Introduction
Since completing our initial plan for program review and assessment, we have learned a great deal about what constitutes organic, helpful, and sustainable review and assessment. We have also had a considerable amount of turnover. Currently, 50% of our faculty is new to the department. Given our increased commitment to program review and assessment, and given our changing departmental composition, we therefore plan to revise our current plan on file, and also reserve the right to change our plan, in keeping with our philosophic commitment toward organic program review.

This report reflects where we’ve been and where we’re going at this point in time.

Where We’ve Been
We have initiated further program review and self-study within our department over the last year. We believe that when both new and ongoing faculty thoroughly understands “who we are” and what “we’re doing” we can best formulate helpful plans for realistic assessment and ongoing review.

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.

In order then to best learn more of each other, provide more direction for our students in terms of our goals for them, and to realize our goals stated in previous plans and reports, we have focused on the following three areas most recently:

1. Writing Departmental Mission Statement: We are in the process of revising a mission statement for the department that will guide our future interactions and plans, our syllabus construction, and our use of resources. We will also publicize our mission statement in the printed college catalogue as well as on our departmental web page. In addition, we have come up with a new web design and plan to “go live” before January. 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. Review of Diversity Goals & Strategies: 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. Even more exciting, we have revised our job description for our fourth member such that we attract candidates interested in communication issues on a more global scale.

Where We’re Going

Currently, we have plans (and a draft) underway to revise our existing plan for program review and assessment. We hope to have this in place by January 2006. We are also working to more directly address issues raised by the program review committee and devise more concrete methods of assessment (see previous comments). Two areas we are currently focusing on include:

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 notice 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. Exit 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.

Conclusion
These are exciting times for our department. We are looking forward to working with our 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.