

A Sample Assessment Plan for a Single Learning Outcome

Based on material from Colorado State University, a sample assessment plan for a single learning outcome is presented below:

PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT RESEARCH PLAN

College: **Liberal Arts**

Department/Unit: **Journalism & Tech. Communication**

Program: **BA Technical Journalism**

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General Plan Information

Institutional Mission Linkages:	This program supports in particular the land-grant mission of ANYU by promoting excellence in student learning, in research and scholarship, and in service and outreach to the community, the state, and beyond. The program creates, integrates, and disseminates knowledge contributing to productive lifelong roles for students and ultimately the betterment of the human condition.
Institutional Strategic Planning Linkages:	This program contributes to Key Strategy One, the undergraduate experience, notably through its commitment to enhancement of intellectual and professional development of communication knowledge of (1) its majors seeking media-related careers; and (2) to the ANYU undergraduate population through core courses addressing communication arts, sciences and practice. Key Strategy Two is addressed through the program's emphasis on information technology throughout its own curriculum, its interdisciplinary work across campus in IT, and its faculty research emphases on IT (also Key Strategy Eight).
College Planning Goals or Mission Statement Linkages:	This program links strongly with College of Liberal Arts objectives in "providing an understanding of people, their cultures . . . media, and arts," and "skills of critical thinking and communication." The program also works to strengthen "undergraduate and graduate teaching" and "foster and encourage significant research, scholarship, and creativity" and service to "the University, the academic disciplines of the liberal arts, and the community."
Program Purpose:	The program is concerned with communication principles and their application and effects in mass and specialized media. To fulfill this role, the program engages in: (1) Teaching, to examine with students the knowledge, skills, and values that may be useful in professional communication responsibilities; (2) Research and other forms of inquiry to help understand the nature, process, effects, and problems of communication, the media, and journalism education, and to test ideas that may help us achieve the goals we seek; (3) Interdisciplinary teaching and research and ANYU (especially related to science and technology communication), and (4) Service to the University, the professional media, academic organizations, and outreach to the public and media/communication constituencies.
Program Improvement Research Administration:	Program improvement research will be administered by the departmental chair with departmental committee oversight as appropriate under the Departmental Code.

Outcome 1

Student Learning / Development

Description & Methodology

Outcome

Outcome One: Students will demonstrate appropriate knowledge and use of communication theory and research principles to guide the selection of communication audiences, message content and format, and media channels to enhance communication impact. Program components aimed at this outcome include: (1) Knowledge of the role of communication and information dissemination in society, including First Amendment and related legal and ethical issues, and the rights and responsibilities of professional communicators; (2) Understanding of the appropriate applications of communication and related social science theory and research principles to professional communication activity; and (3) Ability to identify communication strategies for messages that inform, educate, and/or persuade audiences as appropriate.

Strategy

The program curriculum is structured to achieve this outcome by requiring (1) a freshman-level course focusing on the role of media in American democracy, impact of media on individuals and social institutions, comparative communications, and communication and diversity; (2) A Communication Law course emphasizing political speech, libel, privacy, copyright, information ownership and access, commercial speech, obscenity, and related issues; (3) a third required substantive course drawn from such areas as ethics, media effects, multiculturalism and communication, international communication and related areas. In addition, certain concentrations require parallel coursework, e.g. news-editorial students must take 6 to 9 credits of political science; technical-specialized concentration students must essentially minor in a science-technical specialization. Moreover, communication theory and research are interwoven into the more applied communication skills courses to demonstrate

Assessment Method(s)

The program currently has an integrated assessment approach for the required capstone course in each of the four concentrations (broadcast news and video, news-editorial, public relations, and technical-specialized communication). In each capstone, each student must present a portfolio of work appropriate to that concentration. The portfolio is evaluated in writing by at least two persons apart from the course instructor, typically another faculty member and a member of the professional media community. Each student also presents the portfolio orally to the evaluation team. A Likert-scale rating form with items particular to the concentration, in addition to more general and open-ended items, is used, with the same form used each semester across all capstone sections in a concentration. These forms are being reviewed to add more items on communication principles and theory; the review sessions will also add a more interactive exit form and interview for use by the student. A census survey of all majors at an earlier point in their coursework is also being designed, as is an alumni survey with the assistance of our Alumni Advisory Board. The overall method measures multiple learning components, enabling the faculty committee to determine patterns and identify low and high performing areas for added analysis and interpretation. Faculty drawn from each of the four concentrations will review analyses pertinent to their areas, arrive at conclusions, and present those conclusions to the faculty curriculum committee for policy recommendations.

Expected Performance Level

General faculty expectations for student performance have been developed within each concentration, but not across all. These will be developed more clearly in early spring 2003 within and across concentrations, with end-of-Spring 2003 assessments providing baseline data. Approximately 80 students complete capstone courses each semester.

Results & Planning

Data Summary & Evaluation

Data Summary & Evaluation

Departmental data were gathered on student portfolios during the last two weeks of spring semester 2004 on students in capstone courses: JT450 for public relations (n = 36 students), JT440 for television news and video communication (n = 22), JT420 for news-editorial (n = 24), and JT465 for specialized/technical communication (n = 12). In each of the capstones reviewed, a media professional paired with a departmental faculty member other than the course instructor for the review session, which typically lasted 30 to 40 minutes per student. Students orally described their portfolio products as reviewers examined them, asked appropriate questions, and independently filled out rating sheets including open-ended comments and advice. These rating sheets were given to the instructor and taken into account in course grading. They were then given to the evaluator. In addition, in all four capstone courses offered, the College of Liberal Arts Graduation Surveys were distributed and completed by each course just prior to the end of the semester. An additional list of questions pertaining to Outcomes One and Two were added to this survey. Individual surveys and summary data were reviewed by the evaluator.

All data gathered presented an arguably positive view of student accomplishment and program effectiveness, with quite few (less than 10%) instances of shortcomings in either. Mean scores across indicators in the two capstones reviewed were in the upper quintile of possible scores, e.g. above 4.0 on a 5-point scale, the same as in the previous assessment cycle. For JT440, the a new instructor used an extensive open-ended questionnaire format, not allowing comparable scoring. This will be rectified in the future. However, it was clear from the open-ended comments that the perceptions of the reviewers were uniformly high. As previously, scores on some individual attributes do assist capstone instructors to vary content emphases or techniques, but those are individual decisions based upon specific courses rather than programmatic issues at this point. Indeed, the differences in mean scores on individual course attributes was inconsequential from Spring 2003 to Fall 2003 to Spring 2004, nowhere approaching significance.

On the other hand, the baseline data called for by the objectives specified for Outcome 1 should provide more useful programmatic benchmark indicators. Items are indicated below with mean scores as called for.

Responses were uniformly positive, with fewer than 10% "disagree" and no "strongly disagree" on any one item. Specifically, the items in brief and mean scores ("Strongly Agree" = 5, "Strongly Disagree" = 1) reflecting Outcome One objectives were:

1. I have adequate knowledge of role of communication and information dissemination in society, including First Amendment and related legal and ethical issues, and the rights and responsibilities of professional communicators. Mean = 4.1 (vs. 3.9 in Fall 2003)
2. I understand understanding the applications of communication principles and theories to professional communication skills and activities: Mean = 4.2 (vs. 4.1 in Fall 2003)
3. Ability to identify communication strategies for messages that inform, educate and/or persuade audiences as appropriate: Mean = 4.5 (vs. 4.1 in Fall 2004).

We would like to say that the comparisons with Fall 2004 suggest at the least positive consistency, with some slight but not statistically significant improvements. However, an important caveat enters in here: Due to a printing error, an inappropriate response scale was entered for the questions asked in Fall 2004, i.e. the questions were posed under the rubric "How good a job do you think the courses that you took in your major:" , but the response categories were identified as being from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" on a five-point index. The gaffe was not confusing enough so that all students did not respond, but obviously on the next round the metric will be changed to "Excellent, very well..." etc., which will not allow direct comparisons with this semester's data.

The baseline census survey began with a pre-test across all students in a required sophomore course (JT210 Newswriting). That instrument is under supplemental materials, appears to have worked well based upon preliminary analyses of results and inquiries made of students, and will be repeated to the larger population in fall 2004.

Program Improvements

The evaluation data are still such that after a year we are hesitant to pursue meaningful longitudinal interpretations of the.

However, the positive consistency is highly encouraging. The development of the items above, and open-ended responses by students to the CLA and sophomore course questionnaires, has opened discussion of directions to emphasize in our program, and possible shortcomings in curricular structure. Two immediate outcomes have been formal discussions initiated by the chair among members of the faculty with public relations interests as to how to better manage a smoother flow among those courses, with less duplication. Similar discussions were held among instructors of courses emphasizing media technology over the same basic issues. Those will continue. How to more effectively integrate the concentrations without losing the distinctive elements of each has been discussed as well. We obviously await further data beyond what are still early efforts, however. In addition, the department this year is undergoing its six-year accreditation review by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. These assessments are being included in that review, and we await further comments from the accrediting body as to interpretation of them for accreditation purposes.

Supplemental Materials

[JT440 Video Concentration](#) *Portfolio Evaluations*

[JT450 PR Concentration](#) *Portfolio Evaluations*

[JT450 PR Concentration p2](#) *Student Overall Evaluation*

[JT465 Tec Concentration p1](#) *Portfolio Evaluations*

[JT465 Tech Concentration P2](#) *Student Overall Evaluation*

[JT465 Tech Concentration P3](#) *Student Overall Evaluation*

[JTC Student Survey](#) *Student Survey*