

Annual Assessment Report for Communication Studies 2018-2019

Department: Communication Studies
Academic Year: 2018-19
Date of Submission: 16 September 2019
Department Chair: Deborah Dunn

I. Response to Previous Year Recommendations by PRC:

Designing Senior Capstone Experience	Response: We made several decisions about our new capstone courses (see Appendix D). Students will choose among three options, but there will be some material common to all three.
Consider Utility of Using Varied Assignments	Response: We recognize that assessing varied assignments (even if using the same rubric) can require a lot more work to interpret, but we also recognize that it is holistic, organic, and do-able. We do plan to build assessment activities into our capstone courses (beginning Spring 2020) now that they are required of all graduating seniors. This will make most of our assessment activities less variable, easier to accomplish, and hopefully more easily interpretable. This is the first year we have students required to complete the senior capstone, so we will be able to collect/conduct assessment activities more easily. We look forward to the assessment we will be able to do once the capstone is in place.
Consider More Nuanced Internship Supervisor Questionnaire re Group Participation and Verbal Communication	Response: We will talk about this in Spring 2020 when Lesa Stern returns from sabbatical. One constraint is that we need supervisors to assess a number of items, and we recognize that they are working professionals so we need a streamlined evaluation for each student. We will also contact other departments to compare supervisor evaluations.
Actions Based on Writing Assessment	Response: We continue to refine our worksheets and instruction plans so that students are getting consistent messages about how to make arguments (our biggest issue with student writing). We also worked with the library to make a more instructive and relevant resource page 2017-2019. We are very pleased with the result and have begun pointing students toward this page. We also are going to add more direction for students when they are choosing online sources, which will include listing the first choice, go-to journals. We will explain, more in-depth, what an “academic” source looks like.

II. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) Assessment

Program Learning Outcome	<i>Employ communication theories, perspectives, and principles knowledgeably</i>
Who is in Charge /Involved?	Deborah Dunn acted as facilitator; all departmental members participated substantively.
Direct Assessment Methods	We analyzed application/research projects from 28 graduating seniors, using a rubric we refined from previous assessment (2015) of disciplinary knowledge (see Appendix A).
Major Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are highly developed when it comes to selecting and <i>articulating</i> appropriate theoretical models and perspectives. • Students generally <i>apply</i> theoretical models and perspectives well, with no project rated as “novice.” • Finally, we noted a greater number of experts than our previous assessment in terms of <i>insightfulness</i>. • Overall, we were pleased that students were able to articulate theories or models well, to generally apply the theories at least competently, and that very few students were operating at a “novice” level in articulation and application.
Closing the Loop Activities	We plan to have the conversations identified below in Spring 2020. Ultimately, we plan to create a matrix and guidelines that will be helpful for faculty (and then for students) in envisioning what we see as the most important elements of theorizing in communication studies.
<p>Collaboration and Communication: We spent a great deal of time before and after assessment discussing what we mean by theory, by models, and by perspectives. Some courses are more theory-driven, some more applied, and some talk more about “lenses” and approaches rather than specific theories or models. We agreed that all faculty should pursue helping students find stronger structures for analysis. This is on our agenda for discussion when Lesa Stern returns from sabbatical in the Spring.</p> <p>We also discussed the limitations of assessing theories across multiple courses and assignments. We look forward to having all of our seniors in capstone courses where assessment will occur.</p> <p>We also discussed whether or not there are overarching perspectives or lenses that we should assess, regardless of elective journeys through the curriculum. This is on our agenda for the 2019-20 academic year, but we will not begin the conversation until Lesa Stern returns from sabbatical in the Spring.</p>	

III. Follow-ups

Program Learning Outcome or Key Question	<i>Create effective and appropriate written and oral messages.</i>
Who was involved in implementation?	All.
What was decided or addressed or implemented?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Essays from students enrolled in a seminar course taught by Greg Spencer were part of the CUPA ILO assessment for 2018-19. We received the results a couple of weeks ago, so we will discuss these as a department in the 2019-20 academic year. 2. We discussed strategies for directing students toward the revised library resource page for evidence, documentation, research; Lesa Stern reported that this was particularly helpful in the Introduction to Research Methods course. 3. We reiterated our commitment to writing strategies in courses, including a re-affirmed commitment to the worksheets being used in lower and upper division course, including “make an argument” and others. 4. We also added a 2-unit PR course that helps students write news stories and press releases. This is being taught by a local practitioner.
<p>Collaboration and Communication: These have been productive and helpful conversations. We don’t treat any of our PLOs as the responsibility of just one person; they are responsibilities equally shared among us.</p>	

IV. Appendices

- A. Assessment Findings 2018-19
- B. Rubric: Assessing Disciplinary Knowledge / Ability to Employ Communication Theories, Perspectives, and Principles
- C. Argument / Writing Worksheets Used in Class
- D. Senior Capstone Experience

Appendix A: Program Learning Outcome: Students Employ Communication Theories, Perspectives, and Principles Knowledgeably

Senior projects and essays drawn from senior seminar and three upper division communication courses were rated according to three criteria: 1) How well they were able to describe a theory or concept; how well they were able to apply the theory or concept to their observations; and 3) the overall level of insightfulness in making the application. In all, we evaluated 28 projects and essays.

Results: We met our benchmark of having at least 85% evaluated as competent or expert in terms of articulating a theory or concept and the actual application, though we are missing our target for overall insightfulness. See table, below (*previous results, 2015, in parentheses*):

	Expert	Competent	Novice
Articulation of Theory/Concept	46% (50)	43% (27)	11% (23)
Application	32% (36)	68% (32)	0% (27)
Insight	39% (14)	39% (68)	21% (18)

Comments on Our Findings:

- Students are highly developed when it comes to selecting and **articulating** appropriate theoretical models and perspectives. We were very encouraged to see that more students were ranked in our “competent” and “expert” categories than in our previous assessment (from 77% to 89%). Though not rated as a separate category, we noted that citations were strong.
- Students generally **apply** theoretical models and perspectives well, with no project rated as “novice.” We think our attention to helping students understand how theories are formed and how disciplinary knowledge is aggregative rather than a series of discrete statements independent of history and context has been effective. Still, we would like to move more students from competent to expert.
- We noted a greater number of experts than our previous assessment in terms of **insightfulness**, but we would like to move more out of “novice” applications and move more from “competent” to “expert.”
- It was challenging to make judgments about student abilities in these areas given that prompts were given in four different classes for four different kinds of assignments. We are hopeful that these challenges will be minimized with the advent of our senior capstone experiences beginning Spring 2020.

Overall, we were pleased that students were able to articulate theories or models well, to generally apply the theories at least competently, and that very few students were operating at a “novice” level in articulation and application. We do see room for improvement in terms of demonstrating a nuanced, sophisticated, insightful appreciation for theoretical models and perspectives.

Action To Be Taken: We will create a matrix and guidelines that will be helpful for faculty (and then for students) in envisioning what we see as the most important elements of theorizing in communication studies, as well as in how to use theories/models most constructively.

Appendix B: Rubric

DISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE

	Expert	Competent	Novice
Articulation of Theory/Concept/Model	Summarizes theory or concept well; Is specific about how the theory or concept works; Names key authors or contributors; Correctly IDs central tenets & propositions.	Names and briefly describes a theory with some level of specificity; Theory is largely explained, though there are some missing elements or key terms.	Vague idea of a theory or concept; Not well sourced; Key terms missing or incomplete; Overly relies on recall of classroom lecture or introductory texts.
Application	Application is thorough and holistic (both in terms of depth of application and use of the whole theory or concept); Appears to fit the situation well – observed phenomena are explained or better understood via theoretical application; Deftly incorporates language appropriate to the theory.	Application includes the major claims; Theory appears to fit the situation as articulated; Misses some potential applications or uses the language of the theory sporadically/incompletely.	Vague Application – could fit almost any theory or situation; Applies only a few claims (less than 50% of them) or cherry-picks only one idea and ignores the rest; Theory only minimally fits the situation as articulated.
Insight	Demonstrates a nuanced, sophisticated, holistic understanding and appreciation of the theory and its application; If theory is applied in a novel fashion, this is acknowledged and explained in a way that adds to the richness of the application.	Draws appropriate insights; Deliberate analysis leads to step-by-step application.	Seems like any one (major or non major) who's taken a com course could come up with this; Misses good opportunities for application; Demonstrates little or no conception of the richness and/or complexity of the theory.

Appendix C: “Make an Argument” Handout & Worksheets (used in lower div courses)

Adapted from and Inspired by: Stephen Toulmin, Omedi Ochieng, & Greg Spencer

THESIS/CLAIM:

What are you asserting?

- What do you want your readers/hearers to believe/not believe or to do/not do?
- If your audience remembers **one** thing from your discourse, what would that one thing be?
- An audience member should be able to answer: “What is being asked of me?” or “How am I being asked to change my mind?”

REASONS/WARRANTS:

Why should your audience accept the assertion that you have made?

- Why should they change their beliefs or actions?
- If you were in conversation and someone heard your assertion and then said, “Interesting idea. Why should I accept it?” what would you say?
- Think in terms of “because,” as in “You should believe that Hitler was a puppet of Stalin BECAUSE _____.”
- A reason is a **warrant**, a premise that links the evidence/data/facts you plan to supply with the thesis/assertion/claim that you are making.

EVIDENCE/DATA:

What supports your reasons?

- Since your audience will not accept your reasons “just because you said so,” what support or data make your reasons more credible, more believable?
- Support might come in the form of 1) citations from the discourse you are analyzing; 2) authoritative experts who corroborate your ideas (preferably in more insightful or eloquent ways than you can state); 3) studies that verify that what you think is true has been substantiated empirically; or 4) ethical/biblical connections to your reasons.

Use the attached worksheet to analyze your claim/warrants/data (based on the Toulmin model). Type in your claim/thesis, your reasons/warrants, and affirm that your data/evidence are sufficient to support your reasons/warrants (and ultimately your claim/thesis). Attach this to your outline.

Claim / Warrant / Data Worksheet

I. My Thesis / Claim (the primary argument/position of speech):

My thesis asserts a position that meets these criteria:

- It goes beyond merely exemplifying (illustrating/demonstrating) a theory.
- It needs to be defended in order for someone to accept it. (*It isn't "obvious."*)
- On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with your thesis?

II. Reasons / Warrants

The first reason to accept my thesis is:

This reason meets these criteria:

- It provides the reader with justification for accepting the thesis.
- I have provided evidence/data to support my reasoning, in the form of...

The second reason to accept my thesis is:

This reason meets these criteria:

- It provides the reader with justification for accepting the thesis.
- I have provided evidence/data to support my reasoning, in the form of...

The third reason to accept my thesis is:

This reason meets these criteria:

- It provides the reader with justification for accepting the thesis.
- I have provided evidence/data to support my reasoning, in the form of...

III. These three reasons make my thesis/claim/pitch/requested action more believable/acceptable/desirable to my audience. Yes or No?

On a scale of 1-10, how confident are you that you've provided good reasons to accept your thesis?

Appendix D: Senior Capstone Experience

All students are required to take a senior capstone course. This change (implemented four years ago) is now “due” for the students who entered under this catalogue requirement as first year students.

All students will take one of three capstone experiences:

Senior Seminar (for now, this is the seminar course taught by Greg Spencer, The Rhetoric of Transition);
Senior Research (for now, this course will be taught by Lesa Stern each spring); or
Senior Internship (for now, this course will be taught by Lesa Stern each spring).

Students will decide toward the end of their junior year which option they’d like to pursue. If they are pursuing the research option, they will submit a proposal for their research project toward the end of their junior year. Honors research projects will count for this requirement.

An attempt will be made to keep enrollments for the seminar at 12, and enrollments for research (which will be labor intensive) less than 12.

Regardless of which capstone experience students choose, we have discussed some elements common to all three.

- We’d like students to be able to articulate what it has meant to study communication as a liberal art (both the discipline itself and in the context of a liberal arts college).
- We’d like students to be able to articulate how being a communication studies major has equipped them for meaningful personal, professional, and public lives, characterized by commitments to lifelong learning and faithfulness.
- We’d like students to do some specific preparation for their work after Westmont, including activities such as interviewing and resume workshops.

We’ve also discussed potential models to build courses around – such as past (what you’ve learned), present (what are you doing right now) and future (launching beyond Westmont). We also are thinking through specific readings or experiences that might work well in all three experiences. This course is a work in progress.