

COMMUNICATION ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

TO: Dean Phillip Certain

FROM: Mary Anne Fitzpatrick
Chair

DATE: December 10, 1996

RE: Assessment Plans for Undergraduate and Graduate Education in Communication Arts

At its meeting on December 9, the faculty of the Department of Communication Arts met to discuss the plans for assessment proposed by the standing departmental committee on Undergraduate and Graduate education. The assessment plans were enthusiastically and unanimously approved by the faculty.

We look forward to learning a good deal of information that we can utilize to improve our program.

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Assessment of the Graduate Programs in Communication Arts
December 1996

Description of the Program

The Communication Arts Department has one of the top-ranked graduate programs in the country according to the recent report of the Research Board of the Speech Communication Association. We are highly selective in accepting students and consistently successful in placing Ph.D. graduates. Students develop their programs of study in consultation with their major advisors. Students in the Communication Theory track must demonstrate minimum methodological competency by examination by the end of their fourth semester in residence (if B.A.), or their second semester in residence (if M.A.). Methodology and statistics are tested again during the 16 hour preliminary examinations given at the end of a students' program of study. Students in Rhetoric, Telecommunications and Film demonstrate competency in foreign languages. In addition, students in Telecommunications and Film must take a course in video production (or otherwise demonstrate proficiency) to better prepare themselves for teaching and for effective media criticism.

The program in Communication Arts is a doctoral program. The master's examinations constitute an occasion for a full review of each student's progress. At times, committees suggest that students should not continue into the doctoral program.

1. Educational Goals and Objectives

The purpose of our doctoral programs is to facilitate the development of the student as a scholar and a teacher. We want to attract and train high quality students to pursue research in Communication Arts. Students are expected to develop a clear scholarly focus built from both theoretical and analytical course work. Students are expected to gain a broad working knowledge of the theories and issues in the study of communication, going well beyond the bounds necessary for a dissertation.

We promise to give students expertise in a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches. Faculty must bring concomitant scholarly expertise to the design and teaching of graduate research courses and to guide students to work with experts in various cognate disciplines outside the department.

We also strive to provide professional development skills. Students are regularly expected to give oral research presentations, write and publish research papers, develop course syllabi, and so forth. We encourage students to develop some of their work for publication. We guide them through the following stages: seminar paper, colloquium paper, conference presentation, and publication. The sequence works well, and almost all of our students have conference presentations and publications by graduation.

Questions:

1. Do doctoral students construct programs of course work that provide both theoretical and methodological grounding?
2. Do doctoral students leave with the ability to function as independent scholars?
3. Do doctoral students regularly give convention presentations and publish research papers during their time in graduate school?
4. Do we attract high quality students?
5. Do we foster professional development?
6. Do we provide appropriate graduate instructions?
7. What are our students' placement opportunity and post-doctoral career developments?
8. Do we provide teaching opportunities for graduate students?

2. Assessment

1. All minor programs of study are registered with the Director of Graduate Studies who carefully examines each one for depth. In addition, the preliminary examination questions for each student are maintained in files in the graduate office for five years. Every year, the programs of study of each graduate student are examined by the Graduate Committee to consider the breadth and depth of the program.

Incompletes are carefully monitored by the Director of Graduate Studies as is time to completion of the degree requirements.

At least three faculty members are involved in the evaluations of preliminary examinations. Five faculty members evaluate dissertations.

2. The Graduate Director will begin to maintain files on the research productivity of the graduates of the program. We can begin by requesting faculty to give us the list of books written by their doctoral students. A search can be made of the Social Science and Humanities Citation Index for articles written by graduates and frequently cited.

3. We conduct an annual review of doctoral student's convention presentations in order to award travel funds. This list will be maintained in the Graduate Office. In addition, each graduate student will be asked to provide the Director of Graduate Studies with a vita each year when under consideration for the annual McCarty competition.

4. We have been assessing the recruitment issue for a number of years. In 1994, the Director of Graduate Studies compiled data from 1982 through 1994 (N= 178) on the undergraduate GPA, the GRE scores and faculty assessments of how well students had done in the program. Interestingly, none of these factors predicted success in the program. For the next five years, the Graduate Committee is going to keep records on Graduate Committee judgments of the student writing sample as well as evaluations of the students' statements of purpose. These assessments can then be added to the quantitative measures to predict success in this graduate program.

We will maintain statistics on proportions of students accepted into the program by area and numbers of students who turn down our offers.

In addition to these quantitative measures, the Graduate Director will interview a sample of graduate students at the end of the first semester. The purpose of the interview is to examine the written materials provided to students, as well as the initial contacts with the students, to see how the recruiting information could be improved. In addition, the interviews help us to obtain information about first semester experiences in both teaching and research.

5. Each of the cognate areas of the department holds a weekly colloquium with invited speakers from across campus and across the country. Not only do we expose students to excellent research exemplars but we also allow students to present their research to colleagues.

6. During the annual review cycle, the Executive Committee of the Department of Communication Arts will consider the credentials of the faculty teaching graduate seminars.

7. A list of placements for graduating students will be maintained.

8. A sample of graduate student teaching portfolios will be examined during the annual Graduate Committee review of potential teaching fellows nominees.

3. Timetable

1997-1998: 1 through 8. We will begin data collection although the Quantitative Measure Study can not be undertaken again for five years as the study requires a sizeable sample.

Assessment of the Undergraduate Program in Communication Arts
December 1996

Department of Communication Arts: Goals and objectives

The Department of Communication Arts spans a wide variety of approaches and perspectives, but it is unified by its common concern with human communication in its verbal and visual forms. Interpersonal and group communication, public address, radio, television and film all involve the creation of meaning through human action expressed through words and images, though each area has its own appropriate subjects and analytical methods. The Communications Arts major is designed to lead students to an understanding of the complex process of communication, from broad concepts and basic tools to the specific concerns, techniques and settings that will allow them to become better producers and consumers of communication. It is designed to foster the critical thinking skills, translated into method and creative technique, that will enable a rich and detailed understanding of the crucial role that communication plays in contemporary life. To accomplish this overall goal, the Communication Arts curriculum has been designed around a sequence of interim objectives, through which students proceed in the course of pursuing the major.

Goals and Assessment Methods:

1) **Progress through a well-designed and organized curriculum.** Our curriculum has recently been revised to accomplish this objective. We have set goals for each step of the curricular structure and have procedures in place to encourage students to maximize the benefit of this design.

Fundamentals: introducing students to broad concepts and basic analytical tools

Core Courses: developing knowledge in key areas central to the field

Applied Skills: applying tools and subject knowledge to practice

Theory-History-Criticism: expanding and deepening theoretical and critical knowledge, encouraging students apply critical thinking to develop their own research/creative projects and engage with critical/scientific/aesthetic tradition.

Embedded in this curricular structure is an ongoing assessment of achievement, since students must perform at an acceptable level at each step in this curriculum before proceeding to the next. Having put this curriculum in place, it is important to make sure that students progress through it in the prescribed sequence.

Assessment method: the Communication Arts advising office will keep track of students' progress through the curriculum by annually assessing the DARS reports of students at various points in their major. The Undergraduate Studies chair and the departmental advisor will examine a representative sample of students' progress and report to the Undergraduate Studies Committee. This will enable the committee to take note of exceptions to normal academic progress and to adjust policies and curriculum accordingly. This information will also be provided to the Assessment Committee and to the faculty at large.

2) Mastery of a body of knowledge in communication arts expressed through applied communications skills. Communication is a central focus of our department, and the ability to communicate effectively -- in written, verbal, and media forms -- constitutes a primary goal of education in Communication Arts. By their senior year, students should be able not only to demonstrate their mastery of a body of communication knowledge, but to effectively mobilize this understanding in clear, coherent, and even elegant form.

Assessment method: The Assessment Committee will review a selected body of senior work each spring semester, consisting of papers, exams, and/or film/video productions, to assess the level of performance after the student has completed most of the Comm Arts curriculum.

3) Responding to students' expressed needs and interests. Students' own perception of the effectiveness of the curriculum, availability of classes, satisfaction with opportunities and instruction, and preparation for post-graduate careers or further study is also important. To help to gauge the effectiveness of the Communication Arts programs, exit interviews will be encouraged through the Comm Arts advising office for seniors planning their last semester of course work.

Assessment method: The exit interview will take the form of a short survey to be administered by the departmental advisor to first-semester seniors and reviewed annually by the Assessment Committee.

4) Outside evaluation of students' preparation and skills. It is important to have outside corroboration of the skill level and communication abilities of our students. Since the Communication Arts program emphasizes professional internships for its undergraduates, written evaluation of interns will now be required.

Assessment method: A form for evaluation will be devised by the Assessment Committee and sent out to those supervising internships in professional settings. These evaluations will be collected by the department chair's office as part of the requirements for completing an internship and reviewed annually by the Assessment Committee. Faculty members will consult the evaluation of student interns before assigning a grade for the course. In addition, these letters will be kept on file by the department adviser as a reference tool for matching students with internships.

5) Post-graduate experience and perceptions. Finally, it would be beneficial to ascertain the opinions of alumni of the Communication Arts major as to their experience as students and the ways that they have used their training after graduation.

Assessment method: A short survey will be added to the request for information on alumnis that goes out in our department newsletter twice a year. We will ask department alums what they think about the quality of the education they received and the way that it relates to their current lives. Returned surveys will be forwarded to the Assessment Committee.

Dissemination: The Assessment Committee will meet in the spring to review materials and report to the Department. Outcomes will be measured in relation to stated goals, and recommendations made to improve curriculum and administration.

Timetable: Fall 96-Spring 97 -- develop forms and procedures
Spring 97 -- collect outside review letters from intern supervisors
Fall 97 -- conduct senior interviews
Spring 98 -- assess written and production work
Spring 98 -- Assessment Committee will review all of above
Fall 98 -- report to faculty