

## Communication Studies Program Assessment Report 2020-2021

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## **I. Communication Studies Program Mission and Educational Objectives**

### *A. Program Mission*

The Communication Studies Program prepares students for the challenges of a society that is shaped by communication. As participants in the program, students develop and integrate knowledge, creativity, ethical practice, and skills. Students also examine and produce work in oral, written, and visual communication and practice skills in group and intercultural communication.

### *B. Mission Alignment*

The Communication Studies degree typically culminates in an externship, offering students a chance to practice their target career with a current professional. Prior to that hands-on experience, Communication courses offer a variety of open-ended projects and opportunities to engage with professional or public communities as objects of study for research (e.g. COM 326: Communication Research) or practice (e.g. COM 425/426: Mediation and Mediation Practicum).

As every student's 36-credit focused sequence (see below) creates a unique degree program, innovation is a regular feature of the curriculum – students' programs of study vary as much as the students themselves. Communication Studies students work with their advisors to identify and take classes from other programs that support their individual career goals.

The Focused Sequence and many of our program's core courses emphasize the university mission's focus on innovation, hands-on experience, scholarship and leadership development.

- **Innovation:** Students actively craft their own program of study in response to their career goals. Many students come to OIT to craft an expertise that cannot be gained through traditional undergraduate programs (e.g. e-Sports/Live-Streaming Broadcast Expert).
- **Hands-On Experience:** Students in Communication Studies courses regularly apply their academic knowledge to real-life situations, both as a means to complete homework and as a part of their professional lives outside of school.
- **Scholarship:** Students in Communication Studies engage with communication and rhetorical theories, both as a means of understanding the discipline and as a product for broader consumption. In COM 326: Communication Research, students submit abstracts of their course projects to a regional conference for presentation in the Spring. OIT regularly sends half a dozen students to this conference each year.
- **Leadership:** Communication Studies is a field that studies and works to improve group dynamics and leadership strategies. All of our students graduate with a thorough understanding of a variety of effective strategies for managing teams and group projects.

### *C. Additional Information*

The Communication Studies program fills a niche in the Human and Professional Communication world by offering students the opportunity to design a major particular to their career goals. All students are required to complete 36 credit hours in courses of their choosing, forming a Focused Sequence tailored to their individual professional goals. These courses may come from within the Communication department, but many students enroll in courses from Business, CSET, and Psychology to gain specific technical expertises in addition to the interpersonal communication knowledge and skill they gain in a Communication Studies program.

The diversity of our students' career goals results in a graduate body that does not conform to a single mold. Graduates have pursued careers in law enforcement, education, management and marketing, while others have moved on to Communication-focused graduate programs. Each student is guided by their advisor to craft their focused sequence. The student to full-time faculty ratio in our program (39:11 in Fall 2020) allows students to work closely with their advisor in planning this Sequence. Moreover, the breadth of experience in the Communication Studies program allows students to find advisors who have knowledge of fields like management, UX, content writing, mediation and journalism.

Focused Sequence information can be found in III.E. Learning Experiences.

## **II. Program Description and History**

The Communication Studies program fills a niche in Communication programs nationally. Rather than focus on content production within a specific medium (e.g. television or radio broadcast) or on the dynamics of interpersonal communication, the Communication Studies B. S. gives students the flexibility to craft their own program of study. Students do gain experience in content production through courses like COM 248: Digital Media Production and COM 309: Communication Technology in Use, and they do gain experience in interpersonal communication through OIT's general education requirements and courses like COM 205: Intercultural Communication and COM 347: Negotiation and Conflict Resolution. However, these experiences are the foundations for students to develop their specific professional interests.

## **III. Program History: AY 2014 to Present**

The Communication Studies program was revised and approved by the CPC in Winter 2014. All new courses within the major have been rolled out, but many courses in the major are offered once per year or once per two years. As a result, limited PSLO data has been collected in many of these courses. Within the same department, the Professional Writing program was approved in Winter of 2017 and its first courses launched in Winter 2018. While it is a distinct program from Communication Studies, the two share many faculty and some courses. As this report discusses in section V: Assessment Cycle of Student Learning Outcomes, the PSLO assessment cycle is

undergoing active revision to more efficiently assess these programs. This revision will be complete in AY 2021-2022.

*A. Program Locations*

All Communication Studies students are located on the Klamath Falls campus, but the department is developing hybrid and online offerings to make the major more appealing to students in other locations. Communication faculty are present on the Klamath Falls campus (9 full-time, 1 single-year contract), the Portland-Metro campus (2) and online (1).

The program serves primarily Communication Studies majors, but also serves students in other fields interested in communication-related course work to complement their chosen major.

*B. Enrollment and Retention Trends*

The Communication Studies program averages 40 enrolled students each Fall. Many of our students transfer to OIT from other schools or change to a Communication Studies major from another program at OIT. The latter is an attractive option for students who decide not to persist in a program for any reason but want to retain their technical knowledge (and course credits) towards graduation.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Communication Studies</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>39</b>
Full-Time	32	25	32	33	34
Part-Time	8	6	11	8	5

Table 1: Communication Studies B. S. Enrollment and Retention

*C. Program Graduates*

In AY 2020, 3 students graduated with a Communication Studies B. S. One student also received the Dispute Resolution Certificate offered by the department.

*D. Industry Relationships*

The Communication department as a whole does not maintain industry relationships beyond its advisory board, which includes school board members, Jeld-Wen employees and members of the community.

During AY 2020, the Communication department continued its membership in the MadCap Scholar Program, which grants access to the professional MadCap Flare suite of technical writing applications for students (normally \$1,799 per license).

*E. Learning Experiences*

In April of 2021, two students presented papers at the Northwest Communication Association’s annual conference, along with many of their faculty. Their work was presented at the same level as graduate students and faculty from universities across the Pacific Northwest.

#### *F. Program Changes*

The Communication Studies B. S. has no programmatic changes from AY 2020 to AY 2021 due to formal assessment data. Curricular changes in AY 2019-2021 were largely the result of COVID, increased offerings of fully-online or hybrid classes, and loss of faculty.

As discussed in VIII. Action Plan and IX. Closing the Loop, much of the program's energy for curricular change and development is spent managing increasing demands with decreasing faculty.

### **IV. Program Education Objectives and Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs)**

#### *A. Program Education Objectives*

Upon completion of the Communication Studies program, students should be able to:

1. Apply appropriate communication skills across settings, purposes, and audiences.
2. Demonstrate knowledge of communication theory and application.
3. Practice critical thinking to develop innovative and well-founded perspectives related to the students' emphases.
4. Build and maintain healthy and effective relationships.
5. Use technology to communicate effectively in various settings and contexts.
6. Demonstrate appropriate and professional ethical behavior.

#### *B. Program Student Learning Outcomes*

Students with a bachelor's degree in Communication Studies should be able to:

1. Demonstrate critical and innovative thinking
2. Display competence in oral, written, and visual communication
3. Apply communication theories
4. Understand opportunities in the field of communication
5. Use current technology related to the communication field
6. Respond effectively to cultural communication differences
7. Communicate ethically
8. Demonstrate positive group communication exchanges

#### *C. Origin and External Validation*

The program objectives are reviewed annually by the department and at each advisory board meeting. They are implicitly discussed at each CSAC (Communication Studies Advisory Committee) meeting, occurring twice per academic term, as individual students' programs of study and focused sequences are reviewed.

The Communication department has not yet begun external validation of these outcomes nor assessment of student proficiency after graduation.

### **V. Curriculum Map**

As the Communication Studies program recruits many non-traditional students, transfer students and students not persisting in other majors at OIT, and because every student's program of study

includes 36 credits not necessarily taken within the Communication Studies program (in addition to general education credits and elective credits), a traditional curriculum map is not appropriate for the program.

Beginning in AY 2018, program faculty have been polled occasionally regarding the PSLOs *necessary* to successfully complete a course within the program. For instance, COM PSLO 7: Communicate Ethically is considered necessary in many courses, but that looks different in each context. In COM 326: Communication Research, ethical communication practices often look like an informed consent form for survey-based research and accurate citation practices in the formal report produced from that research. In COM 255: Communication Ethics, ethical communication practices are more likely to involve justification of communicative practices using established ethical theories.

The PSLO map included below is intended as an aid to understand which courses are most likely to demonstrate particular PSLOs. Due to staffing constraints, not all courses are offered every year.

<i>Course</i>	<b>COM 1</b> Demonstrate critical and innovative thinking	<b>COM 2</b> Display competence in oral, written, and visual communication	<b>COM 3</b> Apply communication theories	<b>COM 4</b> Understand opportunities in the field of communication	<b>COM 5</b> Use current technology related to the communication field	<b>COM 6</b> Respond effectively to cultural communication differences	<b>COM 7</b> Communicate ethically	<b>COM 8</b> Demonstrate positive group communication exchanges
<i>COM 104: Introduction to Communication</i>		✓		✓				
<i>COM 105: Introduction to Communication Theory</i>						✓		
<i>COM 106: Introduction to Communication Research</i>		✓			✓			
<i>COM 109: Introduction to Communication Technology</i>	✓				✓			
<i>COM 115: Introduction to Mass Communication</i>	✓	✓					✓	✓
<i>COM 135: Office Software</i>		✓			✓			
<i>COM 205: Intercultural Communication</i>						✓	✓	
<i>COM 216: Essentials of Grammar and Punctuation</i>		✓						
<i>COM 225: Interpersonal Communication</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	
<i>COM 237: Introduction to Visual Communication</i>	✓	✓						
<i>COM 248: Digital Media Production</i>		✓			✓			✓
<i>COM 255: Communication Ethics</i>							✓	
<i>COM 276: Democracy and Media</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓		
<i>COM 301: Rhetorical Theory and Application</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓		
<i>COM 305: Contemporary Rhetorical Theory</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓		
<i>COM 309: Communication Technology in Use</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓			
<i>COM 325: Gender and Communication</i>	✓					✓		
<i>COM 326: Communication Research</i>	✓		✓				✓	



<i>Course</i>	<b>COM 1</b> Demonstrate critical and innovative thinking	<b>COM 2</b> Display competence in oral, written, and visual communication	<b>COM 3</b> Apply communication theories	<b>COM 4</b> Understand opportunities in the field of communication	<b>COM 5</b> Use current technology related to the communication field	<b>COM 6</b> Respond effectively to cultural communication differences	<b>COM 7</b> Communicate ethically	<b>COM 8</b> Demonstrate positive group communication exchanges
COM 345: <i>Organizational Communication I</i>			✓			✓	✓	
COM 347: <i>Negotiation and Conflict Resolution</i>			✓	✓		✓		
COM 358: <i>Communication and the Law</i>			✓			✓		
COM 424: <i>Capstone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
JOUR 211: <i>Publication / Student Newspaper</i>		✓		✓				✓
SPE 314: <i>Argumentation</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓		

Table 2: PSLOs mapped by course

## VI. Assessment Cycle of Student Learning Outcomes

The Communication department collects artifacts and faculty statements across several courses offered. While the method loses some power in the amount of data collected, it does allow for widespread data collection and comparison within an individual program.

This method is especially appropriate for the Communication Studies program, as many of our students progress through core program courses in a different sequence from that listed in the OIT Catalog—whether that is due to transferring in with several upper- and lower-level courses satisfied, changing majors mid-career at OIT *after* taking some core courses as general education requirements or simply taking courses out of the listed sequence due to scheduling needs. As a result, what may be a “foundational” course in a PSLO (e.g. COM 109: Introduction to Communication Technology, offered each Spring) might be taken after an “intermediate” or “reinforcing” course in that same PSLO (e.g. COM 248: Digital Media Production, offered each Winter).

Formal assessment is limited to a small number of courses. Informal assessment (through department meeting discussions, curricular group discussions, and regular exchanges on the department’s MS Teams site) is less limited and frequently results in changes on a shorter timeline.

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
COM 1: <i>Demonstrate critical and innovative thinking</i>	✓		

COM 2: Display competence in oral, written, and visual communication		✓
COM 3: Apply communication theories	✓	
COM 4: Understand opportunities in the field of communication		✓
COM 5: Use current technology related to the communication field		✓
COM 6: Respond effectively to cultural communication differences		
COM 7: Communicate ethically	✓	
COM 8: Demonstrate positive group communication exchanges		✓

Table 3: Assessment Cycle for PSLOs

## VII. Summary of 2020-2021 Assessment Activities

Due to staffing and time constraints, formal assessment is limited to direct assessment of student performance in COM 326: Communication Research.

### A. PSLOs

#### 1) Direct Assessment

**Direct assessment** in COM 326: Communication Research addressed COM 1 (Demonstrate Critical and Innovative Thinking), COM 3 (Apply Communication Theories) and COM 7 (Communicate Ethically). Professor Kevin Brown conducted the majority of the assessment and his email interview responses are included below. At the conclusion of COM 326, students submit an abstract of their final reports to the annual conference for the Northwest Communication Association (the regional branch of Communication Studies' larger professional organization, the National Communication Association). Two students' papers were accepted and presented in Spring 2021.

### COM 1: Demonstrate Critical and Innovative Thinking

The students in the course were, **by and large**, able to come up with interesting and reflective hypothesis and research questions that demonstrated a sophisticated understanding and critical regard of the theories in the major. They had to be encouraged to focus on applying the theories at a practical level in their specific fields of interest.

### COM 3: Apply Communication Theories

The final research project in COM 326 represents an application of specific communication theories to real world questions. In **most instances**, the students actually created theory to explain communication phenomena. Though students still have a hard time conceiving themselves as capable of generating theory.

## **COM 7: Communicate Ethically**

All of the students proposals for studies with human subjects showed appropriate regard for the ethics of doing research and the impact on subjects.

### *2) Indirect Assessment*

All three graduates participated in the student exit survey. The quantitative data provided in the survey was largely positive, with at least two students always responding that the program improved their skills in each PSLO “Very Much” (the maximum positive response). In ordinal responses without 100% agreement, the remaining response was always “Quite a Bit” (the response ranked just beneath “Very Much”).

Finer granularity in student satisfaction with their major can be found in the text response questions of the survey.

### **What are the three best things about your major?**

Faculty and Community (between students and between students/faculty) themes were included in all three responses.

### **What are the three worst things about your major?**

One student did not respond and another responded “Honestly, nothing.” The third student indicated some difficulty with the Focused Sequence and courses that cannot be offered each year, as faculty were not always able to keep up with what courses would be available for their advisees each term.

### *B. ESLOs*

Quantitative Literacy and Inquiry and Analysis were assessed university-wide in AY 2020. Not enough artifacts were submitted to the Inquiry and Analysis committee to allow for generalizable or useable assessment data.

Quantitative Literacy’s assessment was largely completed via faculty reflection and response about their satisfaction with their students’ quantitative reasoning ability at various points through their academic career: lower-division coursework, upper-division coursework and graduation.

Communication Studies faculty who teach courses requiring some quantitative literacy largely noted two patterns in our students. Their ability to perform calculations to a course’s expectations tends to *decrease* over time, while their ability to ask questions about quantitative problems tends to *increase*. Their ability to communicate the importance of quantitative information tends to remain satisfactory throughout their academic career.

Upon further discussion, faculty felt that these trends were due to the abstract role of quantitative reasoning in our discipline. Students focused on human subject research (e.g. COM 326) are

expected to conduct some statistical analyses, generally relying on software or other tools to perform calculations but relying on their mathematical understanding to explain the results of those calculations. Students focused on document or media design (e.g. COM 248) are expected to understand algebraic and geometric mathematics to an intermediate level in order to use the design software central to those courses.

While Communication Studies courses frequently discuss quantitative data and its use in argument or messaging strategies, it is rare for students to have to calculate or collect that data themselves, resulting in much greater challenge in upper-level courses where that expectation exists. However, faculty discussing quantitative literacy among program students also noted that specific faculty in our program are associated with those quantitative issues, and our students are especially adept at determining what questions they need to ask to address a computational or quantitative data concern, even after graduation.

### **VIII. Action Plan**

#### *A. AY 2021 recommendations from this report*

The data collection and assessment process was complicated by continuing COVID effects and continued staffing problems over the past year: Communication Studies department faculty have too many commitments. (Indeed, this was suggested by the lone negative response in the student exit survey. We cannot offer all of our courses at the rate students need them, *not* due to low enrollment but due to insufficient faculty to teach them.)

The direct assessment data was collected through a new mechanism allowed by the Director of Academic Excellence, in which programs can solicit qualitative direct assessment of courses or projects from faculty teaching PSLO-linked courses. Without this change, we would have been unable to collect and analyze PSLO-related data for AY 2020. Notably, although the process required a small amount of time from faculty members, very few faculty responded to the request for these short statements.

The program requires more faculty, particularly as it has lost several over the past few years without adequate replacement hires. We have proposed creative solutions to staffing and course offering concerns, either by (a) expanding instructional formats and modalities to allow greater flexibility to those faculty consistently teaching out-of-load courses or to allow Portland-Metro faculty to teach Klamath Falls students via Zoom, (b) or by requesting work arrangements not typical to OIT that would address instructional and service needs. These proposals have not been accepted, so the department has continued to develop other plans to address those same concerns raised by the lone negative response in the student exit survey.

#### *B. Response to PSLO Data*

The PSLO data collected from COM 326 and informally collected through the year did not prompt any concern for our program's curriculum or our students' ability to meet these outcomes.

### *C. Response to ESLO Data*

The ESLO data collected in AY 2020 did not prompt any concern for our students' quantitative reasoning abilities. The discussions were useful in making some issues explicit, particularly when we found that things we *thought* were areas in need of development were a natural result of our curriculum's structure.

Changes in the professional technological landscape for communication professionals suggest that concerns about calculation ability will become a less necessary skill for our graduates than the ability to understand and communicate the importance of quantitative information.

### *D. Ongoing*

As discussed in the Summary of Activities section, the Communication department has shifted its assessment strategy to sample a broad set of artifacts or evaluations from as many courses as possible each term. Because Communication Studies is a smaller program, this will allow us to measure achievement across the entire program each year rather than focusing on a small number of students in a few courses each year.

## **IX. Closing the Loop**

### *A. Continuing Conversations*

While the loop has not fully closed yet, the Communication department has begun work on several large-scale revisions to its program. Some of this has involved the creation of new courses, and that course creation has underscored the need to hire more faculty to handle both general education offerings and the specific technical skills we teach. This has also led to further discussion of a departmental laptop requirement or other methods of solving technological access problems.

Ultimately, while these conversations center on the allocation of financial and institutional resources, our ability to act on them is limited to (a) faculty who are willing to teach out of load until searches are approved or (b) faculty who are willing to be creative in scheduling access to institutional spaces and resources necessary for these new curricular changes to take effect.