

Communication Studies Annual Assessment Report 2014

Department: Communication Studies

Date: September 15, 2014

Department Chair: Lesa Stern

I. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) assessment

Program Learning Outcome	Students can apply biblical and ethical principles appropriately to complex communication situations.
Who is in Charge	Greg Spencer
<u>Direct Assessment Methods</u>	We spent the Fall and part of Spring semester creating a rubric (see App B) for assessing biblical and ethical principles. We assessed 47 student papers/assignments written by seniors from four different assignments within 4 different classes by the 4 faculty. Students were asked specifically to support their written arguments with biblical and ethical principles. Papers/assignments ranged in length from 2 pages to 8 pages. In Spring 2014, all faculty read and rated 3 papers; faculty rated them consistently (with few variations). Faculty then discussed the usage of the rubric and more clarifications to it. After this initial coding of 3 papers, the remaining papers were divided up (due to the large sample) such that each faculty member rated about 12 papers.
<u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u>	None.
Major Findings	See results table in Appendix C. Overall, students are well grounded in biblical and ethical knowledge and application. For the most part, they are able to identify appropriate biblical perspectives and apply them to complex situations when asked to do so. We would like to see more of our students in the highly developed category. We were pleased that most scores were in the developed or highly developed categories. Students are comfortable discussing their values—and are generally competent. We noticed a tendency toward proof-texting of Scriptures. Students need to establish more context when they reference the Bible. A related concern is the practice of assuming the defense of their ethical positions instead of explicitly defending their arguments. These assignments were part of the course curriculum (therefore content rich and grade bearing). This assessment followed a main assessment principle of being embedded in the curriculum and meaningful. One of the consequences of the embedded nature of the assessment, is that not all assignments asked for any demonstration of “self-awareness of biblical and ethical principles.” Some students incorporated their personal stances into their papers and others did not.

	<p>Only 18 papers contributed to the self-awareness findings; Those papers that did have “awareness” comments were well grounded. (see results table). We did not want to draw many conclusions on self-awareness, as the assignments did not elicit this “category.” If we had explicitly asked students to address these self-awareness issues, they would have done so even better than these results suggest. We will construct an assignment that will elicit this information in our next round of assessment.</p>
Closing the Loop Activities	<p>Each faculty member created an in-class exercise or assignment that would foster direct, contextually strong references to biblical/ethical principles (see APP D) and will pilot these exercises during the fall semester. We will discuss their effectiveness at the end of semester. We envision that encounters of these assignments across their COM classes will greatly improve their ability to handle complex biblical and ethical situations.</p>
Discussion	<p>On 8/27/2014 and 9/3/2014, departmental faculty met to discuss the results of reviewing the papers.</p>

II. Follow-ups

Program Learning Outcome	none
Who is in Charge	
Major Findings	
Closing the Loop Activities	
Discussion	

IV. Adjustments to the Multi-year Assessment Plan (optional)

Proposed adjustment	Rationale	Timing
None that we know of...		

V. Appendices

A. Prompts or instruments used to collect the data

- B. Rubrics used to evaluate the data
- C. Relevant assessment-related documents/samples (optional)

Appendix A
(2 of the 4 prompts)
Prompt from Senior Assignment
**Questions about Etty Hillesum's *An Interrupted Life*,
toward the writing of your paper.**

Your task is to characterize her rhetoric and to respond to it. Along the way, you must address question number one. The other questions are to assist your thinking.

(I guess we are referring to her by her first name. To do otherwise seems a violation of the friendship we have developed.)

1. From what you have been taught about biblical and ethical communication (in a variety of courses), how would you evaluate Etty's rhetorical and other choices?

2. Consider the role of framing in Etty's rhetoric.

Among other things, she says, "The few big things that matter in life are what we have to keep in mind; the rest can be quietly abandoned," (280)

But she also says, "People sometimes say, 'You must try to make the best of things.' I find this such a feeble thing to say. . ." (327).

How do you sort out her recommendations about framing?

3. What does Etty have to teach communication studies majors? If you had to summarize the book to other majors, what would you say? (besides "ahhhhh, I can't do this!)

4. Etty has particular views of the past, present and future. How do these views speak to your future as a soon-to-be graduate?

5. What are some key themes, key imperatives? How might you pull these together as characteristics of her discourse? Below are some examples—but, make your own, see where they lead, see what you are noticing.

"You must remain your own witness." (41)

"If you have given sorrow the space its gentle origins demand, then you may truly say: life is beautiful and so rich . . . that it makes you want to believe in God." (97)

"I have matured enough to . . . cease living an accidental life." (132)

"My own [life] is one long sequence of inner miracles, and it's good to be able to say so again to somebody." (333)

Appendix A (con't)

Biblical and Ethical Assessment of an Interpersonal Scenario: Due the Tuesday April 29 at 3p
1-2 single-spaced typed pages (do not exceed 2 pages)

*Note: this is an “exam—do not discuss this scenario with other students.
This exam is open book/notes. You can ask Dr. Stern questions as well!*

Read the following scenario. It is a very basic and not every detail is stated.

In Ann’s second year of college, she lived with six of her first year friends off-campus in a co-ed house. Towards the end of the first term, Ann (a Christian) and one of the housemates, Bob, decided that they wanted to be in a romantic relationship. They are considering waiting until the end of the year to be “officially” dating each other. They made the decision not to tell any of the housemates about their interest in each other because it would make it awkward if things didn’t work out. Also, they are concerned about the dynamics of dating within this living arrangement of 6 people.

First, what kinds of interpersonal issues do you see “lurking” in this scenario? What are the potential relational positives in this scenario? What kind of advice would you give Ann/Bob in this situation to help them successfully navigate the issues and promote positive relationships with their roommates as well as a positive romantic relationship?

Make sure your analysis and advice is based on solid biblical and ethical principles combined with interpersonal communication scholarship (tie in findings/principles from all our units: self/perception/conflict/relationships/identity/diversity/emotions)

Appendix B

Biblical and Ethical Principles SLO Rubric (7/7/2014)

One of the four Student Learning Objectives in the Communication Studies Department is to inculcate in our students a biblical and ethical framework for understanding and living in communication situations. A biblical framework refers to scripturally based (theological) values and principles, especially those that connect explicitly to communication. An ethical framework refers to morally oriented values and principles, especially those that connect explicitly to communication. Students highly developed in this SLO should be able to cite scriptural/theological references and ethical principles/theories by name—and to apply them in nuanced ways. The rubric reflects the department's commitment to biblical and ethical principles. It does not imply that students must believe in God and/or the authority of the Bible, but that they are learning to understand and apply perspectives based on biblical sources. Not all assignments need to evidence all three of the areas in the rubric, though all three should be in evidence over the whole of the student's work.

Bib/Eth self-awareness	Identifies minimal to some sense of the importance of biblical and ethical perspectives but with little nuance or detail.	Describes a personal commitment to biblical and ethical perspectives, sees oneself as ready to learn from Scripture or ethical theorists.	Clearly articulates commitment to biblical and ethical perspectives. Evaluates own behavior accordingly. A sense of humility regarding communication choices.
Bib/Eth knowledge	Demonstrates faulty or clichéd understanding of biblical and ethical perspectives. From no to some biblical/ethical references made, perhaps out of context.	Demonstrates some understanding of biblical and ethical perspectives, mostly in non-formulaic ways. Mentions appropriate Scriptures and ethical principles/themes.	Strong to sophisticated understanding of biblical and ethical perspectives, articulates more mature treatment of Scripture and detailed explanation of ethical principles.
Bib/Eth application	Demonstrates faulty or superficial application of biblical and ethical perspectives in concrete situations. Evidences little to no connection between faith/moral commitments and practical living.	Demonstrates observable application of biblical and ethical perspectives, shows appropriate relevance of biblical and ethical perspectives. Use of Scripture is “in context.”	Thoroughly applies biblical and ethical perspectives, demonstrating nuanced connections to concrete situations. Applies more complex Scriptural connections.

Appendix C
Results Table- Biblical and Ethical Principles
Percentage of papers per cell

	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed	Total Number Papers Rated
Bib/Eth self-awareness	17	56	28	N= 18
Bib/Eth knowledge	8	64	28	N= 47
Bib/Eth application	16	51	33	N= 43

Note: 47 Papers written by seniors were evaluated. 4 different assignments in 4 different classes (one paper assigned by each of the COM faculty)

Appendix D

Assignments/Activities created in response to Assessment

LESA STERN had conversations with Dr. Work, Dr. Reeder, and Dr. Lee (all from Religious studies) asking them for good readings and examples and assignments I could use/modify for my classes.

Com 098 is a required course. Therefore, Lesa will introduce how to use scripture and ethical principles via a reading and discussion as part of her content analysis/rhetorical analysis section of that course.

Action item: All students read chapter 11 of Richard Hayes' book "The Moral Vision of the New Testament" – this chapter is on how ethicists use scripture.

In COM 110, students complete a scripture analysis, which teaches them to discern and name themes in scripture. The new component will be adding a reading on divorce and remarriage (ch 15 from Dr. Hayes' book) that provides a good example of interpreting/using scripture as it relates to marriage/divorce (a topic in the class)

OMEDI OCHIENG: for COM 015, Public Speaking

Come to class with a "hard passage" drawn from the Bible. Examples include: Abraham's attempt to sacrifice Isaac; the *herem* (God's commands in Deuteronomy to kill "everything that breathes"); or the narratives in Joshua which tell of this command being carried out. Imagine that you are speaking to an audience that does not share your faith. You are trying to explain or justify the "hard passage." Your audience is skeptical and even disgusted by what they take to be the immorality of the text. Come to class with a speech in which you explain, justify, or critique the passage. Make sure you consult credible research that will help you contextualize the passage, discern its theological meanings, and evaluate its ethical soundness.

Note:

Do not attempt to "explain away" the text. Wrestle with the difficulty of the text:

1. This assignment does not require that you pretend to believe what you do not. If you find the text unethical or reprehensible after deep study and reflection, be truthful about this. However, make sure you give your reasons for this judgment.
2. If you are "stumped" or "perplexed" by the passage even after researching the text and reflecting upon it, do not pretend otherwise. Honestly state your perplexity and explore why you find the text confusing, disturbing, mysterious, etc.

Examples of hard passages:

- I. i) **The practice of herem: (total annihilation of everyone and everything):**

When you draw near a town to fight against it, offer it terms of peace. If it accepts your terms of peace and surrender to you, then all the people in it shall have served you as *forced labor*. If it does not submit to you peacefully, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it; and when the Lord your God gives it into your hand, *you shall put all its males to the sword. You may, however, take as your booty the women, the children, livestock, and everything else in the town, all its spoil.* You may enjoy the spoil of your enemies, which the Lord your God has given you. (Deut. 20:10-14).

ii) Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one that the Lord sent to make you king over His people Israel. Heed, therefore, what the Lord has said [to me]. Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Now I will punish the Amalekites for what they did in opposing the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt. Go attack Amalek, and utterly destroy everything that they have; do not spare them, but kill both men and women, children and little babies, oxen and sheep, camels and donkeys. (1 Sam. 15:1-3)

II. Abraham's Willingness to Sacrifice his Son

1Some years later God decided to test Abraham, so he spoke to him. Abraham answered, "Here I am, LORD." 2The LORD said, "Go get Isaac, your only son, the one you dearly love! Take him to the land of Moriah, and I will show you a mountain where you must sacrifice him to me on the fires of an altar." 3So Abraham got up early the next morning and chopped wood for the fire. He put a saddle on his donkey and left with Isaac and two servants for the place where God had told him to go. 4Three days later Abraham looked off in the distance and saw the place. 5He told his servants, "Stay here with the donkey, while my son and I go over there to worship. We will come back." 6Abraham put the wood on Isaac's shoulder, but he carried the hot coals and the knife. As the two of them walked along, 7-8Isaac said, "Father, we have the coals and the wood, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" "My son," Abraham answered, "God will provide the lamb." The two of them walked on, and 9when they reached the place that God had told him about, Abraham built an altar and placed the wood on it. Next, he tied up his son and put him on the wood. 10He then took the knife and got ready to kill his son. 11But the LORD's angel shouted from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am!" he answered. 12"Don't hurt the boy or harm him in any way!" the angel said. "Now I know that you truly obey God, because you were willing to offer him your only son." 13Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in the bushes. So he took the ram and sacrificed it in place of his son. 14Abraham named that place "The LORD Will Provide." And even now people say, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." ^[a] 15The LORD's angel called out from heaven a second time: 16You were willing to offer the LORD your only son, and so he makes you this solemn promise, 17"I will bless you and give you such a large family, that someday your descendants will be more numerous than the stars in the sky or the grains of sand along the beach. They will defeat their enemies and take over the cities where their enemies live. 18You have obeyed me, and so you and your descendants will be a blessing to all nations on earth." 19Abraham and Isaac went back to the servants who had come with him, and they returned to Abraham's home in Beersheba. (Genesis 22:1-19)

GREG SPENCER: COM 140 / Media Ethics

Biblical Principles Exercise

1. When you consider the themes in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (or the paragraph provided: p. 27), what biblical passages/principles seem pertinent? Why?

2. Discuss the difference between applying these Scriptures as *passages* and applying them as *principles*. Be specific with at least one passage.

3. What would it mean to apply one of the biblical principles to the themes in *White Noise* or to a second supplied paragraph (p. 47)?

Take-Home Course Exercise: Using the Bible Wisely as a Source

The Bible is a credible source (acknowledged by both people of faith and people who view it as a work of great literature or commentary on ancient times), and it is the source of inspiration for many of us. Accordingly, we should use the Bible as a source in ways that demonstrate good scholarship, critical thinking, and respect for both the scriptures themselves and the various ways that people of faith interpret and respond to scripture.

When you wish to use the Bible as a source to bolster your argument, there are some steps you should go through to be sure you are using scripture wisely, and not attempting to wield scripture as a weapon to beat others into submission to your argument. When you wish to use the Bible as a source to show how it inspires your thinking or your actions, you want to be sure you incorporate scripture in ways that fit thematically with your essay, speech, or paper, and is not simply tacked on to the end to grant a sort of umbrella “blessing” on your point of view.

To help you think about using the Bible as a source, in this exercise you will think of a controversial topic (many people would disagree as to how to define a problem, or what to do about a problem, or how to think about a particular issue), and then find a Bible verse that people might use to support their point of view.

Then you will take that Bible verse(s) and do some research, answering these questions:

- 1) ***What is the Context of the Biblical Passage?*** Context includes:
 - a) the verses/chapter/book surrounding your portion of scripture;
 - b) other books in the Bible written by the same author;
 - c) the overall message of the entire Bible; and
 - d) the cultural environment of the time when the book was written.

- 2) ***How Have Others Interpreted This Same Scripture Differently?*** Good speakers and leaders understand that it is wise to understand the criticisms and objections to your arguments – the same is

true in understanding how/why people will interpret and use scripture differently. You can find this via commentaries, other books and articles written on the topic at hand, and Bible study guides.

Potentially Helpful Resources:

- On Authority of Scripture (N.T. Wright): http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Bible_Authoritative.htm
- On Context: http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Bible_Interpretation/03_Context/03_Context_Notes.pdf?x=x

Bring your typed research to class in whatever format makes most sense to you. We will discuss in class, and you'll turn in your work afterwards. DO cite all of the sources you used, as this is key to the assignment!