

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REPORT AY 2008-2009

Report Date: June 1, 2009

School/College: Arts and Sciences

Department/Program: Division of Communication Studies

Person completing the Report: Eve-Anne Doohan, Evelyn Ho, Marilyn DeLaure

- 1. **Overview Statement**: Briefly summarize the assessment activities that were undertaken this academic year, indicating:
 - a. which program learning outcomes were assessed this year.
 - b. who in your department/program was involved in the assessment of the above learning outcomes

We assessed two learning outcomes this year for three of our foundational courses. These are listed below.

Program Goal 1: Students will be able to understand critically how communication shapes the contemporary world.

Learning Outcomes:

- **1.1.** Students will analyze the taken for granted nature of everyday communication and discuss how theories of communication allow people to understand everyday life. (203: Communication and Everyday Life)
- **1.2.** Students will compare and contrast communicative environments from various cultures, identifying how the communicative practices of different cultures reflect and express cultural beliefs, values, and norms. (204: Communication and Culture)
- **1.3.** Students will explain how political issues and relations of power in the contemporary public sphere shape and are shaped by rhetoric. (202: Rhetoric and the Public Sphere)

Program Goal 2: Students will be able to use a variety of methodological tools to analyze communicative practices in both our public and private lives.

Learning Outcomes:

- **2.1.** Students will learn how to read, analyze, and critique quantitative scholarly sources. (203: Communication and Everyday Life)
- **2.2.** Students will demonstrate familiarity with qualitative methods to study cultural communicative practices (fieldwork, participant observation, recording and transcribing). (204: Communication and Culture)
- **2.3** Students will employ rhetorical theory to analyze and critique various texts. (202: *Rhetoric and the Public Sphere*)



The following faculty members were involved in this assessment: Sarah Burgess, Marilyn DeLaure, Eve-Anne Doohan, Evelyn Ho, and Marco Jacquemet.

2. Please Answers the Following Questions for Each of the Student Outcomes Assessed:

a. What did you do?

Describe clearly and concisely how you assessed the learning outcomes that were evaluated this year (e.g., measures, research methods, etc.). [please use bullet points to answer this question]

- We began by randomly selecting 25% of our majors for a total of 46 students. We did this so that we could follow students throughout their undergraduate career as they progressed through the major. For each entering class we plan to randomly select another 25% from that group.
- We assessed performance of these 46 students in our three foundational courses for Spring 2009 (one section of Communication and Everyday Life, one section of Communication and Culture, and two sections of Rhetoric and the Public Sphere). Note: some of these students were not currently enrolled in any foundational courses and some were enrolled in multiple courses.
- The professor for each individual class developed measures for each learning outcome and defined them along a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 = very poor, 3 = the benchmark, and 5 = superior.
- Exam answers and papers were collected as evidence of student performance. Each professor evaluated this evidence to determine if each of the learning outcomes was met and to what degree.

b. What did the faculty in the department or program learn?

Summarize your findings and conclusions as a result of the assessment indicating strengths and weaknesses in student learning demonstrated by this assessment.

For learning outcome 1 across all three courses, we had 21 students meet or exceed the benchmark standards, and 12 students below the benchmark.

For learning outcome 2 across all three courses, we had 26 students meet or exceed the benchmark, and 7 students below the benchmark.

Students demonstrate mixed performance levels. The first learning outcome essentially measures theory and the second learning outcome measures method. Students appear to be performing better in methodology than theory. There are too many students who are falling below the benchmark. This could be due to the fact that these are the first Communication Studies courses that many of these students have taken, or this could be due to the fact that our courses themselves could be



improved. We will address this further in the next section.

We also learned the following:

- 1. It does not make sense for us to assess student learning outcomes for our foundational courses because these are the first courses that students take in our major. We need to continue to develop our assessment plan in conjunction with making changes in individual classes and/or overall curriculum.
- 2. Some faculty members found it difficult to assess our learning outcomes. For example, some assignments did not easily map on to the learning outcomes, learning outcomes are very broad and therefore students could have partially met an outcome through one assignment and fall short on another. Faculty are also unclear on whether the benchmarks are consistent across courses.
- 3. Many of our learning outcomes do not account for our public relations and advertising courses, of which there are many in our major.
- 4. We learned that the goal of assessment is not necessarily to follow students over time as they progress through the major. Instead, it may be more beneficial to assess students as they enter and exit our major.
- 5. Too many of our students are currently falling below the benchmark standards, yet those same students can often pass the course with a C- or above.

c. What will be done differently as a result of what was learned?

Discuss how courses and/or curricula will be changed to improve student learning as a result of the assessment. Include a discussion of how the faculty will help students overcome their weaknesses and improve their strengths.

Before we offer changes to our curriculum and courses, we hope to refine our assessment mechanism because one of the things we have learned is that our current measures of assessment may not be very good. In order to improve student learning, we want to first improve our assessment tools. We plan to do the following differently as a result of this assessment that will eventually improve student learning:

- 1. There remains a lot of work to better assess our divisional learning outcomes and create recommendations for change. We have scheduled a division retreat in late August to discuss assessment. At this retreat we hope to discuss other options for assessment, such as assessing students in their senior year, developing assessment measures for all upper-division classes or developing a senior capstone and/or senior professional development seminar, and developing an exit survey to supplement class performance as a way of assessing learning outcomes.
- 2. Faculty are beginning to have informal discussions about what is considered competency in a particular area and if there are better ways



to measure competency.

- 3. We will work as a division to expand our learning outcomes to include what is taught in our public relations and advertising courses.
- 4. As stated above, we are working to refine exit measures and begin to have discussions about how to measure where students begin. For example, we could use the measurements we collected this semester as a starting point to be compared with student exit data.
- 5. We have not had discussions about grading and minimum standards for courses. Individually many faculty members are re-examining testing and paper assignments and best ways to promote student success in these areas. Some of the changes that faculty are considering implementing to improve student performance include narrowing paper topic options, requiring writing assignments to be turned in earlier in the semester, and spending more time discussing how to integrate theory into written assignments, all in an effort to help students improve the quality of their work. We plan to discuss this at the divisional level.
- 3. Attach a copy of the components of the department/program assessment plan that have been modified since its initial submission:
 - a. Program Mission
 - b. Program Learning Goals
 - c. Program Learning Outcomes
 - d. Program Learning Rubrics aligned with outcomes
 - e. Curriculum map that shows the courses that pertain to the outcome

Please return to: Provost Office by June 1, 2009

You can send your replies as either a Word attachment (to: marin@usfca.edu) or as a hard copy to: Provost Office, Lone Mountain Rossi Wing 4th floor.

If you have any questions, please contact: William Murry, Director of Institutional Assessment (wmurry@usfca.edu or x5486).