2013-2014 Assessment Report
Program: Communication, MA/MANT

College of Liberal Arts
School of Communication & Journalism
Communication, MA/MANT

Expected Outcome 1: Discipline Specific Knowledge: Mastery of Introductory Communication Theory

Full Description: The communication graduate program provides course offerings that enable students to master communication theory and methods central to the study of the discipline. Students pursuing all degree options should demonstrate mastery and understanding of introductory communication theory.

Assessment Method 1: Qualifying Exam

Description: Students will demonstrate proficiency with introductory communication theories. The Qualifying Exam committee, consisting of three graduate faculty members and the Graduate Program Officer, will evaluate student performance on their qualifying exams, which are taken by all graduate students following completion of the program’s required coursework. Students should be able to: 1) identify the primary elements of theory building and development; 2) express primary components of a minimum of three communication theories; 3) provide examples of communication theory in applied contexts. Proficiency will be evaluated based on a 3-point scale (for a possible 9 points) ranging from 3 (Exceptional) to 2 (Satisfactory) to 1 ( Unsatisfactory).

Findings

- There were seven students in the 2013-2014 (MA/MANT) cohort. Responses from all seven students were assessed.

- Findings for the Theory Exam are as follows:
  - Exam responses were rated overall score of 1.86 out of 3 on the ability to identify primary elements of theory building. One (14%) response received an Excellent rating, four (58%) were rated Satisfactory, two (28%) were rated unsatisfactory.

  - Students rated an overall score of 2.14 on their ability to express primary components of at least three communication theories. One (14%) response received an Excellent rating, while the remaining six received Satisfactory ratings.

  - Students rated an overall 2.29 on their ability to apply theory to applied contexts: Three (43%) Excellent ratings; three (43%) Satisfactory ratings; one (14%) Unsatisfactory rating.
In the past, assessment of qualifying exams was holistic based on a simple pass/fail of the exam. This new rubric provides more specific data on areas in need of development. While the majority of responses were Satisfactory or better in each area of assessment, the lower rating in the area of theory building is less than desired.

How did you use findings for improvement?

- Faculty evaluating the exam responses found the 3-point scoring categories confining and questioned whether the response categories to the current rubric were “flattening out” ratings. Thus, we will refine the current rubric to allow for greater nuance in assessment.
- Graduate faculty teaching the required theory course will receive a copy of the assessment results to aid them in course development. The assessment suggests greater emphasis is needed on the basic tenets of theory development.
- The Graduate Program Officer will conduct a graduate student workshop: Preparing for Qualifying Exams. The program will cover study techniques and exam response expectations.

Assessment Method 2: Comprehensive Exam (nonthesis option)

Description: Students will demonstrate proficiency with communication theories in their chosen emphasis area(s). The Comprehensive Exam Committee, consisting of three graduate faculty members, will evaluate student’s knowledge of, and ability to, apply theory if their area(s) of emphasis. Committee members will evaluate student responses to comprehensive exam questions. Students should be able to: 1) express primary components of communication theories in their emphasis area(s), and 2) provide examples of communication theory in applied contexts. Proficiency will be evaluated based on a 3-point scale (for a possible 6 points) ranging from 3 (Exceptional) to 2 (Satisfactory) to 1 (Unsatisfactory).

Findings

- All eleven MANT candidates who took comprehensive exams during the 2013-2014 academic year were assessed.
  - Responses rated an overall score of 2.81 out of 3 on their ability to express primary components of communication theories. Forty-six percent scored Excellent, 50% scored satisfactory. One person scored Unsatisfactory.
  - Responses rated an overall 2.54 out of 3 on their ability to apply theory to applied contexts: 58% of responses were rated as Exceptional; 38.5% were Satisfactory; 3.5% were Unsatisfactory.
- Response ratings improved upon those from qualifying exams, suggesting that over the course of the program student knowledge of and ability to apply theory improves. For example, the overall rating improved from 1.81 to 2.81 in the ability to express primary components of theories. However, their ability to apply theory to an applied context while better, did not improve as much (from 2.29 to 2.54).

How did you use findings for improvement?

- The graduate faculty will consider moving to assessing students’ final internship paper. The internship paper assignment has been recently revised to require greater theoretical
application. It may be a better indicator of student ability to apply theoretical concepts to an applied context.

- Several faculty members noted that the nature of some emphasis areas is such that questions on applied research contexts may be inappropriate. Thus, they asked that the rubric be revised to include a “not applicable” response category.

Assessment Method 3: Thesis

Description: Students will demonstrate proficiency with communication theories in their chosen emphasis area(s). The Thesis Review Committee, consisting of three graduate faculty members, will evaluate student’s knowledge of and ability to apply theory in their area of emphasis via the development of a sustained research project (i.e., thesis).

Students should be able to: 1) offer a summary of theory appropriate to the research question/thesis; 2) synthesize theory to reach a conclusion (i.e., research question, hypothesis). Proficiency will be evaluated based on a 3-point scale (for a possible 6 points) ranging from 3 (Excellent) to 1 (Unsatisfactory) using the following rubric: 3 (appropriate content to the research project is covered in depth, significance to the topic is unquestionable; review goes from general to specific conclusions that clearly support stated research questions/hypothesis); 2 (major theoretical concepts are introduced and significance of reviewed material is evident, but review is not as explicit/in depth as expected; some analysis and synthesis is illustrated, but some conclusions are not supported by earlier review); 1 (summary is perfunctory and/or disjointed and/or major sections of pertinent content are omitted; little evidence of synthesis of information and/or conclusions are not supported by the literature reviewed).

Findings

- Two theses were written by M.A. candidates over the last year. One thesis was randomly chosen for review.
  - A 3.0 out of 3 suggests MA candidates have mastered the ability to summarize theory appropriate to their thesis project.
  - A 3.0 out of 3 suggests MA candidates have mastered the ability to synthesize theory to clearly support their stated research question(s)/hypotheses.

How did you use findings for improvement?

- Proposed changes to internship requirements may result in an increase number of students opting to complete a thesis, which would provide additional data for assessment.

Assessment Method 4: Graduate School Survey

Description: The graduate school surveys graduate students during their final semester. Using a 4-point scale, ranging from 4 (Strongly Agree) to 1 (Strongly Disagree), one question on the graduate school survey addresses how well the program addresses emerging trends in the field of Communication.
Findings

- Seven of the eight (87.5%) graduates who completed the survey agreed or strongly agreed that the program introduced them to current trends in the field. Five graduates Strongly Agreed, two Agreed, and one Disagreed.

How did you use findings for improvement?

- Findings of the survey will be shared with graduate faculty. Faculty will be encouraged to evaluate current academic and professional literature to ensure that the theoretical approaches taught continue to be reflective of the field. Ideally, all students will agree or strongly agree with this survey item.

Expected Outcome 2: Discipline Specific Knowledge: Mastery of Introductory Communication Research Methods

Full Description: The communication graduate program provides course offerings that enable students to master communication theory and methods central to the study of the discipline. Students pursuing all degree options should demonstrate mastery and understanding of introductory communication research methods.

Assessment Method 1: Qualifying Exam

Description: Students will demonstrate proficiency with communication research methods presented in the two required introductory communication research methods courses. The Qualifying Exam committee, consisting of three graduate faculty members and the Graduate Program Officer, will evaluate student performance on their qualifying exams, which are taken by all graduate students following completion of the required classes. Students should be able to: 1) identify the primary elements of major qualitative and quantitative communication research methods; 2) illustrate the application of both methodological approaches; and, 3) provide examples of applying communication methodology in applied contexts. Proficiency will be evaluated based on a 3-point scale (for a possible 9 points) ranging from 3 (Exceptional) to 2 (Satisfactory) to 1 (Unsatisfactory).

Findings

- There were seven students in the 2013-2014 cohort who took qualifying exams.
- Findings for Qualitative Methods are as follows:
  - Students rated an overall score of 2.14 out of 3 on their ability to identify primary elements of major qualitative theories. One student scored Exceptional, while remaining students received Satisfactory evaluations on their responses.
  - Students rated an overall score of 2.14 on their ability to apply the theory. Students rated an overall 2.29 on their ability to apply qualitative methods to applied contexts. Two students received Exceptional rankings, four were Satisfactory and one was Unsatisfactory.
  - The Qualitative Methods course is viewed as one of the more difficult courses in the program. Importantly, all but one student received a satisfactory rating in all three of
the assessed areas. Ideally, however, a greater number of students would score an Exceptional in these two areas.

- Findings for Quantitative Methods are as follows:
  - Students rated an overall score of 2.71 out of 3 on their ability to identify primary elements of major quantitative methods. Seventy-two percent of students received an Exceptional, while the remaining were rated Satisfactory.
  - Students rated an overall score of 2.57 out of 3 on their ability to apply quantitative method techniques: 86% Exceptional; 14% Satisfactory.
  - Students rated an overall 2.43 out of 3 on their ability to apply quantitative methods to applied contexts: 57% Exceptional; 43% Satisfactory.
  - Results suggest that students in the program have an “above” average understanding of introductory quantitative methods, particularly in their understanding of their basic elements.

Comparatively speaking, students appear to have an overall better understanding of quantitative methods than qualitative methods.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**

- We will refine the current rubric to allow for greater nuance in assessment.
- Instructors of the methods courses will receive a copy of the assessment results to aid them in course development in the upcoming year.
- The Graduate Program Officer will conduct a graduate student workshop: Preparing for Qualifying Exams. The program will cover study techniques and exam response expectations.

**Assessment Method 2: Comprehensive Exam (nonthesis option)**

**Description:** Students will demonstrate proficiency with communication research methods in their chosen emphasis area(s). The Comprehensive Exam Committee, consisting of three graduate faculty members, will evaluate student’s knowledge of, and ability to, apply communication research methods if their area(s) of emphasis. Committee members will evaluate student responses to comprehensive exam questions. Students should be able to: 1) express primary components of communication research methods in their emphasis area(s), and 2) illustrate how these methods may work in applied contexts. Proficiency in these two areas will be evaluated based on a 3-point scale (for a possible 9 points) ranging from 3 (Exceptional) to 2 (Satisfactory) to 1 (Unsatisfactory).

**Findings**

- Eleven MANT candidates took comprehensive exams during the 2013-2014 academic year.
  - Students scored 2.85 out of 3 in their ability to express primary components of communication research methods related to their emphasis area(s). Five (46%) percent scored Exceptional, while six (54%) were rated Satisfactory.
- Students scored 2.58 out of 3 in their ability to illustrate how research methods could be used in applied contexts. Six (54%) were rated Exceptional, while five (46%) were Satisfactory.

- On a positive note, students scored quite well in their understanding of research methods. However, their ability to apply methods to an applied context, while good, could be improved.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**

- Several faculty members noted that the nature of their class/area was such that questions on applied research contexts were inappropriate. Thus, they asked that the rubric be revised to include a “not applicable” response category.
- The Graduate Program Officer will conduct a graduate student workshop: Preparing for Comprehensive Exams. The program will cover study techniques and exam response expectations.

**Assessment Method 3: Thesis**

**Description:** Students will demonstrate proficiency with communication research methods in their chosen emphasis area(s). The Thesis Review Committee, consisting of three graduate faculty members, will evaluate student’s knowledge of and ability to apply research methods in their area of emphasis via the development of a sustained research project (i.e., thesis). Students will: 1) demonstrated the ability to develop a research methodology appropriate to their research question/hypothesis; 2) implement an appropriate collection and analysis of data or ability to articulate a critical response to the artifact/text under study. Proficiency will be evaluated based on a 3-point scale (for a possible 6 points) ranging from 3 (Excellent) to 1 (Unsatisfactory) using the following rubric: 3 (Data interpretation is appropriate and uses correct methodology; identifies weaknesses in interpretation); 2 (Data interpretation is appropriate and uses limited number of correct methodology; identifies few weaknesses in interpretation); and 1 (Data interpretation is inappropriate and/or uses incorrect methodology; identifies no weaknesses in interpretation).

**Findings**

- Two theses were written by M.A. candidates over the last year. On thesis was randomly selected for review.
- While it is difficult to extrapolate from limited data, a rating of 3 out of 3 in both areas of assessment suggests thesis students have the ability to develop a research methodology appropriate to their research question/hypothesis and have the ability to identify areas of weakness in their methodological choices/interpretation.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**

- Given recent changes in the internship requirements, we may see an increase in the number of students opting to complete a thesis, which will provide additional data for assessment.
- Graduate faculty will be reviewing the current rubric to determine if additional assessment areas are needed.
Assessment Method 4: Graduate School Survey

Description: The graduate school surveys graduate students during their final semester. Using a 4-point scale ranging from 4 (Strongly Agree) to 1 (Strongly Disagree), one question on the survey addresses how well the program prepared them for conducting research.

Findings
- Seven of the eight students who completed the survey agreed (4) or strongly agreed (3) that the program introduced them to current research trends in the field. One student disagreed with survey item.

How did you use findings for improvement?
- Findings of the survey will be shared with faculty teaching the research methods courses. Research topics will be reviewed yearly to ensure that the methodologies being taught remain current.

Expected Outcome 3: Communication Skill: Mastery of the Ability to Communicate Discipline Specific Knowledge

Full Description: The communication graduate program provides course offerings that enable students to master communication theory and methods central to the study of the discipline. Students should demonstrate proficiency at relaying discipline specific knowledge from their chosen emphasis area(s). Students should be able to effectively communicate their understanding of the theory and concepts they have learned orally and in writing.

Assessment Method 1: Written Thesis/Comprehensive Exams

Description: The Thesis and Comprehensive Exam Review Committees, each comprised of three graduate faculty members, will evaluate students’ writing to either their comprehensive exams or their thesis. Evaluation will be based on student ability to: 1) present a clear thesis; 2) present research support; 3) demonstrate organizational skills; and, 4) exhibit proper language usage. Proficiency in these areas will be evaluated based on a 3-point scale (for a possible 12 points) ranging from 3 (Exceptional) to 1 (Unsatisfactory).

Findings
- Thirteen students completed the program in the 2013 academic year, and were assessed.
  - Students scored 2.72 out of 3 on the ability to present a clear thesis: 72% were Exceptional; 28% Satisfactory.
  - Students averaged 2.59 out of 3 on their ability to present adequate and accurate research for support of their written responses: 59% were Exceptional; 41% Satisfactory.
  - Students received an average of 2.69 out of 3 on language use (70% were Exceptional; 30% Satisfactory) and a 2.76 out of 3 on organization (76% were Exceptional; 24% Satisfactory).
• While students generally did well in this area, comprehensive exam students may be at a disadvantage, given that they are responding to timed exam. In addition, several committee members noted that greater citation of sources and increased use of academic support is needed by students taking comprehensive exams.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**

• Beginning Fall 2014, we will begin using the MANT students’ final internship paper to assess writing skills. The internship paper assignment has been recently revised to require greater theoretical application. It should be a better indicator of student writing ability and is more comparable to the sustained writing required by a thesis.

• Beginning Fall 2014, incoming graduate students will be required to attend an orientation session given by the Miller Writing Center.

**Assessment Method 2: Oral Defense of Thesis/Comprehensive Exam**

**Description.** Thesis and Comprehensive Exam Review Committees, each comprised of three graduate faculty members, will evaluate students’ oral presentation and defense to either their comprehensive exam questions or to their thesis. Evaluation will be based on student ability to 1) defend research/question responses; 2) provide additional research support where necessary; 3) clarity/understandability of responses; and 4) eye contact. These abilities will be evaluated on a 4-point scale (for a total of 16 points): 4) Exceptional to 1) Poor.

**Findings**

• The oral defense of the thirteen students completed the program in the 2013 academic year was assessed.
  o Students scored an average of 3.45 out of 4 on their ability to defend their thesis/exam responses. Forty-eight percent of students were rated Exceptional, 49% Satisfactory, and 3% Unsatisfactory.
  o Students averaged 3.10 out of 4 on their ability to present additional research support as needed. Sixty-six percent of students were rated Exceptional, 31% Satisfactory, and 3% Unsatisfactory.
  o Students received an average of 3.07 (59% Exceptional; 41 % Satisfactory) on overall clarity and understandability and 3.86 on eye contact (62% Exceptional; 38% Satisfactory).

• Given the nature of the program, it is not surprising that students did quite well in this area. Findings indicated that students have the ability to orally communicate their knowledge of communication theory and research in a cogent and well delivered manner.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**

• Students without an undergraduate communication degree may be at somewhat of a disadvantage in this area. The Graduate Program Officer will conduct a graduate student workshop: Preparing for Your Defense. The program will cover study techniques and defense expectations.