Assessment of Student Learning in the Department of Communications: A Successful Faculty Collaboration

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Department of Communications
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Curriculum structure

* Communications Major
  * Advertising
  * Entertainment & Tourism Communications
  * Journalism
  * PhotoCommunications
  * Public Relations
Where we’ve come from: *Limited activity, non-compliance w/ standards*

- **2006 and earlier** – Good ideas for assessment proposed by a few strongly committed faculty. Department learning objectives identified, but no curriculum-wide effort proposed or implemented.
- **2008** – ACEJMC Reaccreditation team found non-compliance with assessment expectations, *along with faculty “hostility to assessment and hope that the requirement of assessment will go away.”* The team offered extensive detail of our non-compliance with association standards and concluded, *“The prognosis for substantive progress is gloomy.”* The team suggested that without big changes, the department’s next accreditation effort (2014) would fail.
Getting on track: A systematic plan

* January, 2011 – Systematic plan for assessment drafted during university’s assessment workshop. Plan included:

  * **PLOs and CNLOs** – We identified learning objectives for the Program (core courses) and learning objectives for each of the five Concentrations. PLOs and CNLOs draw from the AEJMC’s 11 “Professional Values & Competencies” and department learning objectives (2006).

  * **Curriculum Map** – We linked the PLOs to courses in the core and linked CNLOs to courses in each of the five concentration areas.


  * **Policy Statement** – Communicated how we’ll act on what we learn.
Getting on track:  
*A systematic plan*

- Elements developed after the January 2011 workshop:
  - **Mission statement** – Revised and clarified the department mission statement to fall in line with the assessment effort.
  - **Terminology statement** – Drafted a ‘glossary’ so everyone would be speaking the same language about assessment.
  - **Evaluation rubric** – Created a generic rubric for faculty to use in evaluation of student work, along with suggestions for faculty to develop their own rubrics if they so desired.
  - **Technical Proficiencies Statement** *(in progress now)* – We are identifying and discussing specific technical proficiencies students need, in the core and in the different concentrations. We hope this will allow us to better identify where learning can/ does occur, as well as prepare for the resources needed to teach specific skills.
Program moving forward...

Evidence of student learning

- **Pre/post testing** in Core Courses to identify students’ knowledge of basic skills and ability to put understanding in context.
- **Long-form writing** in Concentration Courses to identify students’ ability to use sound strategic thinking, apply professional concepts, and write articulately about those concepts.
- Extensive **survey data** from Internship to document employer satisfaction with students’ knowledge and skills + students’ opinions of Internship and course preparation for the experience.
- Professional **advisory panel review** of campaign team notebooks from courses where students work in groups to develop client-based projects.
How did we implement change?

**Overcoming faculty resistance**

- **“Just do it”** – Knowing that a full discussion among faculty is problematic, no approval was sought. We just rolled out the assessment program slowly but steadily, one or two courses at a time – working closely with concentration coordinators.

- **We kept it simple** – Our program makes minimal demands of faculty for involvement.

- **Winners go first** – Our Internship and PR courses were leaders in assessment; other courses followed their model.
Getting on track: Sharing what we learn

Assessment of Learning Outcomes
The Department of Communications has an assessment program that identifies seven learning outcomes for all Communications majors. The assessment program has procedures for measuring and evaluating student learning within the core, and within each subject area concentration.

We identify learning outcomes within the core as PLOs (program learning outcomes). We identify learning outcomes within the concentrations as CNLOs (concentration learning outcomes).

Our assessment program is being operationalized over four years. At the end of each stage of the assessment program, faculty in the subject concentration areas are tasked with "closing the loop" to assure that our measurement/assessment/evaluation of student learning results in improved curriculum and instruction.

Our program is documented through an assessment plan and flowchart, curriculum map, and a statement of policies and procedures. All are linked here.

We are confident that our assessment program will give us much insight about what our students know, and how their knowledge is consistent with industry expectations. We are confident that the assessment program will also show us how we can improve and enhance student learning in the future, while keeping our curriculum consistent with professional standards.

Why should we assess student learning?
- Assessment Policies & Procedures 11-2-11
  - Curriculum Map 11-2-11
    - Assessment Plan and Flow Chart - Rev. 6-4-12
    - Program Learning Outcomes [PLOs]
    - Concentration Learning Outcomes [CNLOs]
  - Assessment Terminology
  - Assessment Results Summaries, 2011-2012
  - Assessment Results Summaries, 2012-2013

Department Assessment Committee, 2012-13: Genelle Belmas, Pam Caldwell, David DeVries, Emily Erickson, Doug Swanson
Questions?

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