Mission Statement

The mission of our master's program is to provide students with advanced communication knowledge and skills to help them excel in all aspects of their lives. In addition, the program strives to provide a solid academic foundation for those students who intend to pursue the doctoral degree in Communication.

Goal 1  Discipline Specific Knowledge and Skills

Student Learning Outcome

- M.A. Students will demonstrate proficiency with theories and methods of communication research in two of five areas of emphasis: organizational communication, health communication, interpersonal communication, rhetoric, media and cultural studies, and performance studies.

Method of Assessment

- M.A. Supervisory Committees, comprised of three professors from the student’s major and minor areas of emphasis, will evaluate M.A. students’ Plans of Study, which are prepared once the student has completed 18 credit hours towards the M.A. degree, based on their ability to: 1) articulate knowledge of two distinct theoretical perspectives and at least one methodology in communication inquiry and 2) demonstrate the relationship between these perspectives and a chosen methodology. These three abilities will be evaluated based on a 3-point scale (for a total of 9 possible points): 1) unsatisfactory, 2) satisfactory, and 3) outstanding.

Performance Targets

- All M.A. students’ Plans of Study will demonstrate proficiency with theories and methods of communication research at or above the satisfactory level and a minimum of 6 points, according to the evaluation rubric described above.

Assessment Results

- Four MA students completed a Plan of Study during the data collection period of December 2010-September 2011. Three faculty members reviewed each Plan of Study; the scores ranged from a low of 6.33 out of 9 to a high of 8.33 out of 9 and the average score based on their reviews was 7.08 out of 9. This average score exceeds the satisfactory level minimum measure of 6 out of 9 points although it is lower than last year’s average of 7.9. Inter-rater reliability on this measure was .61 as computed by average percent agreement. Satisfactory ratings comprised 58% of the overall reported results, and outstanding ratings comprised 42% of the overall results. However there was some variation across three measures. Whereas only 33% achieved outstanding on the first two measures (knowledge of theoretical perspectives and knowledge of one methodology), 58% achieved outstanding on the third measure (relationship between theory and method). The results suggest that proficiency with theories and methods of communication research is being achieved among MA students based on their ability to articulate mastery of communication theory and methods in narrative form. The data suggest that MA students are equally proficient in communication theory and research methods and more proficient in combining theory and method to conceptualize research problems. In our 2009-2010 assessment, students’ average across the measures was 7.9 out of 9 as compared to 7.08 out of 9 in this assessment, although there were fewer data in this reporting period (4 students were assessed this year as compared to 6 last year).

Use of Assessment Results

- The results of this assessment will be discussed by the Department of Communication Graduate Committee to identify program improvements supporting MA student’s ability to articulate communication theory and research methods. The graduate faculty will be encouraged to complete assessments of Outcome 1 to increase the number of students evaluated, with the graduate program assistant enlisted as the point of contact for distribution of this assessment in conjunction with the submission of complete Plans of Study, which are placed in MA student files. It was recommended
last year that the methods of assessment on outcome 1 be changed to allow for assessment of students at the conclusion of courses in which instruction in communication theories and research methods was provided. However this change was not implemented due to changes in the staffing of the graduate director position. Therefore this change will be implemented in the coming year.

Admin Comment

Student Learning Outcome

- M.A. students will be able to skillfully present communication research to academic audiences.

Method of Assessment

- Faculty members will evaluate students’ research presentations given at the yearly conference presentation practice sessions, conference presentations, and end-of-term paper presentations based on their ability to: communicate 1) the thesis, 2) theoretical framework, 3) methodology, and 4) findings of their research to an academic audience; 5) present their research in an audience-centered manner; and 6) demonstrate oral communication skills. These six abilities will be evaluated on based on a 4-point scale (for a total of 24 possible points): 1) unsatisfactory, 2) satisfactory, 3) excellent, and 4) outstanding.

Performance Targets

- All M.A. students who make conference and/or end-of-term presentations will demonstrate the ability to present communication research to academic audiences at or above the satisfactory level and a minimum of 12 points, according to the evaluation rubric described above.

Assessment Results

- Sixteen MA students were assessed on Outcome 2 for the data collection period of December 2010-September, 2011. The assessments were all based on end-of-term research presentations. One faculty member reviewed four MA student research presentations at the conclusion of a course; a second faculty member reviewed four research presentations at the conclusion of a course; a third faculty member reviewed five research presentations at the conclusion of a course; and fourth faculty member reviewed three research presentations at the conclusion of a course. Inter-rater reliability was not computed because each presentation was assessed by only one faculty member. The average score based on these 16 reviews was 20.70 out of 24, which exceeds the satisfactory level minimum measure of 12 points out of 24. The average score for the 2009-2010 reporting period was 15.71 (based on assessment of twenty-one students). This year, the average rating for item # 1) the thesis, was 3 out of 4. The average rating for item #2) theoretical framework, was 2.80 out of 4. The average rating for item #3) methodology, was 3.62 out of 4. The average rating for item #4) findings, was 3.70 out of 4. The average rating for item #5) audience-centered, was 3.90, and the average rating for item #6) oral communication skills, was 3.45. No ratings were in the unsatisfactory range. Eleven out of 96 ratings were in the satisfactory range (3 out of 16 students were rated satisfactory in communicating a thesis statement, 7 out of 16 were rated satisfactory in theoretical framework, 1 out of 16 was rated satisfactory in findings). Thirty-one out of 96 ratings were in the “excellent” range (10 out of 16 students were rated excellent on thesis, 5 out of 16 students were rated excellent on theoretical framework, 6 out of 16 were rated excellent on method, 2 out of 16 were rated excellent on audience-centered, and 5 out of 16 were rated excellent on oral communication skill). Fifty-four out of 96 “outstanding” ratings were given (3 out of 16 students were rated outstanding on thesis, 4 out of 16 were rated outstanding on theoretical framework, 10 out of 16 were rated outstanding on method, 12 out of 16 were rated outstanding on findings, 14 out of 16 were rated outstanding on audience-centered, and 11 out of 16 were rated outstanding on oral communication skills.) These results suggest that proficiency in presenting communication research to academic audiences is satisfactory to outstanding among MA students. More specifically, the data suggest that MA students excel in their ability to make audience-centered presentations using excellent (5 out of 16) or outstanding (11 out of 16) oral communication skills and performing in the excellent range (2 out of 16) or outstanding range (14 out of 16) in presenting research in an audience-centered manner. They are somewhat weaker (though still satisfactory) in their ability to communicate a thesis and theoretical framework for their research and can improve their ability to communicate methods. These data show improvement from 2009-2010 report. We would like to see continued improvement in these areas.

Use of Assessment Results

- The results of this assessment will be discussed by the Department of Communication Graduate Committee, which began an assessment of the introductory graduate course titled Histories and Theories of Communication (required of all of our incoming MA students) in spring 2011. The curriculum in that course, particularly the final paper assignment, might profitably be revised to provide instruction in the importance of devising and clearly articulating thesis statements and theoretical frameworks for communication research. The criteria included in the rubric will be distributed and emphasized to MA students during graduate brown bags on job talks and presentations held in spring and fall 2011. In addition, the results of this assessment will be discussed by the Department of Communication graduate faculty to identify program improvements supporting MA student’s ability to articulate communication theory and research methods. Last, the graduate faculty will be encouraged to complete assessments for Outcome 2 to continue to increase the number of students evaluated, as well as the number of faculty reviewers included in the assessment results.

Admin Comment
Student Learning Outcome

- M.A. students will be able to analyze and synthesize communication theory and research in their areas of emphasis and articulate their understanding to an academic audience.

Method of Assessment

- M.A. Supervisory Committees, comprised of three professors from the students’ major and minor areas of emphasis, will evaluate M.A. students’ written responses to each of three comprehensive exam questions based on their ability to (based on the University of California composition Scoring Rubric, U.C. Irvine, 1997): 1) articulate a concept; 2) articulate a thesis; 3) offer research support; and 4) demonstrate organizational skills and 5) exhibit proper language usage. These abilities will be evaluated on a 4-point scale (for a total of 20 points): 4) responds incisively and analysis relevant, sophisticated, and original; 3) responds well and analysis goes beyond the obvious; 2) responds adequately and may have some factual, interpretive, or conceptual errors or irrelevancies; 1) confuses some significant concepts, including some of those in the question; 0) and misunderstands question and/or concepts.

Performance Targets

- All M.A. students will earn a minimum score of 14 points, with no scale subscore lower than 2, according to the evaluation rubric described above.

Assessment Results

- Five MA students were assessed on Outcome 3 during the data collection period of December 2010-September 2011. Three faculty members reviewed four students following the completion of his or her comprehensive exams, and four faculty members reviewed one student. The average score based on these reviews was 17.73 out of 20, which exceeds the minimum score of 14 out of 20. The average score for the 2009-2010 reporting period was 16.22. Inter-rater reliability on this measure was .59 as computed by average percent agreement. The scores in the current reporting period ranged from 15.66 out of 20 to 20 out of 20, so all students scored well above the minimum score of 14 points. No student received a subscore rating lower than 2 out of four. One student received ratings of 2 out of four on two measures (1 for concept, 1 for support). Ratings of 4 (the highest possible rating) were received in each measure (8 out of 16 for concept, 8 out of 16 for thesis, 9 out of 16 for support, 10 out of 16 for organization, and 11 out of 16 for language). This suggests that the ability to analyze and synthesize communication theory and research is satisfactory among MA students. The data also suggest that MA students are stronger regarding their use of language and organization skills and could improve in their abilities to articulate concepts and thesis statements and to offer support for their ideas. We would like to see continued improvement in these areas.

Use of Assessment Results

- The results of this assessment will be discussed by the Department of Communication Graduate Committee, which began an assessment of the introductory graduate course titled Histories and Theories of Communication (required of all of our incoming MA students) in spring 2011. The curriculum in that course, particularly the final paper assignment, might profitably be revised to provide instruction in the importance of devising and clearly articulating concepts, thesis statements, and theoretical frameworks for communication research and in offering sufficient support for research analyses. In addition, the results of this assessment will be discussed by the Department of Communication graduate faculty to identify program improvements supporting MA student's ability to articulate communication theory and research methods. The graduate program assistant will be enlisted as the point of contact for distribution of this assessment in conjunction with her work to note the completion of comprehensive exams and thesis projects in MA student files.

Admin Comment

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