



Date: June 6, 2007

To: Dean Gary Sandefur  
Associate Dean Chuck Halaby  
Assistant Dean Elaine Klein ✓  
College of Letters and Science, South Hall

From: Vance Kepley, Jr, Chair, Communication Arts

Re: Undergraduate Assessment

On behalf of the Communication Arts Department, I am happy to submit for your consideration the Department's assessment of the of the undergraduate major. The attached report was prepared by the Department's Director of Undergraduate Studies, Steve Lucas, working with our Undergraduate Studies Committee (Mary Beltran, Rob Howard, Louise Mares, Ben Singer), and with our Undergraduate Academic Advisor Mary Rossa.

I think that you will find the report to be clear, thorough, and balanced. I know it will help us in our thinking on some future aspects of our program.

Attachment

Department of Communication Arts

## Assessment of the Undergraduate Major in Communication Arts May 2007

At the undergraduate level, the Department of Communication Arts spans a wide range of approaches and perspectives, but is unified by its common concern with human communication in its verbal and visual forms. Interpersonal and small-group communication, public address, radio, television, and film all involve the creation of meaning through human action expressed as words and images. The Communication Arts major is designed to lead students to an understanding of the complex processes of communication, from broad concepts and basic analytical tools to the specific concerns, techniques, and settings that will help them become better producers and consumers of communication. At the same time, the major aims to foster the critical thinking skills that are vital to every endeavor of life in contemporary society. The number of majors in Communication Arts holds steady at 650-700 per year, with more than 250 degrees conferred annually.

In December 1996 the Department submitted an assessment plan that was approved by the College of Letters and Science. The current assessment, completed this spring by the Department's Undergraduate Committee, is based on that plan. What follows is a summary of the assessment, followed by the full report.

### *Assessment Summary*

The goal of this assessment was to evaluate the Communication Arts major in light of the five criteria set forth in the Department's 1996 assessment plan:

1. Students' progress through a well-designed and organized curriculum.
2. Students' mastery of a body of knowledge in Communication Arts.
3. The program's ability to respond to students' expressed needs and interests.
4. Outside evaluation of students' skills and professional readiness.
5. Students' post-graduate experiences and perceptions.

There were five main sources of data used for the assessment:

1. Annual reviews by the Undergraduate Advisor of majors' DARS reports.
2. Annual surveys of graduating Comm Arts majors conducted from 2003-2006.
3. An on-line survey of 630 Comm Arts alumni conducted in fall 2006.
4. Evaluations of Comm Arts major by the professional organizations that supervise our students' internships.
5. An examination by the Undergraduate Committee of a sample of work completed by senior majors across from 2004-2006.

Overall, the program appeared to be functioning well on all five criteria. Students and alumni report high levels of satisfaction with the quality of instruction, their experiences in the program, and the extent to which they use skills acquired as Comm Arts majors in their personal and professional lives. Outside reviews of Comm Arts interns are extremely positive, and the Undergraduate Committee's evaluation of work by senior Comm Arts majors indicates that students are graduating with an appropriate body of knowledge and skills.

The Committee also noted some areas for future progress. Some of these areas can be addressed by the Department itself, while other areas require support and resources from the College of Letters and Science and the university administration in general.

1. There is difficulty meeting student demand for certain fundamentals courses and applied communication courses. To some extent, this problem can be addressed internally, but it also requires additional faculty resources. (See pages 2-4, 8, 13-15.)
2. Students express concern about overlap among various courses and about difficulty taking courses in the correct sequence. The first of these problems can be addressed internally; the second requires additional faculty resources. (See pages 2-4, 6-7, 13-15.)
3. Although most students are writing at an appropriate level, a small minority continue to struggle in this regard. This problem can be addressed internally by providing more opportunities for students to revise and polish their writing; it can be addressed externally by referring students to the Writing Center. (See pages 4-5.)
4. Students want to take more courses with faculty members rather than with adjunct staff or graduate students. Resolving this problem requires three things: first, retaining current members of the faculty; second, hiring replacements for faculty that have left the department; third, adding new faculty to meet student demand for courses. (See pages 7-8.)
5. Students and alumni repeatedly comment on the Department's lack of career advising services. This problem stems partly from the fact that we have one Undergraduate Advisor to serve a department with 650-700 majors. It also stems from the fact that the Advisor's job has grown in recent years to include a number of vital responsibilities that go well beyond the original job description. The most obvious solution to this problem is to add another advisor. (See pages 14-16.)
5. Students and alumni also note that the facilities in Vilas Hall are outdated, in poor repair, and instructionally inadequate. This problem becomes more palpable with every passing year--especially as all the buildings contiguous to Vilas Hall are slated for major renovation or for replacement--and is a growing obstacle to our continued ability to serve the needs of our majors. (See pages 8-9, 14-15.)

### *Full Report*

The current assessment was conducted during the 2006-2007 academic year in accordance with the five criteria set forth in the Department's 1996 assessment plan. Each of those areas is discussed below, along with an explanation of the method(s) used for assessment in each area.

**1. Progress through a well-designed and organized curriculum.** We have designed our curriculum so students progress through four levels of courses:

*Fundamentals* courses that introduce students to broad concepts and basic analytical tools.

*Core* courses that develop knowledge in key areas central to the field.

*Applied Skills* courses that apply subject knowledge and analytical tools to practice.

*Theory-History-Criticism* courses that expand and deepen theoretical and critical knowledge, encourage students to apply critical thinking to their own research/creative projects, and provide opportunities for students to engage with the critical, social scientific, and/or aesthetic traditions of specific subareas in the communication discipline.

Although students do not move in lock-step as they advance through specific courses, the curriculum is designed so students must perform acceptably at each level of the major before proceeding to the next.

*Assessment Method:* The Communication Arts advising office keeps track of students' progress through the curriculum by annually reviewing the DARS reports of students at various points in the major. The Director of Undergraduate Studies and the Undergraduate Advisor examine a representative sample of students' progress and report to the Department's Undergraduate Committee, which takes note of exceptions to normal academic progress and explores whether the curriculum, or individual course offerings, need to be adjusted accordingly. In addition, we pay close attention to the feedback we receive on our annual survey of graduating Comm Arts majors (explained in item 3 below, pages 5-9). Yet another source of information for the current assessment is the alumni survey we conducted during the fall 2006 semester (explained in item 5 below, pages 10-15).

*Conclusions:* For the most part, the undergraduate curriculum is working well for our majors. It is systematic, well-ordered, and coherent, and we do not anticipate any major modifications to it at this time.

However, both our own observations of the curriculum and responses from alumni and graduating seniors make clear there are issues that require attention to help ensure progress through the curriculum in a manner that will allow students to graduate on time. Indeed, as we shall see later in this assessment, the single problem mentioned most often by alumni and graduating seniors is difficulty enrolling in required courses because of heavy demand, with the result that some students are prevented from graduating in four years even though they are attending school full-time. Not only is this a barrier to expeditious advancement through the major, but it also forces students take classes out of order so as not to fall even farther behind in accumulating the number of major credits required for graduation. The result tends to undermine the order and coherence built into the curriculum.

Beyond this general observation, there are several specific issues that have arisen in the process of conducting our assessment:

1. We are unable to meet student demand for both fundamentals courses--CA 250 (Radio, TV, Film as Mass Media) and CA 260 (Communication and Human Behavior)--but especially for CA 260. Both courses consistently fill before the end of sophomore registration; during the last three years, CA 260 has filled during the second day of sophomore registration, due to the fact that CA 260 has an enrollment cap of 160 students, as opposed to CA 250, which has a cap of 240 students. Because CA 260 is the gateway course into the Rhetoric and Communication Science track of the major, students who want to pursue that track often have to delay their entrance into the major, thereby making it more difficult for them to graduate on schedule. The most obvious solution to this problem is to increase enrollment in CA 260 to 240 students, which will put it at the same level as CA 250, thereby producing equity between the two tracks of the major.
2. Students in the Rhetoric and Communication Science (RCS) track repeatedly report difficulty getting into their applied communication courses--CA 262 (Theory and Practice of Argumentation and Debate), CA 266 (Theory and Practice of Group Discussion), CA 272 (Introduction to Interpersonal Communication). Even though these are 200-level courses, seniors have composed 65 percent of the enrollment across all three courses during the past three semesters. This means that courses designed primarily for sophomores are being populated primarily by seniors. Apart from the

fact that seniors would be better served in more advanced courses, their presence in these 200-level courses prevents sophomores (and even juniors) from enrolling in them, thereby creating a bottleneck that can slow the progress of students through the RCS track of the major.

One reason for the enrollment patterns in CA 262, CA 266, and CA 272 is that all three courses fulfill the campus-wide Communication-B requirement, and have done so with great effectiveness since that requirement was instituted in the mid-1990s. All three draw students from outside the major as well as from inside the major, partly because of the importance and wide applicability of the communication skills they teach. Because of the role played by these courses in the Comm-B requirement, we believe it would be counterproductive simply to reserve more seats in these courses for majors, though this might be one option. Rather, we would recommend increasing enrollment in the courses so as to allow them to continue serving the needs of students seeking to fulfill their Comm-B requirement while also meeting more effectively the needs of Communication Arts majors

3. Students in the Radio, TV, Film track of the major frequently comment upon what they regard as excessive overlap among various course offerings. These comments typically revolve around three sets of classes. The first set is CA 250 (Radio, TV, Film as Mass Media) and the two courses for which it is a prerequisite--CA 350 (Introduction to Film) and CA 351 (Introduction to Television). The second set is CA 350/CA 351 and various upper-level courses that follow CA 350 and CA 351 in the curriculum. The third set is CA 352 (History of World Cinema) and CA 354 (Film Styles and Genres). Student comments point to overlap both in general course content and in the specific films and other works studied in all three sets of classes. The Undergraduate Committee has examined syllabi for CA 250, CA 350, CA 351, CA 352, and CA 354. While it is clear to the Committee that the courses are far from being duplicates of one another, the Committee understands why students perceive overlap among the courses. The Committee has brought this issue to the attention of the full faculty, and the Department will explore ways of resolving it during the 2007-2008 academic year.
4. It should also be noted that there has been substantial turnover in the Department's faculty during the past five years. Two senior professors retired, two moved to another university, one changed her primary appointment to another program on campus, and one died. In addition, three junior faculty accepted offers at other institutions. All told, we have had nine departures from a faculty of 21-20 people. At the same time, we have added eight new faculty members, a number that includes two assistant professors whose appointments will begin this fall. In short, while the overall number of faculty has remained relatively stable across the past five years, the composition of the faculty has changed dramatically. Because of this, the time is propitious for the Department to conduct a thorough re-examination of its undergraduate curriculum to see what changes might be necessary in light of the changing composition of the faculty and the evolving needs of our students. This will be one of the items on the Department's agenda for the 2007-2008 academic year.

**2. Mastery of a body of knowledge in Communication Arts expressed through applied communication skills.** In addition to learning about communication, the Comm Arts major seeks to help students develop the ability to communicate effectively--in oral, written, and media forms. By the end of their senior year, students should be able not only to demonstrate their command of a body of communication knowledge but to effectively mobilize this knowledge in clear, coherent, even elegant form.

*Assessment method:* Periodically the Undergraduate Committee reviews a selected body of work by senior majors--papers, exams, and/or film and video productions--to assess the level of performance after the students have completed most of the Communication Arts curriculum. For purposes of the current assessment, the Committee examined a total of sixty papers and exams distributed across nineteen different Comm Arts courses from the 300 level to the 600 level. For purposes of inter-reader reliability, each paper was reviewed by two members of the Committee. Criteria for assessing the papers and exams were as follows:

1. Does the paper or exam exhibit appropriate command of the subject matter for the level of the course?
2. Is the paper or exam clearly organized and presented?
3. Is the paper or exam written in a clear, effective style?
4. Are claims supported as necessary with evidence and other source material?
5. Does the paper or exam exhibit command of writing mechanics, including grammar, spelling, and punctuation?
6. Does the paper or exam use statistical measures accurately and effectively when quantitative methodology is required?

*Conclusions:* The Committee found that student work exhibited an appropriate command of subject matter across a wide range of courses in both tracks of the undergraduate major--Rhetoric and Communication Science and Radio-TV-Film. The Committee also found student papers to be clearly organized and presented, to support claims as necessary with evidence and other source material, and to use statistical measures accurately and effectively when quantitative methodology was required. Some papers were exceptional with regard to writing style, while some clearly needed improvement. The same was true of writing mechanics. Students can be helped in both areas by having more opportunities in the Department for writing-intensive work, especially work that stresses systematic attention to matters of style, writing mechanics, and the revision process. The Committee also recommends that students be referred to the Writing Center, not solely to address serious writing deficiencies but also to improve work that is already acceptable but still in need of improvement.

In addition to reviewing papers and exams, the Committee examined films and screenplays produced by senior Comm Arts majors. In both cases, the Committee found a high level of work that reflected attention to such matters as topic choice, narrative structure, plot and character development, formatting conventions, and production values. The projects examined by the Committee evinced a creditable blend of creativity and professionalism, which is consistent with the success our graduates have had over the years in the fields of film and video production.

**3. Responding to students' expressed needs and interests.** One gauge of an academic program is the extent to which it is responsive to the expressed needs and interests of the students who invest their time and effort into completing requirements for the major. Thus our assessment procedures include surveying the perception of students about the effectiveness of the curriculum, the availability of classes, the quality of instruction, the adequacy of facilities, and the like.

*Assessment Method:* Each year the department's Undergraduate Advisor conducts a brief survey of graduating seniors to determine their degree of satisfaction with the Communication Arts major. This survey is distributed via e-mail and yields 40-50 responses per year. The Undergraduate Advisor and the

Director of Undergraduate Studies review the responses to identify curricular and instructional issues that might require attention. The current assessment is based on a total of 136 senior surveys gathered across the 2003-2006 academic years. The survey asked students to respond to the following questions using a 5-point Likert scale in which 1 represented the lowest rating (very dissatisfied) and 5 represented the highest rating (very satisfied). We also invited students to provide written responses to each of the questions.

1. Course availability: Could you get into the courses you needed to take?
2. Sequence of curriculum: Did lower-level Comm Arts classes give you the skills you needed to complete your upper-level courses?
3. Range and depth of curriculum: Did Comm Arts courses cover the areas you feel are important for an education in Communication Arts?
4. Quality of instruction: Were you satisfied with your teachers' level of knowledge and ability to convey it to students?
5. Facilities: Were classroom facilities adequate for learning?

*Conclusions:* Responses to the senior survey from 2003-2006 generally indicate a high degree of satisfaction with the major. At the same time, they identify specific curricular, instructional, and physical-plant issues that need attention. We will proceed by looking at responses to each of the items on the senior survey.

1. Course availability: Could you get into the courses you needed to take?

The mean score on this item across all respondents to the senior survey during the past three years was 3.89, which correlates to slightly less than "somewhat satisfied" on the 5-point scale. The most frequent comment from students is that while they were usually able to get into courses needed to fulfill requirements for the major, they often were not able to get into the courses they most wanted to take. More specifically, students indicated a desire for a better selection of courses each semester, for less overlap in the number of courses being offered during the same time slots, for more offerings in Rhetoric and Communication Science courses, and for easier access to advanced production classes.

2. Sequence of curriculum: Did lower-level Comm Arts classes give you the skills you needed to complete your upper-level courses?

The mean score on this item across all respondents to the senior survey during the past three years was 4.23, between "somewhat satisfied" and "very satisfied" on the 5-point scale. This level of response suggests that the Department's efforts to sequence the curriculum so upper-level courses build on skills, concepts, and knowledge gained in intermediate- and lower-level courses has, for the most part, been successful. As with other questions in the survey, however, student comments provide additional insight that we can use to refine and improve the sequencing of our courses.

While students seemed generally satisfied with the preparation received in lower-level classes, they did express concern about overlap among various courses as the curriculum moved from introductory courses to intermediate and advanced courses. As we noted earlier in this report, overlap among CA 250, CA 350, and CA 351 was mentioned most frequently, along with overlap between CA 352 and CA 354. Given the turnover in the Department's faculty during recent years, as

well as the fact that the turnover has often resulted in CA 250, 350, and 351 being taught by lecturers drawn from advanced doctoral students, these comments regarding overlap are somewhat predictable. Nonetheless, the issue of overlap among courses--including but not limited to the ones mentioned above--is a serious matter that the Department plans to address in a systematic fashion during the 2007-2008 academic year.

3. Range and depth of curriculum: Did Comm Arts courses cover the areas you feel are important for an education in Communication Arts?

The mean score on this item across all respondents was 3.80. When one looks at student comments, it becomes clear that responses to this question were related to the responses to questions 1 and 2 above. Students mentioned the need for a greater variety of courses, for less repetition among courses, and for more Communication Science courses. In addition, some expressed an interest in a greater number of "practical" courses with a "career" or "real-life" focus. Among the courses they mentioned were public speaking, persuasion, technical communication, and production. Because of the death of Professor Nietzsche Keene, we have had only one faculty member in production during the past three years. That number will double this fall with the addition of assistant professor Sabine Gruffat as the Department's first Hamel Professor, and it will increase yet again when we hire a replacement for Professor Keene. The arrival of assistant professor Lyn Van Swol this fall will also allow us to offer more courses in Communication Science, helping to alleviate the shortage in that area. There is no clear way to meet the request for more courses in public speaking, persuasion, and technical communication without either adding new faculty or shifting faculty resources away from current courses, which we could not do without making it even more difficult for students to move through the curriculum in a timely fashion.

4. Quality of instruction: Were you satisfied with your teachers' level of knowledge and ability to convey it to students?

The mean score on this item across all respondents during the past three years was 4.43, which indicates a high level of satisfaction with the teaching received by Comm Arts majors. This is also reflected in student comments, a few of which follow:

- "Most of my teachers exceeded my expectations, and were fabulous and extremely knowledgeable."
- "Some of the most brilliant and approachable professors I've encountered at the University were in this department."
- "Loved all my Comm Arts profs--you can tell they know what they are talking about and enjoy teaching it to students."
- "I thought the professors were really good, and I was overwhelmingly impressed with the quality of the TAs."

This last comment deserves special note because it mentions the high quality of work by the Department's teaching assistants. The Department has long regarded training teaching assistants as an integral part of graduate education. Because of its importance to the campus-wide



Communication A requirement, Comm Arts 100 devotes special attention to TA training, and it serves as a teaching practicum for graduate students throughout the Department. Teaching assistants receive additional training and supervision in other courses, and we are very pleased that students place a high value on the quality of work by our TAs.

At the same time, it is important to note that some students stated that they would have preferred taking more classes from professors and fewer from teaching assistants. This is a perfectly understandable sentiment, and it reflects the fact that a shortage of faculty has forced us to hire graduate students to work as lecturers in several intermediate-level courses during recent years. We anticipate that this situation will change for the better as we make additional faculty hires, but we are concerned that temporary vacancies may become permanent if the University budget does not improve.

As we noted earlier, the primary complaint of Comm Arts majors is their inability to get into required courses and/or courses they would most like to take. Although we have the third highest number of majors in the College of Letters and Science, the size of our faculty is markedly smaller than that of other departments with large numbers of undergraduate majors. The disparity is most striking with regard to the English Department. Current figures put the number of Communication Arts majors at 649, and the number of English majors at 648 (in both cases excluding students who are studying abroad). Yet the English Department currently has fifty-three faculty members, while Comm Arts has nineteen, a number that will rise to twenty-one in 2007-2008. In other words, Comm Arts is teaching the same number of undergraduate majors as the English Department with a faculty that is 60 percent smaller than the English Department. This kind of disparity has been long in the making, and we appreciate steps taken by the College to begin to alleviate it, but we would be remiss if we failed to observe that responses to our senior survey reinforce the need for additional faculty if we are to meet the needs of students who have chosen to major in Communication Arts.

5. Facilities: Were classroom facilities adequate for learning?

This question asked students both about classrooms and production facilities. The mean score on with regard to classrooms was 3.95; the mean score with regard to production facilities was 3.92. A substantial number of students complained that the production studios are out of date and lack the most current editing equipment. Others commented that the Media Center needs more space, more staffing, more editing suites, and more cameras. Given the constantly evolving technology of film, video, and digital production, we anticipated these kinds of comments. No matter how often we update the production facilities, they will always be somewhat behind the latest technological developments. Still, we need to do the best we can to ensure that our students have the kinds of production facilities that will allow them to develop the skills and sensibilities they need to be prepared for the challenges they will face after graduation.

What we found most striking about student comments regarding facilities, however, was the number and vehemence of negative reactions to the general classroom facilities in Vilas Hall. Numerous students expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of desktops for note taking in 4070 Vilas; several noted that the equipment in 4070 and other classrooms did not always work; many commented on the deteriorating condition of the classrooms and of Vilas Hall in general; still others wrote that many classrooms were small, outdated, cramped and not conducive to learning. The tenor of these remarks can be summarized in the comments of two students, one of whom stated simply, "Vilas

awful building,” the other of which wrote, “The classrooms for my Com Arts classes were terrible. . . Vilas Hall is one of the worst buildings on campus.”

Such comments need to be taken seriously. Although maintenance and repair of Vilas Hall is outside the control of the Department, we think it imperative that the University tend to the problem. At a time when all the buildings contiguous to Vilas Hall are being replaced or substantially upgraded, Vilas Hall alone is not scheduled for major improvements. Yet, as the comments of students indicate, and as a physical inspection of the building will readily confirm, Vilas Hall needs extensive renovation and updating--both in terms of the basic physical plant and in terms of classroom technology and teaching environment. Few classrooms contain the media, projection, and computer equipment needed to teach our courses effectively. Most lack large projection screens, Internet access, and equipment for PowerPoint presentations. We do have mid-size television monitors in most classrooms, but they cannot be used with PowerPoint, and they are woefully inadequate for film and video analysis. In this day and age, it is impossible to be a first-rate department of Communication Arts in the absence of instructional technology that will allow us to utilize in the classroom the communication phenomena we are teaching.

**4. Outside evaluation of students' career preparation skills.** It is important to receive outside assessment of the skill level and communication abilities of our majors. We have an excellent source of such assessment in the evaluation forms we receive each year from the businesses, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and the like that supervise professional internships for Comm Arts majors.

*Assessment Method:* Before a student can receive an internship grade, the organization supervising the internship must submit an evaluation of the student's work. That evaluation includes five questions in which the organization evaluates the student's preparation for the internship using a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest. We also inviAppendix te the organization to provide written comments about each student's performance as an intern. During the 2003-2006 academic years, we received 156 internship evaluations. Here are the five quantitative questions, along with the aggregate means for the years 2003-2006:

1. Attitude and willingness to learn	4.75
2. Preparation and basic skills	4.37
3. Ability to contribute in a professional setting	4.54
4. Judgment and competence	4.43
5. Ability to build on skills and knowledge	4.68

These numbers reflect favorably on the quality of our interns and on the preparation, abilities, and attitudes they manifest during their internships. So do the written comments of the internship organizations, which include (to mention a few) CNN, CBS, NBC, Fox News, Columbia Pictures, Twentieth-Century Fox, Sports Illustrated, The Daily Show, Louis Vuitton, Wisconsin Historical Society, Iron Oaks Foundation, American Red Cross, CUNA, Lindsay, Stone and Briggs Advertising, Morgan Stanley, Special Olympics, Cramer-Krasselt Public Relations, Infinity Management International, State of Wisconsin Lieutenant Governor, and the Milwaukee Admirals. The fact that these and other businesses, government, and non-profit organizations respond so favorably to our interns--and continue to provide internships for Comm Arts majors on a regular basis--is a positive sign about the quality of our majors and the education they are receiving.

**5. Post-graduate experiences and perceptions.** In addition to soliciting evaluations of the major from graduating seniors, the assessment plan devised in 1996 included a provision for ascertaining the opinions of Communication Arts alumni about their experiences as majors and the ways they have used, after graduation, the training they received in the Department.

*Assessment Method:* In the summer of 2006, the Department submitted a proposal for funding to support a DOIT Web Survey of our 7,500 alumni. The proposal was accepted, and the survey was conducted in November 2006. Designed in consultation with Associate Dean Elaine Klein and John Stevenson, Associate Director of the UW Survey Center, the survey included a mix of informational and evaluative questions. We had planned to do an initial electronic mailing followed by a second mailing, but when we received more than 630 responses to our first mailing, it was not necessary to do a follow-up.

The responses yield important information about how Comm Arts alumni evaluate their experience as majors with the perspective afforded by the passage of time and growing professional development. The graduation dates of respondents were distributed by decade as follows:

<u>Graduation</u>	<u>Number of respondents</u>	<u>Proportion of respondents</u>
1970-1979	73	11 %
1980-1989	145	23 %
1990-1999	170	27 %
2000-2006	248	39 %

We will first present a summary of responses to the scale questions included on the survey, followed by a summary of comments in response to the two open-ended evaluative questions. We conclude by analyzing the survey results and what they indicate about the Department's accomplishments and needs. (Note: Some %ages may not total 100 because of rounding off of individual items.)

1. Please rate your overall academic experience as an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin.

Very Satisfied	45 %
Satisfied	47 %
Neutral	5 %
Dissatisfied	2 %
Very Dissatisfied	1 %

2. Think back to when you were an undergraduate in Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin. Please rate your experience as a student in Comm Arts on each of the following items.

Quality of Instruction

Very satisfied	40 %
Satisfied	54 %
Neutral	5 %
Dissatisfied	1 %
Very dissatisfied	0 %

Breadth and Depth of Curriculum

Very satisfied	33 %
Satisfied	50 %
Neutral	12 %
Dissatisfied	5 %
Very dissatisfied	1 %

Ability to Get Into Courses

Very satisfied	20 %
Satisfied	50 %
Neutral	18 %
Dissatisfied	10 %
Very dissatisfied	2 %

Quality of Facilities

Very satisfied	19 %
Satisfied	47 %
Neutral	22 %
Dissatisfied	9 %
Very dissatisfied	2 %

3. How effective was your Comm Arts education in helping you master the following skills:

Oral Communication

Very effective	27 %
Effective	52 %
Neutral	17 %
Ineffective	4 %
Very ineffective	0 %

Written Communication

Very effective	29 %
Effective	50 %
Neutral	17 %
Ineffective	3 %
Very ineffective	0 %

Critical Analysis

Very effective	33 %
Effective	49 %
Neutral	15 %
Ineffective	3 %
Very ineffective	0 %

### Applying Critical Thinking to Your Own Research/Creative Projects

Very effective	35 %
Effective	45 %
Neutral	17 %
Ineffective	3 %
Very ineffective	1 %

4. To what extent do you use skills or knowledge gained from your Comm Arts courses?

#### In Your Work

Often	58 %
Occasionally	28 %
Rarely	11 %
Never	3 %

#### In Your Daily Interactions

Often	48 %
Occasionally	39 %
Rarely	11 %
Never	2 %

In addition to scale questions, the survey included two open-ended questions designed to give alumni a chance to write about positive and negative aspects of their experiences as Comm Arts majors. Here are the questions, along with a few representative comments:

1. What do you most value about your experience as an undergraduate in Comm Arts at the University of Wisconsin?
- Most respondents mentioned the quality of instruction they received as Comm Arts majors. For example:
    - “My professors. They were all very passionate about the subject matter, were challenging and engaging. I enjoyed each and every Comm Arts professor, and TAs as well.”
    - “Professors who were passionate about their work and were known nationally for their research.”
    - “The extraordinary energy, enthusiasm and knowledge of the profs. The high-quality TAs.”
    - “The passion and dedication that the faculty demonstrated for their work and their students was inspiring to me and provided me with an excellent role model for how to be a professional.”

- Many respondents commented on the positive impact the Comm Arts major has had on their personal and professional lives. For example:
    - “Courses taught me to analyze something, break it apart, and draw conclusions of the content. Those are skills that I use every day in my current job.”
    - “I currently own a full-service advertising and public relations agency, and cannot think of a day when I don’t utilize at least one small aspect of the education I received.”
    - “At the time I had no idea how much I would use my education, but the skills I acquired were ingrained and have served me well over and over again.”
    - “The majority of what I learned is applicable every day in my professional and personal life, It has stayed with me, and I continue to build on it each day.”
  - We were also struck by the large number of respondents who commented on the critical-thinking skills they acquired as Comm Arts majors. For example:
    - “Research and writing papers is what I valued. . . . The courses I took forced me to read more and think critically about information, whether written or verbal.”
    - “This program offered me a wide range of critical thinking courses that applied not only to the classes that I was taking, but also to my life in general.”
    - “Learning how to learn and think critically is important regardless of your job/situation, and that’s what I got out of my experience.”
    - “The training to think independently. It did not matter what your opinion was, but you had to be able to support it with evidence and critical thinking.”
2. As you think back to your experience as an undergraduate in Comm Arts, what one or two things within the program would you like to see us change?
- The most frequently mentioned concerns revolved around the availability of classes. For example:
    - “Availability of classes. The one class I wanted to get into most I was never able to get in to during my five years on campus.”
    - “More availability of classes. There are still a few classes I always wanted to take but was never able to register for because they were always full.”
    - “More diversity of courses. I’m not sure how easy it is to get the classes you want now, but it was very difficult when I was in school.”
    - “It was difficult to get into classes when you needed them to graduate. I may have graduated a year earlier if I could have taken classes when I needed them.”

- A large number of students mentioned the need for more career information and resources as part of department advising. For example:
  - “In retrospect, what would have been helpful would have been some serious career counseling. I remember thinking, what the heck do I do with this degree?”
  - “Career planning, tracking, and steering would have been most helpful.”
  - “It would be more helpful to have some sort of program for graduating seniors helping them with job placement or career paths.”
  - “I would have loved a more efficient career development program not only from the Comm Arts department but from the L&S school. Career development services were horrific.”
- Students also noted the need for improvements in facilities. For example:
  - “More up to date facilities.”
  - “I always thought that quality of facilities was in need of improvement (and continue to think so given the vast investments the UW and other departments have made in their facilities).”
  - “Vilas Hall is a dump. With the way communications and the study of the field have changed--even since I graduated in 2002--the communications program really needs a high-tech environment in which to teach students.”
  - “The facilities were marginal at best, and I honestly feel that for a department that’s one of the best in the country, it should have facilities to match.”

*Conclusions:* Alumni clearly value the dedication of the Comm Arts faculty and the quality of the education they received as majors in the Department. They stress the impact that education has had on their lives, both with regard to specialized knowledge and with regard to critical thinking. These comments are consistent with the high quantitative marks given by alumni to their overall experience as a Comm Arts major, the effectiveness of their education in Comm Arts, and how often they use the skills and knowledge gained in Comm Arts in their personal and professional lives.

We must note, however, that the alumni comments are also consistent with the lower marks they gave on specific issues such as the availability of classes and the quality of facilities. Many students are not able to get into the Comm Arts classes they need or desire, with the result that some students are forced to take extra time to graduate and/or to forgo classes they would like to take. It is also clear that there is a strong sense of need for more career advising and for a significant upgrade in the Department’s facilities.

These matters are, for the most part, out of the control of the Department, for they can only be solved by the commitment of additional resources from the University in general. As we noted earlier in this report, even though the Department of Communication Arts has one of the largest number of majors in the College of Letters and Science, it has many fewer faculty than other departments with a comparable

number of majors. As long as this inequity exists, so will the problems of limited class availability and course offerings.

The same lack of resources helps to account for the lack of career advising services. The department has one Undergraduate Advisor to serve 700 majors. In addition to advising students on class offerings, course loads, entrance to the major, degree requirements, and the like, the Undergraduate Advisor works on a number of other tasks, including curricular analysis, alumni relations, TA budget needs, summer teaching schedule, and internship development and coordination. This is far too much for one person to accomplish even without trying to provide meaningful career direction and advising. The most obvious solution to this problem is to add another advisor to help meet needs of our undergraduate majors.

Finally, we cannot help but note the oft-repeated comments about the poor facilities in Vilas Hall. To put the matter in a nutshell, Comm Arts is being asked to run a top-flight national and international program with facilities that are embarrassingly dated and run down. As we noted earlier in this report, there is an urgent need for upgrade of the Department's instructional facilities (not limited to film and video production), including classroom technology. The time has also come for a renovation of Vilas Hall in general. The longer this is put off, the more time-consuming and expensive the project will be when it is finally undertaken.

Submitted by Department of Communication Arts Undergraduate Committee, May 2007:

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