MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Department of Communication Studies is to provide students with communication skills and understanding of the communication process to function in a complex and changing society. We are concerned with the ability to express ideas in an informed and coherent manner; the ability to articulate, debate, and negotiate issues; and to do so both orally and in writing. We are committed to promoting knowledge, criticism, and practical application of human communication. We educate students to be critical observers of social problems and discourse about them, to participate effectively in public life as citizens, and to become involved in culturally diverse personal and professional relationships in their communities.

DEPARTMENT ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

After listing each departmental objective, indicate which of the five strategic opportunities (from UM’s Strategic Vision) the objective supports. In this section, you may also briefly describe any innovative or noteworthy programs/initiatives that support the strategic opportunities.

1. **Encourage the development of students’ critical and analytic abilities about the processes and consequences of human communication.** (Reinvent the Heart of the Curriculum). COMM teaches students core principles about communication and then deepens understanding of those principles through application in a variety of socially significant themes and contexts, such as health communication, non-profit and social movement organizations, and gender and intercultural communication. Many of our majors pursue internships that allow students to put these skills into practice. In addition, the department sponsors the UM Debate Team, a truly co-curricular activity involving 5-10 students annually that develops speaking, research, and critical thinking skills for students across campus. Finally, three faculty members taught freshman seminar courses in the Global Leadership Initiative designed to incorporate communication theories and skills with global leadership development.

2. **Deliver a curriculum that integrates humanistic and social-scientific perspectives on human communication.** (Reinvent the Heart of the Curriculum). Our program blends humanistic approaches (rhetoric) and social scientific approaches (interpersonal and organizational) into the curriculum. COMM was also one of the first departments to partner with Missoula College to develop A.A. concentrations for their students. Missoula College students may satisfy several lower-division requirements that count towards the major at the Mountain Campus, thereby exposing them to both humanistic and social-scientific perspectives early in their career.

3. **Raise students’ awareness of diverse cultures, ways of thinking, and styles of communication.** (Partner with Place). Our courses on gender and communication, intercultural communication, and communication and conflict provide students with opportunities to explore matters of identity, difference, and power in their personal and social relationships. Approximately ½ of our upper-division courses directly address issues of local to global action and responsibility.

4. **Establish high standards of scholarship for graduate and undergraduate students in communication.** (Foster Knowledge Creation and Innovation). At the undergraduate level, every COMM major (50-75 students annually) engages in an applied research project as part of the required course in Communication Research Methods. At the graduate level, most of our students have presented research at scholarly conferences, and they have published numerous articles and book chapters in the past five years (several co-authored with faculty). Our graduate students
have regularly garnered Top Paper honors at our regional communication conference for student research and several have been accepted into top Ph.D. programs in the past two years.

5. **Encourage and support faculty in research and service activities for the campus, discipline, community, and society.** (Foster Knowledge Creation and Innovation). COMM has a nationally recognized MA program guided by faculty members who are scholarly leaders in the discipline. Among our eight tenure-track faculty, four recently won national-level awards for scholarly research; two have served as editors of major national journals; and two have served as President of our national and regional disciplinary associations and another was recently elected to do so starting next year.

### STUDENT LEARNING GOALS and MEASUREMENT TOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Goals</th>
<th>&lt;Measurement Tool&gt;</th>
<th>&lt;Measurement Tool&gt;</th>
<th>&lt;Measurement Tool&gt;</th>
<th>&lt;Measurement Tool&gt;</th>
<th>&lt;Measurement Tool&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senior Exit</td>
<td>UD Writing</td>
<td>PRCA</td>
<td>Research Methods</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Rubric</td>
<td></td>
<td>Projects</td>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Discipline-specific knowledge, skills, and abilities**
   - Explain, synthesize, apply and critique:
     - communication theory;
     - principles of interpersonal communication and their application to everyday life;
     - principles of rhetoric and their application to contemporary social issues;
     - the nature of organizations and communication issues in work situations;
     - principles and practice of social science
     - cultural issues in interpersonal relationships, organizations, and the larger society;
     - communication processes in family and personal relationships;
     - uses of new media in organizations and the social uses/impacts of new comm technology.
     - Categorize the various career pathways for students in Communication

   The senior exit survey provides an indirect measure as it gauges student perceptions of effectiveness across several areas of our curriculum. It asks specifically about the breadth of knowledge gained through our curriculum, and the relevance of courses to personal life and career goals.

   The argument and scholarship categories on the writing rubric assess student’s abilities to integrate discipline-specific conceptual knowledge into written argument.

   Projects in the required research methods course provide the clearest site for assessing student knowledge and skills regarding the principles and practice of social science.

   The alumni survey provides another indirect measure of perceptions of effectiveness. A core part of the survey asks how well the program prepared them for their personal and professional lives in 11 different areas connected to our curriculum.
### Student Learning Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Communication skills</th>
<th>3. Problem-solving skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- writing</td>
<td>- ability to analyze and evaluate the claims and arguments made by others;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- public communication</td>
<td>- ability to analyze and synthesize information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Interpersonal and group communication</td>
<td>- ability to evaluate theory and to assess theory in light of data;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Adapt messages to the diverse needs of individuals, groups and contexts</td>
<td>- ability to make connections between theory and practice in a variety of contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Locate, evaluate and use information (information literacy)</td>
<td>- knowledge of research methods that are usable in academe and beyond.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The exit survey asks specifically about the effectiveness of teaching public speaking and discussion skills, and writing skills. The exit survey also asks specifically about the effectiveness of teaching critical thinking skills.

The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) assesses pre and post levels of communication apprehension in several contexts. Two areas of the rubric (argument and scholarship) address several of the learning goals in this category. The research projects provide an opportunity to assess students' ability to analyze and synthesize information.

### RESULTS and MODIFICATIONS

#### Learning Goal results

**Discipline-specific knowledge, skills, and abilities**

- Exit survey: Overall scores improved modestly during the past two years compared to the previous two years in most categories with more significant improvements related to advising and online courses.

- Alumni survey: We did not administer the Alumni Survey during this evaluation period.

---

#### Modifications made to enhance learning

Some areas show continued strength like student assessments of quality of conventional courses (4.75 on a 5 point scale for 2017-2018).

In Fall 2016, we further expanded our advising to include the formerly pre-COMM majors so that regular faculty started advising incoming majors early in their academic careers with the hope of better aligning course selection with student goals. During AY17-18 faculty advised freshman through senior students. Exit survey results showed that student assessment of academic advising rose from 4.19 to 4.42 on five-point scale from AY16 to AY18. In addition, "Career Preparation Advising" moved above a 4.0 on a 5.0 scale for the first time since we...
began administering the current exit survey in 2009.

The National Communication Association developed nine learning outcomes for communication studies graduates. While many of these were already aligned closely with our department objectives, these NCA learning outcomes provided an opportunity during this assessment period to compare our stated learning goals with the NCA learning goals. As a result of this comparison, we revised several items in our learning objectives and added several others in relationship to “Discipline-specific knowledge, skills and abilities” including: “categorize the career pathways for students in Communication” and “information literacy.”

The department recognizes that we do not have an overall assessment of discipline-specific knowledge and skills across our entire curriculum at the senior level. We’ve discussed some options to do so, but with three different options in the major, plus the general option, students may take significantly different paths through the major. In addition, we do not have a senior capstone-type course in which we could administer such an assessment nor the resources to expand and create one at this time.

---

### Communication skills

- **Exit survey:** For the 2017 & 2018 Exit surveys we saw modest gains in several categories including: Public Speaking Skills and Critical Thinking Skills. We saw a modest decline in Research Skills and Writing Skills remained stable in the surveys.

- **UD Writing Rubric:** On a five point scale with a “3” indicating “meets expectations for a college graduate,” ratings for AYs 17-18 were slightly higher in communication scholarship (3.44 to 3.61) and argument (3.53 to 3.66) and slightly lower in style (3.59 to 3.44) as compared with AYs 15-16.

Overall, self-assessments from our graduates indicate a long-term, high favorable high impression of the communication skills they receive from faculty in the Department of Communication Studies (see attached).

We developed a rubric for writing and have been gathering data every semester. During our last three assessment reports in December 2012, 2014 and 2016 we saw scores dip up or down slightly, but no really significant changes. In the current report (December 2018), our numbers are relatively stable from the previous report, going up slightly in two categories and down slightly in one other. Given the small sample sizes of the data collected (n=41) and the relatively small changes in the averages, our conclusion is that our effectiveness in the teaching of writing skills remains the same. Overall, the averages for each of our writing categories are above a 3 on a five-point scale with 3 indicating “meets expectations” for a college graduate paper. While this is good news in some ways, we would...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Goal results</th>
<th>Modifications made to enhance learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>like the quality of our undergraduate writing to improve in the future—to move averages to above 4.0 on a 5-point scale (“exceed expectations”). To do so, the faculty continues to have conversations about how we might encourage students to take more writing courses and further refine the course we offer. In addition, we also need to continue to work together as a faculty to apply the writing rubric so that we can assure greater continuity in the way we are using the tool to ensure that we can better compare data across time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication Apprehension</strong></td>
<td>The <em>Personal Report of Communication Apprehension</em> (PRAC) is a survey developed by scholars in the discipline to evaluate a speaker’s comfort with and confidence in communicating and interacting in a variety of settings including speech-making and in groups. For our previous assessment, we piloted this measure in two of our introductory public speaking classes during the Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 semesters by giving pre and post-tests to students. During this current assessment period, we expanded use of the measurement tool into more sections of COMX 111, <em>Public Speaking</em>, and provided clearer instructions to the GTAs (Graduate Teaching Assistants) about how to administer the tool to achieve greater methodological consistency. The results show that taking COMX 111 reduced communicative apprehension in students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2017-Fall 2018: Average reduction in communication apprehension after taking COMX 111, <em>Public Speaking</em>, across 12 sections of COMX 111 was 9%. (See attached)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem-solving skills</strong></td>
<td>We again chose to focus on our Research Methods course for this evaluation since it is a required course that most students take near the end of their career. During fall of 2018, three of four projects were rated as “above average in terms of ability to analyze and synthesize information,” and three of four are being submitted to regional academic conferences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In addition to Research Methods, other project-based and writing intensive courses at the 400-level could be sites for student assessment in this area in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Research methods: three of four projects in this Fall’s class were rated “above-average” in terms of ability to analyze and synthesize information.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In the exit survey, student self-assessment of the teaching of critical thinking skills improved from 3.94 in 2013 to 4.43 in 2015. to 4.71 in 2018.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FUTURE PLANS FOR CONTINUED ASSESSMENT

The key areas for future assessment are: 1) consider a full-scale adoption of the nine learning outcomes developed by the National Communication Association to replace our own 2) identify a way to assess public speaking training more broadly across campus with our recent participation in the campus-wide Writing and Public Speaking Center 3) identifying practical ways of assessing student learning in the core content areas of the discipline. 4). Use the baseline data from the PRAC developed during this period to improve public speaking training.

APPENDICIES

1. Curriculum Map


3. PRAC Results