Chapter 8: Undergraduate Discipline Spotlight

The Communication major emphasis areas (Journalism, Public Communication, and Communication Studies) prepare students for not only professional careers and graduate school but also participation in the democracy—as critical thinkers. The Department utilizes multiple means to assess and review student performance.

Students who graduate from Truman are required to complete a digital Portfolio administered through the capstone experience in each Department. Papers submitted by Communication students—evaluated by faculty across campus—are assessed for ***critical thinking***, ***communication*** (organization, mechanics, and style), and ***interdisciplinary thinking***. Next, the Portfolio provides a wealth of information from graduating seniors that serve as indicators of program assessment success. The Graduating Senior Questionnaire (GSQ), for example, provides valuable feedback in such areas as faculty ***accessibility*** to students, strong connections with faculty through the ***advising*** process, satisfaction with ***course availability***, and ***overall satisfaction*** among Communication majors.

In recent years the faculty revamped its senior test, a major area of Department assessment, to better illuminate outcomes and critical thinking. From 2004-2008, the Department utilized the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) for its senior test. By FY2008, students had to choose between the GRE or Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA). The faculty was not satisfied with either exam as an instrument of measuring learning in the major; however, the absence of a nationally normed test further exacerbated Department efforts to meet the University's testing mandate. In 2009, the faculty implemented a Department-specific senior test. A test committee collected pools of original questions that faculty contributed from Public Speaking, Introduction to

Communication, Mass Communication, Communication Theory, the Senior Capstone as well as three methods courses.

The absence of comparisons to students tested on a wider scale was a major challenge with the "in-house" assessment. With renewed University appeals to institute a national evaluation, the faculty voted to implement the Area Concentration Achievement Test (ACAT) in fall 2014. The nationally normed ACAT, which closely meshes with our curriculum, is administered through the Communication capstone course. The ACAT assesses learning in four areas of Communication: Public Speaking, Mass Communication, Law and Ethics, and Interpersonal Communication. Department learning outcomes (e.g., percentiles) are now compared to normed-results from institutions similar in size to Truman.

Graduate Placement is an emerging area of attention for the University and Communication Department. Placement numbers strongly suggest that students in the major generally choose Communication as a career pathway rather than a track to graduate school. This data serves as an indirect assessment of the major: are students graduating with degrees that mesh with expectations in the job market?

Finally, the Department developed a curricular map in 2015, a University mandate. The map evaluates how the program coursework reinforces departmental and University objectives, and corresponding outcomes. These outcomes serve the Department and University twofold. In spring 2019, Communication faculty initiated a curricular review with the goal of revamping the curriculum in the 2019-2020 school year; the map will guide the Department in this process. In addition, the curricular outcomes are incorporated into course syllabi that serve as pathways for faculty to better communicate course goals to students, the University, and external audiences.

An example of the map's value in curriculum delivery is found in COMM 350 Media Criticism, a writing-enhanced course. A writing assignment rubric incorporates Department objectives stated in the course description as well as desirable University outcomes. Communication curricular goals include knowledge, knowledge application, and critical thinking. These objectives are emphasized, reinforced, and mastered through overlapping University outcomes: theoretical explication and application; researching, analyzing, organizing, writing, and oral presentations (communication); exhibiting self-confidence in the writing and presentation process (creative production/scholarship); critical thinking; and computer literary (e.g., online library research).