impressed" by the inclusion of a capstone experience in a core curriculum that offers "a nice blend of historical, theoretical, practical, and ethical courses." She also noted that the emphases were well "tailored," and that they represented a comprehensive range of options for students with interests in the field.

John Nerone, author of the seminal book, *Violence Against the Press*, observes that UVSC is part of a current trend in "other institutions around the country in recognizing the importance of communication as a set of vocations central to current and future social and economic developments." He states that "the proposed degrees allow the campus to provide students with the necessary tools to contribute to the media and communication industries." He also notes the cooperation with other units on campus, and sees great possibilities for "a cross-pollination of available human and technological resources in a way that maximizes the potential of the campus."

No changes to the degree curriculum are planned at this point.

To summarize changes that have been made as a result of assessment practices, the department has:

- Developed a new public relations writing class, which will be offered spring 2007.
- Offered a higher number of in-class drills for its media writing classes. Daily news quizzes have also been added to encourage students to read the newspapers in the

morning before class.

- Included professional internships as part of the core curriculum, as well as the addition of more writing-intensive courses for the program's journalism and public relations emphases.