Expected Outcome 1: Knowledge and Application of Concepts
As a stated learning objective we are committed to helping our students “Know, understand, and apply a variety of theoretical perspective to appropriate communicative contexts.” For communication studies this includes helping our students develop an understanding of the theories that explain the relationships between audience, message, and context. This student learning outcome was assessed two ways:

- First the internship evaluations were used to assess how our students were performing as communicators in workplace settings.
- Second the internship reports were used to assess how our students were recognizing and incorporating theoretical perspectives in workplace settings.

Assessment Method 1: Internship Reports

Assessment Method Description:
- All COMM students are required to have an internship after completing the required courses in the COMM degree plan. At the end of the internship the students are assigned to write a report. In regards to their internship’s requirements one section asks, “What communication theories or concepts did you use to help you accomplish these duties or tasks?” A total of 32 reports from the fall and spring were selected and their answers to this question were evaluated based upon three criteria: first how many theories were accurately identified; second were the theories accurately described; and third were the theories accurately applied in their examples. These were judged on a scale of 0-4: zero being no or inaccurate representation, to four being a complete and thoughtful representation.

Findings:
- The findings were as follows.
  - First 19 of the 32 reports identified at least two theories (59.3%), 11 identified at least one (34%), one identified three, and one didn’t identify any.
  - Second students accurately described theories at an overall benchmark level. Nine scored a three (28.1%), fourteen scored at least a two (43.7%), seven scored a one (21.8%), and one scored a zero.
  - Third students accurately applied theories at an overall benchmark level. Two scored a four (12.5%), four scored a three (9.3%), sixteen scored a two (50%), nine scored a one (28.1%), and one scored a zero.
The findings were encouraging in some places and disappointing in others. Over one third of the students failed to identify more than one theory covered in the core classes. The descriptions of the theories were lacked all but the basic depth, with over two thirds struggling to explain the concepts with any detail. Where they struggled most was the application; the overall average for application was a 1.91.

The findings also demonstrated another unexpected trend. Of the twenty-four different theories identified only three (12.5%) came from the least recent class. This suggests that the students were in part relying more on the courses they had taken the semester preceding their internships. Most students take their internship in the spring and the bulk of the theories identified came from the core class offered in the fall.

How did you use findings for improvement?

While we were generally pleased that the students identified, described, and applied communication theories on a benchmark level there was some concern about their breadth and depth of knowledge regarding core concepts. In response the faculty will be working on assignments and projects that reintroduce the core concepts more overtly into the remainder of the curriculum. Our goal is to combat the perceived isolation of the concepts in the core theory courses. We are also in the process of expanding the internship report assignment to encourage students to think about the theories in a deeper fashion.

Assessment Method 2: Internship Evaluations

Assessment Method Description:
- All COMM students are required to have an internship after completing the required courses in the COMM degree plan. At the end of the internship on-site supervisors are asked to evaluate interns on their oral communication skills. Supervisors are asked to rate their satisfaction of the interns’ oral communication skills on a scale of one to five, from poor to excellent.

Findings:
- In 2013-2014 COMM had 78 students complete internships, of those 55 received an excellent rating, 20 received a very good rating, one received a good rating, and two had no answers. Fewer than one in four failed to achieve an excellent rating. The average was a 4.67 out of 5.00, down slightly from 2013 at 4.72, but still higher than 2011, 4.58, and 2012, 4.40. We were satisfied to see the scores remain well above average

How did you use findings for improvement?

Given our students’ overall excellent performance in this area for the past four years we are now looking to generate more exact data so that we may target areas in which students may be struggling. To that end we are revamping the
internship evaluation to include questions that deal with specific areas in communication studies such as public speaking, interpersonal communication, group communication, persuasive strategies, and argumentation.

Assessment Method 3: Alumni Survey

Assessment Method Description:

The School of Communication and Journalism surveys its recent graduates to learn how appropriate our program is in relation to the employment opportunities our students are seeking. The most recent survey of graduates was used. There were a total of 269 responses, 85 of which were COMM graduates.

Findings: On a question about the usefulness of COMM classes (“How useful were the oral communication classes that you took”) measured on a scale of one to five from strongly agree to strongly disagree the average was a 1.9.

- How did you use findings for improvement?
  We were pleased to see that our graduates find value in the courses we offer. We will continue to emphasize real-world applicability in our theory-oriented courses in order to maintain that value.

Expected Outcome 2: Critical Thinking

As a stated learning objective we have expressed a commitment to helping our students “Use credible evidence and valid reasoning to construct sound arguments for presentation in public sphere.” For communication this includes helping our students develop the ability to construct a sound proposition, identify appropriate and necessary evidence, and unite the two with appropriate reasoning strategies.

Assessment Method: Critical Thinking Rubric

Assessment Method Description:

We have adopted the Association of American Colleges and Universities Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric as a tool for assessing student critical thinking. A sample of 27 papers was selected from a senior-level course in the fall of 2013. The papers were evaluated according to the rubric, scoring the essays on a scale of one, or benchmark, two to three, or milestone, or four, or capstone, on their ability to explain issues, use evidence, understand context and assumptions, establish a position, and draw logical conclusions.

Findings:

- On the explanation component, sixteen of the papers earned a benchmark score of two or more (59.2%), with nine earning a three, and one earning a four. The average was a 2.39.
On the evidence component, nineteen of the papers earned a benchmark score of two or more (70.3%), with eight earning a three, and two earning a four. The average was a 2.26.

On the context component, sixteen of the papers earned a benchmark score of two or more (59.2%), with four earning threes. Eleven earned a one (40.7%). The average was a 1.78.

On the position component, nineteen of the papers earned a benchmark score of two or more (70.3%), with six earning a three. Eight earned a one. The average was a 1.96.

On the conclusion component, seventeen of the papers earned a benchmark score of two or more (62.9%), with four earning a three, and one earning a four. The average was a 1.91.

The scores indicate that our students are better at describing and incorporating evidence than they are at using that evidence to reason their way to a conclusion.

How did you use findings for improvement?

The faculty were concerned about the number of papers that earned ones in the five components, particularly the position and conclusion areas. We will adjust the current makeup of the required COMM 3600 course to introduce this concept earlier in their degree plans. We will also stress reasoning and conclusions in future assignments in order to strengthen critical thinking skills across the curriculum.

Expected Outcome 3: Ethical Education

As a stated learning objective we have expressed a commitment to helping our students “understand ethical systems that enable responsible and sensitive communication with others.” For communication this includes helping our students develop an awareness of the ethical implications, both intentional and unintentional, of messages in a variety of contexts.

Assessment Method: Alumni Survey

Assessment Method Description:

The School of Communication and Journalism surveys its recent graduates to learn how appropriate our program is in relation to the employment opportunities our students are seeking. The most recent survey of graduates was used. There were a total of 269 responses, 85 of which were COMM graduates.

Findings:

On a question about ethical practices (“My major emphasized the need for ethical practices in my field of study”) measured on a scale of one to five, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, the COMM program lagged behind the overall department significantly with a 2.1 average, the third weakest response.
How did you use findings for improvement?
  o The COMM faculty has agreed that there is a strong need for improvement in promoting ethical communication practices.
  o Instructors that teach classes with an ethics component will work to incorporate discussions of ethical communication practices throughout the semester in order to emphasize their importance.
  o Instructors that teach classes without an ethics component will add a component that specifically addresses ethical communication practices.