Planning and Implementing a Mandatory Digital Portfolio in a Large-Enrollment Academic Unit

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Background | Dept. of Comm.

- One of the nation’s largest academic programs (factories?) of its type
- Advertising | Entertainment/Tourism | Journalism | Public Relations
- Majority of students are first-generation and/or transfer students
- 240+ course sections/ semester - 800 graduates each year
- Significant pressure to increase the 4-year graduation rate (now 38%)
Rationale

Our accreditors strongly encouraged (2014) us to develop a single path through which all Communications majors would acquire and demonstrate “digital skills learning” consistent with the expectations of the professions.
Concerns

• Department’s large enrollment and high number of transfer students

• “Lack of adequate computer labs and equipment” (accreditation)
  • (A uniform digital skills course would require 800 lab seats/ year)

• Approximately 70 faculty (30 F/T + 40 P/T) – little meeting of the minds

• “Dysfunctional and siloed faculty” (accreditation)

• We argued that digital skills instruction was and is happening, just not in a uniform, systematic way – in part because different professions (concentrations) have different digital skills needs

• “Digital skills” involves student learning (curriculum / pedagogy) and capturing of information about learning (assessment / evidence / structure)

• Avoid slowing student time to graduation (in fact, do the opposite)
### Public Relations Concentration Requirements

- **33 units**: Public Relations Concentration Requirements: Take all five of these courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMM 110</td>
<td>Public Relations in the News</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMM 310</td>
<td>Communications Research and Theory</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMM 320</td>
<td>Public Relations Writing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMM 330</td>
<td>Public Relations Law</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMM 340</td>
<td>Public Relations Ethics</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Collateral Requirement

To enhance learning, all Communications majors are required to take 12 units (one course) of supplementary, upper division courses in other departments. See the catalog for courses in other departments that satisfy the collateral requirement. Courses may be chosen from the following categories:

- **Collateral Courses**
  - [List of Collateral Courses](#)

### Writing Elective

- **6 units**: Writing Elective
  - [List of Writing Electives](#)

### Additional Information

- [Additional Notes](#)
Initial options

- Adding a single core course for digital skills instruction for all majors
  - We don’t have the computer lab space available to create 20 sections each semester of 20 seat lab courses
- Adding identical, specific digital skills learning assignments into a variety of courses in different concentrations
  - Would be, logistically, very difficult and would add to the silo problem
  - We argue that digital skills instruction was/is already happening in concentrations
- Adding a digital skills lab (or lab-based course) and linking it to gateway course in each concentration
  - Would add complexity to registration; difficult to coordinate classes
- Creating 2-unit ‘beginning’ and 1-unit ‘ending’ course to bookend students
  - Looked good initially but adding a 2-unit and 1-unit course was awkward
- Creating a set of online tutorials
  - If it doesn’t count for credit, you can’t enforce it and students won’t do it
Selection

1. Took an existing 3-unit core elective (COMM 317: Digital Foundations) and did a course change, making it a core course for all COMM majors. Students will learn basic digital skills here. Strongly recommended that students take 317 concurrently with their concentration gateway course.

2. Faculty have provided descriptions of digital skills assignments across all concentrations; assignments link to the digital skills learning outcomes. As students complete these assignments, work will drop into Portfolium for grading and for assessment purposes. (Students take “ownership”)

3. Each capstone course instructor will be the ‘final stop’ and will review student Portfolium folders for presence of completed digital skills assignments.
Challenges

• Program will only impact students in fall 2018 catalog and forward
  • Students in earlier catalogs will still be with us for a long time
  • We will need to individually issue lots of permissions/overrides
  • We cannot be certain of the demand for seats in the 317 course

• We don’t know how we’re going to assess quality of work in student portfolios
  • Initially, assessment will have to be ‘presence or absence’ of work

• Capstone instructors will be taking on an added load
  • They don’t all realize this yet

• Every faculty member will have to develop proficiency in use of Portfolium, and of the integration of Portfolium with Moodle (TITANium) learning management system
  • Ditto
Challenges (cont.)

• Faculty will need to do much more communication with colleagues about assignments in same-numbered sections & across dept.
• Faculty will need to get outside their silos to understand the expectations of students in other concentrations
• Digital skills assignments will have to be identified in syllabi
• We will have to build a communications campaign to announce this to a variety of stakeholder groups
  • First-semester freshmen, transfer students, existing students (catalog move?)
  • Full and part-time faculty will need information and ongoing support
• Our Student Success Team (advising team) will be greatly responsible for disseminating information about a program they were minimally involved in building
What we’re learning as we move forward...

• Unintended consequences of curriculum change
  • An action that eases the flow in one place adds to it in others

• Behind-the-scenes mechanics of I.T., scheduling, advising
  • No one person or group knows where all the landmines are

• Extensive time involved with establishing new technology / processes
  • Coordination across campus is needed, among people w/ different priorities
  • Sometimes you make decisions because they are easy (going with Portfolium) and not because the outcomes are the best

• Difficulties of getting faculty attention to curriculum issues
  • “I don’t know anything about the core courses.”

• Difficulties of obtaining (and keeping) faculty buy-in
  • “When did we approve this? I don’t remember agreeing to this.”
  • “I was on sabbatical and didn’t get a say in this.”

• There is no perfect solution to any challenge
  • Stakeholders have to be willing to buy in to a plan with outcomes unknown