

# Assessment of Student Learning Plan (ASLP): Communication

2015-16 Academic Year

University of Southern Maine

## A. College, Department, Date

College            College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences  
Department      Communication  
Date                May 2016

## B. Contact Person for the Assessment Plan

Name and title: **Maureen Ebben, Assoc. Professor of Communication,  
Communication Major Degree Program**

Name of Degree Program **Communication, BA Degree**

## C. Assessment of Student Learning: Program Assessment

### Step 1: Identify the Student Learning Outcomes (SLO's)

- a. Do you have your student learning outcomes published on your department's website? Yes.
  - i. If yes, please indicate the url: <http://usm.maine.edu/com>
  - ii. If no, please list 3-5 of the most important student learning outcomes for your program. **What will students know by the end of your program?**
- b. Please identify **which of your student learning outcome(s) were assessed this past academic year.**

### Communication Major Learning Outcomes

1. Students will be able to understand and apply knowledge of human communication and language processes as they occur across various contexts, e.g., interpersonal, intrapersonal, small group, organizational, media, gender, family, intercultural communication, technologically mediated communication, etc. from multiple perspectives.
2. Students will be able to understand and evaluate key theoretical approaches used in the interdisciplinary field of communication. I.e., students will be able to explain major theoretical frameworks, constructs, and concepts for the study of communication and language, summarize the work of central thinkers associated with particular approaches, and begin to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their approaches.

3. Students will be able to understand the research methods associated with the study of human communication, and apply at least one of those approaches to the analysis and evaluation of human communication.
4. Students will be able to find, use, and evaluate primary academic writing associated with the communication discipline.
5. Students will develop knowledge, skills, and judgment around human communication that facilitate their ability to work collaboratively with others. Such skills could include communication competencies such as managing conflict, understanding small group processes, active listening, appropriate self-disclosure, etc.
6. Students will be able to communicate effectively orally and in writing.
  - a. Do you have a **matrix or curriculum map** showing when your student learning outcomes are assessed and in which courses?

**Curriculum map for Communication major: Student Learning Objectives (SLO) and course matrix. NOTE: Student Learning Objectives (SLO) for the Communication major may be achieved in a variety of courses. The courses listed below are those identified for the purpose of program assessment.**

**SLO #1: Assessed annually in the following course(s):** CMS 102: Introduction to Communication (required core course), and CMS 495 Theories of Communication (capstone course).

**SLO #2: Assessed annually in at least one of following course(s):** CMS 242 Communication and Social Media, CMS 265 Intrapersonal Communication, CMS 272 Persuasion, CMS 290 Intercultural Communication, CMS 332 Communication in the Family, CMS 360 Ethical Dilemmas in the Digital Age, CMS 390 Theories of Organizational Communication.

**SLO #3: Assessed annually in the following course(s):** CMS 200: Methods of Research in Communication (required core course).

**SLO #4: Assessed annually in the following course(s):** CMS 200: Methods of Research in Communication (required core course).

**SLO #5: Assessed annually in at least one of the following course(s):** CMS 255: Business & Professional Communication, CMS 330: Theories of Interpersonal Communication, CMS 345: Small Group Communication.

### **Assessment of Communication Major Student Learning Outcomes**

1. Students will be able to understand and apply knowledge of human communication and language processes as they occur across various contexts, e.g., interpersonal, intrapersonal, small group,

**organizational, media, gender, family, intercultural communication, technologically mediated communication, etc. from multiple perspectives.**

The full-time Communication faculty will assess and discuss the fall and spring grade distribution in CMS 102: Introduction to Communication and CMS 495 Theories of Communication (capstone course) as the primary assessment tool for this learning outcome.

Spring 2015 Grades

CMS 102 had three sections taught across two modalities, face-to-face and online. The median final grade for each section was 2.96, 2.82, and 2.99. The overall median final grade for the three sections combined was 2.92. We see relative consistency across these three sections and two modalities in terms of the final grades achieved. While these are indirect measures, they do shed some light on the extent to which student learning outcomes are being achieved by students in this foundational course for the program.

CMS 495 had two sections taught across two modalities, face-to-face and online. The median final grade for each section was 3.98 and 3.49. The overall median final grade for the two sections combined was 3.73. We see relative consistency across these two sections and two modalities in terms of the final grades achieved. While these are indirect measures, they do shed some light on the extent to which student learning outcomes are being achieved by students in this capstone course for the program.

Summer 2015 Grades

CMS 102 had one section taught in the online mode. The median final grade for the section was 3.43. This result is slightly higher than the overall median final grade for the three sections in the fall, which had a combined median of 2.92. While these are indirect measures, they do shed some light on the extent to which student learning outcomes are being achieved by students in this foundational course for the program. We would seek to explore why students in the summer class did slightly better overall than students in the spring classes. Also, it is important to determine whether the difference is even statistically significant.

CMS 495 had one section taught in the online mode. The median final grade for the section was 3.09. This result is slightly lower than the overall median final grade for the two sections in the fall, which had a combined median of 3.73. While these are indirect measures, they do shed some light on the extent to which student learning outcomes are being achieved by students in this capstone course for the program. We would seek to explore why students in the summer class did slightly worse overall than students in the spring classes. Also, it is important to determine whether the difference is even statistically significant.

Fall 2015 Grades

CMS 102 had three sections taught across two modalities, face-to-face and online. The median final grade for each section was 2.76, 2.82, and 3.01. The overall median final grade for the three sections combined was 2.75. We see relative consistency across these three sections and two modalities in terms of the final grades achieved. While these are indirect measures, they do shed some light on the extent to which student learning outcomes are being achieved by students in this foundational course for the program. In addition, these results appear consistent with spring 2015 results.

CMS 495 had two sections taught across two modalities, face-to-face and online. The median final grade for each section was 3.76 and 3.78. The overall median final grade for the two sections combined was 3.76. We see relative consistency across these two sections and two modalities in terms of the final grades achieved. While these are indirect measures, they do shed some light on the extent to which student learning outcomes are being achieved by students in this capstone course for the program. In addition, these results appear consistent with spring 2015 results.

- 2. Students will be able to understand and evaluate key theoretical approaches used in the interdisciplinary field of communication. I.e., students will be able to explain major theoretical frameworks, constructs, and concepts for the study of communication and language, summarize the work of central thinkers associated with particular approaches, and begin to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their approaches.**

The full-time Communication faculty will assess and discuss the fall and spring grade distributions across at least one of the communication theory courses listed in the major. These include: CMS 242 Communication and Social Media, CMS 265 Intrapersonal Communication, CMS 272 Persuasion, CMS 290 Intercultural Communication, CMS 332 Communication in the Family, CMS 360 Ethical Dilemmas in the Digital Age, CMS 390 Theories of Organizational Communication.

For the purposes of the assessment, the communication theory course, CMS 272 Persuasion, was selected for assessment. CMS 272 Persuasion was offered in the spring 2015 in the face-to-face mode. The median final grade was 2.94. The class was also offered in the summer 2015 in the online mode. The median final grade was 2.62.

- 3. Students will be able to understand the research methods associated with the study of human communication, and apply at least one of those approaches to the analysis and evaluation of human communication.**

The full-time Communication faculty will assess and discuss the fall and spring grade distributions in CMS 200: Methods of Research in Communication as the primary assessment tool for this learning outcome.

#### Spring 2015 Grades

CMS 200 had two sections taught in the face-to-face mode. The median final grade for each section was 3.11 and 2.65. The overall median final grade for the sections combined was 2.88. We see relative consistency across these two sections in terms of the final grades achieved. While these are indirect measures, they do shed some light on the extent to which student learning outcomes are being achieved by students in this mid-level core course for the program.

#### Summer 2015 Grades

CMS 200 had one section taught in the online mode. The median final grade for the section was 2.72. This result is consistent with the overall median final grade for the two sections in the fall, which had a combined median of 2.88. While these are indirect measures, they do shed some light on the extent to

which student learning outcomes are being achieved by students in this mid-level core course for the program.

#### Fall 2015 Grades

CMS 200 had one section taught in the face-to-face mode. The median final grade for the section was 3.37. This result is consistent with the overall median final grade for the two sections in the fall, which had a combined median of 2.88. While these are indirect measures, they do shed some light on the extent to which student learning outcomes are being achieved by students in this mid-level core course for the program.

#### **4. Students will be able to find, use, and evaluate primary academic writing associated with the communication discipline.**

The full-time Communication faculty will assess and discuss the fall and spring grade distributions in CMS 200: Methods of Research in Communication as the primary assessment tool for this learning outcome.

#### Spring 2015 Grades

CMS 200 had two sections taught in the face-to-face mode. The median final grade for each section was 3.11 and 2.65. The overall median final grade for the sections combined was 2.88. We see relative consistency across these two sections in terms of the final grades achieved. While these are indirect measures, they do shed some light on the extent to which student learning outcomes are being achieved by students in this mid-level core course for the program.

#### Summer 2015 Grades

CMS 200 had one section taught in the online mode. The median final grade for the section was 2.72. This result is consistent with the overall median final grade for the two sections in the fall, which had a combined median of 2.88. While these are indirect measures, they do shed some light on the extent to which student learning outcomes are being achieved by students in this mid-level core course for the program.

#### Fall 2015 Grades

CMS 200 had one section taught in the face-to-face mode. The median final grade for the section was 3.37. This result is consistent with the overall median final grade for the two sections in the fall, which had a combined median of 2.88. While these are indirect measures, they do shed some light on the extent to which student learning outcomes are being achieved by students in this mid-level core course for the program.

#### **5. Students will develop knowledge, skills, and judgment around human communication that facilitate their ability to work collaboratively with others. Such skills could include communication competencies such as managing conflict, understanding small group processes, active listening, appropriate self-disclosure, etc.**

The full-time Communication faculty will assess and discuss the fall and spring grade distributions across communication courses that deal with communication knowledge and skills. Particular attention will be

paid to those courses that emphasize communication skills (e.g., CMS 255: Business & Professional Communication, CMS 330: Theories of Interpersonal Communication, CMS 345: Small Group Communication).

For the purposes of the assessment, the communication skills course, CMS 255 Business and Professional Communication. CMS 255 was offered in the spring 2015 in the face-to-face mode. The median final grade was 3.42. While this is an indirect measure, it does shed some light on the extent to which student learning outcomes are being achieved by students in this mid-level course for the program.

### **Step 2: Assessment Methods Selected and Implemented**

- a. *Identify which direct measures (other than course grades) that were used to determine whether students achieved the stated learning outcomes for the degree.*

**The current plan is to work with Susan King to determine which direct measures (other than course grades) could be used to determine whether students achieved the stated learning outcomes for the degree. Until those meetings and work with Susan have been accomplished, in the meantime, we have used course grades to gain a baseline sense of the extent to which students are achieving success toward the stated learning outcomes for the degree.**

*Briefly describe when you implemented the assessment activity, and if a scoring rubric was used to evaluate the expected level of student achievement. (This information may be shown on your curriculum map).*

**The full-time faculty in Communication and Media Studies decided to implement the use of grades as a tool for assessment, drawing upon data produced from Susan's office that reflect student grade achievement over the following semesters: Spring 2015 semester, Summer 2015 summer sessions, and Fall 2015 semesters. The interpretive rubric was based on the fact that program student learning outcomes are embedded in the courses listed above. Assignments, papers, projects, tests, various student experiences, and other course activities are designed and structured to scaffold proficiency toward the student learning outcomes. Given this, it follows that the extent to which students achieve passing and above grades expresses the extent to which learning outcomes have or have not been accomplished.**

### **Step 3: Using the Assessment results to Improve Student Learning**

- a. *Briefly describe your unit's process of reviewing the program assessment results (i.e. annual process by faculty committee, etc.).*

**The full-time faculty in both the Communication and Media Studies majors will meet in late May 2016 to analyze the course grade study in relation each of the learning outcomes in each major of the Communication and Media Studies program. The faculty will decide on any curriculum changes to improve student learning at this meeting.**

- b. *What changes have been or will be made to improve student learning, as a result of using the program assessment results?*

*This is the first measurement of our learning outcomes, and the beginning of our data assessment and therefore we have nothing to compare it with. It may be that with the more specific approaches developed over the summer, fall, and spring of 2016 -2017, and with more data sources identified and collected, appropriate adjustments in the program structure and processes may become more evident. At present, these assessment activities have been illuminating as they have demonstrated that differences in student grade outcomes across the different delivery modalities, such as face-to-face and online are not significant. That is, student grade outcomes seem to be comparable whether students take the course in an online mode or in a face-to-face mode. Also, when more than one section of a class is offered in the same semester, such as with the core foundational class, CMS 102 Introduction to Communication, we have seen relatively consistent student grade outcomes across the sections. This pattern has also held true when the same class is offered across different semesters. These results have been insightful as we did not have the data to answer that question before, and it is a question that many have wondered about. However, student grades, in themselves, do not give us a clear indication of what to change. Faculty have come to realize the limitations of using student grades as a form of assessment. Looking at student grades is helpful, but student grades do not tell the whole story. Another impact of this process, is that the timeline for assessment may need to be adjusted to allow for sufficient planning, execution, and analysis. We do anticipate that with additional assessment methods and plans in place, changes may take place.*

*c. Date of most recent program review/self-study?*

**The Department of Communication and Media Studies submitted its self-study for a program review two years ago and we are still waiting for a response on when the program review will take place.**

**E. Course Assessment Activities:** *Is your program able to report any assessment-related activities at the Course-Level... (i.e. created grading rubrics to use in required courses, examined student progress in entry-level courses, developed a new course, etc.)? Please briefly explain any assessment projects.*

*We are so early in the program assessment process that course level changes have not been identified yet. See also, comments to the question above.*

**F. Community Engagement Activities in your departmental curriculum:**

a. Does your department have a student learning outcome that is related to any community engagement activities? If so, please state the outcome.

b. Please indicate what community engagement activities are included in your program’s curriculum, and whether the activities are required or optional for students in your major.

<u>Community Engagement Activity – Communication Major</u>	<u>Included</u>	<u>Required/Optional</u>
Student Research (related to a community-based problem)	<u>_O_</u>	R O
Student-Faculty Community Research Project	<u>_O_</u>	R O
Internship, or a Field Experience	<u>_O_</u>	R O
Independent Study (community-related project)	<u>_O_</u>	R O
Capstone Course (community-related project)	<u>_R_</u>	R O
Service-Learning (course-based)	<u>_O_</u>	R O
Study Abroad, or an International Program	<u>_O_</u>	R O
Interdisciplinary Collaborative Project (community related)	<u>_O_</u>	R O
Student Leadership Activities (related to a team project)	<u>_O_</u>	R O
Students/Faculty Community Leadership (advisory boards, committees, conference presentations)	<u>_O_</u>	R O
Other Activities (not mentioned above): Select Communication majors participate and present at the annual Thinking Matters conference on the USM Portland campus.		

c. Please list any courses (i.e. EDU 400) that have a community engagement activity in your program.

Communication Major:

CMS 255: Business & Professional Communication

CMS 345: Small Group Communication

CMS 430: Communication Internship

**Reminder: Please complete and submit this form by the end of the academic year, May 2016.**