COMMUNICATION STUDIES
PROGRAM REVIEW & ASSESSMENT REPORT
FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2004-2005

Introduction

We made some progress in 2004-2005 with regard to goals set in earlier assessment and goal-setting efforts. Mostly, we engaged in fruitful conversations to lay out a plan to do more effective assessment in coming years, effective being organic and helpful for both faculty and students. These are exciting times for our department. We are looking forward to working with new faculty in developing a coherent and vibrant identity, and then sharing that with our students. We also look forward to the ongoing challenge of articulating what it is we want for our students and how we can best see those fruits manifest in them.

In addition, we are working on thinking through the best ways to assess some of the more “intangible” aspects of education. For example, if we say that we desire our students to embody Cicero's notion of *sapientia et eloquentia*, wisdom with eloquence, how do we effectively assess whether or not our students are wiser, or more eloquent? Testing a student’s theoretical grasp, general knowledge, and competence in public communication only give us a glimpse of our departmental effectiveness and fall far short of what we hope for our students.

Exigencies

We relied on several sources and kinds of data as we assessed our department and set goals. These sources included:

- **Exit Interviews**: When long-time professor Mike Giuliano left at the end of 2004, and again when one-year full-time adjuncts Mandy Ream and Rick Malleus left at the end of 2005, exit interviews were conducted by both the department chair and the provost. Feedback from the former professors was valuable in assessing the current state of our student body as well as our ability to welcome and integrate new faculty.

- **Senior Interviews**: The new college-wide practice of interviewing graduating seniors has been helpful in terms of formalizing and codifying information that might previously have come to us through conversation, and has also given us food for thought.

- **Advising Interviews**: As an ongoing practice, we regularly check-in with our advisees and students during office hours and during extra-curricular interaction times. For example, one faculty member went to coffee with students or took long walks around the bird refuge and zoo with students, asking them to reflect on their time in the department and their suggestions for particular classes as well as the program overall. Another faculty member made it a point to engage each senior enrolled in senior seminar in meaningful conversation before graduation.
another faculty member sent an email soliciting feedback about the department as a whole.

- **Institutional Reports & Requirements**: The ongoing commitment to assessment and helpful “table talks” on this topic have been helpful in terms of giving us more scope for the imagination when it comes to envisioning organic and constructive assessment plans. Furthermore, institution-wide surveys and reports give additional data points for understanding how we are or are not reaching all of our students.

- **Program Review Committee**: Feedback from the program review committee has been attended to in our department meetings and has given us external motivators to get some of this work done!

- **Observations & Conversations**: Finally, most of our “data” come from informal, unstructured conversation with students and alumni, as well as our own personal observations. This may well be our best source of “data”.

## Action

During 2004-2005 we focused our attention in the following main areas:

**Diversifying**: Since we desire our students to become more globally aware, and since we want to be reflective of the full range of the glory of God’s kingdom, we set goals a number of years ago to do two things:

1. **Diversify Readings & Coursework**: We’ve made major strides in this area, on two fronts. During the fall of 2004 we began departmental discussions of course readings and assignments. We’ve shared what we’re doing and how it is working in the classroom. We are increasing and thinking critically about our reading assignments, including more non-traditional voices as well as readings that raise issues of diversity directly. Three of four faculty members consciously chose non-Western sources as additions to the required readings in four different classes. In addition, we offered a seminar course in “African Communication”.

2. **Diversify Departmental Personnel**: We revised our job description for our fourth, full-time tenure-track member such that we will hopefully attract candidates interested in communication relevant to global issues and/or marginalized groups.

**Emending**: One thing we learned through both observation and interviews was that students were entering upper division classes often with little preparation, which meant that sometimes we felt forced to sacrifice depth for the sake of entry-level learners. Furthermore, even after adding an introductory course in communication research, many students were postponing the course until their final year in the program, defeating the purpose of having an introductory course. Therefore, we changed catalog copy and advising practices to “force” students to take the introductory course sooner rather than later. The following courses now require that students take two introductory courses before enrolling:

- Communication Criticism
Furthermore, we viewed the new general education program as an opportunity to revisit some of our catalog descriptions and syllabi. Two courses were revised to more fully “fit” within the new GE framework (Mass Communication; Persuasion & Propaganda), and syllabi were re-written in order to explain how existing courses fit within the goals and outcomes prescribed by the new GE requirements (Messages, Meaning, and Culture, Communication Criticism, Public Speaking).

Reflecting
What We Want For Our Graduates: We began to reflect on the best ways to assess some of the more “intangible” aspects of education. For example, if we say that we desire our students to embody Cicero’s ideal of sapientia et eloquentia, wisdom with eloquence, how do we effectively assess whether or not our students are wiser, or more eloquent? Testing a student’s theoretical grasp, general knowledge, and competence in public communication only give us a glimpse of our departmental effectiveness and fall far short of what we hope for our students.

Given the complexities of assessing some of the more important desired outcomes, what is the role of assessment in accomplishing this vision? This has been and will be an ongoing conversation for us.

Plan

Immediate Plans
1. Draft a mission statement for the department to guide our future interactions and plans, our syllabus construction, and our use of resources. We plan to publicize our mission statement in the printed college catalogue as well as on our departmental web page. Understanding our own identity, sharing that with our students, and making it part of who we are is a first step in helping us shape future program review and assessment strategies.
2. Redesign web site so that potential students and majors are intrigued and interested, current students find useful and important information and news, alumni enjoy the updates, nostalgia, and opportunity to connect with others.
3. Hire faculty enthusiastic about joining and strengthening our department.

Long-Term Projects:
1. Critical Thinking & Research Outcomes: Too many of our students are unable to conduct independent research or make use of published, disciplinary research. Furthermore, many of our students are unable to collect or interpret basic kinds of communication research and information, ranging from public opinion polls to market research surveys. We added an introductory course in communication research
(Com 98) so that our students would be introduced to research early in their studies and then be able to conduct more advanced work as they moved through their major courses. Unfortunately, based on ongoing program review data, we noticed that many students wait to take Com 98 until their senior years, defeating many (though certainly not all) of the course intents and purposes. We have already made some changes, requiring Com 98 as a prerequisite for many of our upper division courses, and will begin more actively advising students to complete the course by the end of their sophomore years. In addition, we are going to actively intervene to make the course itself as effective as possible. This will also present an opportunity to indirectly measure whether or not this course is effective in helping students interact more capably with both published and independent research.

- As a department, we will meet and collectively evaluate randomly selected student papers to establish a base line – what are students “doing now” in their papers, and how effective are they?
- Next, we will identify at least one outside evaluator (up to three) to read these papers.
- In another two years, we will again collect student papers, evaluate them as a department, and then bring in an outside evaluator.
- We hope to see a difference in quality of papers and use of research. If we do not see a marked improvement, then we will have valuable information and we will come up with another plan to improve this aspect of student learning.

2. **Surveys and Exams:** We have long discussed the value of conducting a survey of communication studies alumni. Many of the virtues we strive to teach in our classes are not fully manifest when students graduate. We think alumni feedback will be quite valuable in helping us see the fruits of our teaching long-term. Along these lines, we have toyed with the idea of giving an exit “test” to our graduating seniors to see how much they recall and how well they can articulate some basic views and theories of communication. Finally, we believe the interviews with graduating seniors (college-wide) bear further inspection and reflection within our department. Therefore, we commit to actually implementing these measures and beginning our dialogue. We will finish our own mission statement and departmental goals first, as this will guide the kinds of questions we ask and information that we seek.

3. **Fostering Community:** We have often talked of our desire to foster more community such that our majors feel part of a vibrant, intellectually curious, cohesive group of communication scholars. To this end, we would like to explore ways to energize our honor society, create more opportunities for dialogue and discussion (perhaps in brown bag sessions, speaker series, movie nights, or conferences), and improve our fall social tradition.

**Conclusion**

We have undergone, and continue to undergo, great change both institutionally and departmentally. We look forward to a period of relative stability and fresh insight and vision and energy from new faculty members. We also look forward to learning more about our students, our alumni, and our colleagues in this ongoing process.