

Detailed Assessment Report  
2010-2011 Communication (Communication Studies) PhD

**Mission/Purpose**

The mission of the doctoral emphasis in communication studies is to prepare students to produce and to critically consume and disseminate communication research, especially as college teachers and professionals. We directly facilitate the university's mission "to cultivate intellectual development and creativity through the generation, dissemination, application, and preservation of knowledge." Moreover, the university values degree programs that "both respond to and anticipate the evolving demands of our society, employers, and the labor market." Until recently, the demand for communication doctoral graduates exceeded the supply. We have helped society by providing faculty for institutions of higher education in our area and beyond. The department facilitates the College mission at all levels of instruction from general education to doctoral education, and by its commitment to the generation and dissemination of knowledge.

**Student Learning Outcomes, with Any Associations and Related Measures, Achievement Targets, Findings, and Action Plans**

**O 1: Understand our discipline's theory and research**

Students will demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the body of theory and research that constitutes the foundation for our discipline.

**Related Measures:**

**M 1: Comprehensive Exam**

Students will take a 12-hour comprehensive essay exam after completing required coursework for the doctoral degree. This exam will contain one or more questions that pertain to learning objectives 1-3. These exams will be rated by the student's doctoral examination committee on a scale reflecting pertinent criteria. [Preview Formatting]

Source of Evidence: Academic direct measure of learning - other

**Achievement Target:**

90% of students to receiving a rating of "acceptable" on the "foundations" portion of their comprehensive exam.

**Findings (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Met**

4/4 (100%) met this criterion. Four students took the comprehensive exam during this time period. The five faculty members evaluating the exams rated these students an average of 4.2, 3.4, 3.6, and 4.23 on a 5-point scale assessing knowledge of theory/research, with 3.0 indicating minimal acceptability and 4.0 indicating excellence.

**M 2: Public Forum Presentation**

Student presentations at professional conferences. Graduate students are encouraged to become involved in professional associations by attending and presenting at conferences. Presentations are universally adjudicated in some form before acceptance, indicating some level of professional competence.

Source of Evidence: Academic indirect indicator of learning - other

**Achievement Target:**

75% of doctoral students to make a presentation prior to graduation.

**Findings (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Met**

1 of 1 (100% met this criterion). The 1 student who graduated in 2010 made multiple presentations at state, regional, or national conferences.

**M 3: Review of research**

As part of their comprehensive examination, students are required to submit a review of research demonstrating their understanding of some aspect of our discipline. These papers will be rated by the student's doctoral examination committee on a scale reflecting pertinent criteria.

Source of Evidence: Academic direct measure of learning - other

**Achievement Target:**

90% of these to be rated "acceptable" on rating scale for this criterion.

**Findings (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Met**

4/4 (100%) met this criterion. Four students completed the research review paper during this time period. The five faculty members evaluating the papers rated these students an average of 4.2, 4.0, 4.0, and 4.5 on a 5-point scale assessing knowledge/understanding of the field, with 3.0 indicating minimal acceptability and 4.0 indicating excellence.

**O 2: Ability to assess research and theory**

Students will demonstrate an ability to think critically, reason, and exercise good judgment when assessing research and theory in our discipline.

**Related Measures:****M 1: Comprehensive Exam**

Students will take a 12-hour comprehensive essay exam after completing required coursework for the doctoral degree. This exam will contain one or more questions that pertain to learning objectives 1-3. These exams will be rated by the student's doctoral examination committee on a scale reflecting pertinent criteria. [Preview Formatting]

Source of Evidence: Academic direct measure of learning - other

**Achievement Target:**

90% of students to receive a rating of "acceptable" on the "critical reasoning" portion of their comprehensive exam.

**Findings (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Met**

4/4 (100%) met this criterion. Four students took the comprehensive exam during this time period. The five faculty members evaluating the exams rated these students an average of 4.2, 3.4, 3.6, and 4.23 on a 5-point scale assessing judgment/critical thinking/reasoning, with 3.0 indicating minimal acceptability and 4.0 indicating excellence.

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Source of Evidence: Academic direct measure of learning - other

**Achievement Target:**

90% of these to be rated "acceptable" on rating scale for this criterion.

**Findings (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Met**

4/4 (100%) met this criterion. Four students completed the research review paper during this time period. The five faculty members evaluating the papers rated these students an average of 4.2, 3.5, 3.75, and 4.25 on a 5-point scale assessing judgment/critical thinking/reasoning, with 3.0 indicating minimal acceptability and 4.0 indicating excellence.

**O 3: Employ research methods**

Students will learn how to employ appropriate research methods in order to study communication.

**Related Measures:**

**M 1: Comprehensive Exam**

Students will take a 12-hour comprehensive essay exam after completing required coursework for the doctoral degree. This exam will contain one or more questions that pertain to learning objectives 1-3. These exams will be rated by the student's doctoral examination committee on a scale reflecting pertinent criteria. [Preview Formatting]

Source of Evidence: Academic direct measure of learning - other

**Achievement Target:**

90% of students to receive a rating of "acceptable" on the "research methods" portion of their comprehensive exam.

**Findings (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Met**

4/4 (100%) met this criterion. Four students took the comprehensive exam during this time period. The five faculty members evaluating the exams rated these students an

average of 4.27, 3.8, 3.77, and 4.0 on a 5-point scale assessing ability to understand and conduct research, with 3.0 indicating minimal acceptability and 4.0 indicating excellence.

#### **M 4: Dissertation**

Doctoral Dissertation Progress. Each year we will examine the progress of students in the doctoral program, noting in particular whether students have passed the comprehensive exam, defended a prospectus, and completed the dissertation.

Source of Evidence: Academic indirect indicator of learning - other

##### **Achievement Target:**

90% of students who are fulltime graduate students to complete a prospectus that contains a description of the proposed methods of research within 1 year of passing their comprehensive exam. 75% of students to complete the dissertation within 2 years of securing committee approval of prospectus.

##### **Findings (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Partially Met**

2/3 (67%) and 3/3 (100%) met these two criteria. Five students completed their comprehensive exams during this time period. The one-year period has not passed for two of these. Of the 3 who qualify for this assessment, 2 have successfully defended a prospectus and are working on their dissertations. Seven students successfully defended a prospectus during this period. The two-year period has not passed for 4 of these. Of the 3 who qualify for assessment, all 3 have completed their dissertations and earned their doctoral degrees.

##### **Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):**

For full information, see the *Action Plan Details* section of this report.

##### **Refer issue to the graduate curriculum committee.**

*Established in Cycle:* 2010-2011

The graduate curriculum committee will be asked to review the assessment results and to specifically address these findings.

#### **M 5: Public Forum Presentation/Publication**

Students should produce dissertations on timely topics and that are methodologically sound. If they do, then the research should warrant presentation at conferences and publication in appropriate journals. The department will monitor and keep records on the presentation and publication of research based on the dissertations by graduates of our doctoral program.

Source of Evidence: Academic indirect indicator of learning - other

##### **Achievement Target:**

50% of doctoral graduates to make a public presentation of dissertation research and 25% to publish an article-length report based on the dissertation.

##### **Findings (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Partially Met**

1/1 (100%) met the first criterion and 0/1 (0%) met the second. One student completed the dissertation in this time period. He made one professional presentation of research related to the dissertation but has not published research based on the dissertation.

**Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):**

For full information, see the *Action Plan Details* section of this report.

**Refer issue to the graduate curriculum committee.**

*Established in Cycle:* 2010-2011

The graduate curriculum committee will be asked to review the assessment results and to specifically address these findings.

**O 4: Become communication teachers**

Students will become effective communication teachers.

**Related Measures:**

**M 6: Alumni Survey**

A survey of recent alumni will be conducted. A question will ask former teaching assistants if their education adequately prepared them for their roles as teachers. A second question will ask former students to assess how their education has helped them achieve their personal and/or professional goals.

**Achievement Target:**

90% of students to report an affirmative answer to the question about teacher preparation.

**Findings (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Not Reported This Cycle**

One student graduated with the doctoral degree during this assessment period. This student did not respond to multiple requests to complete our annual assessment survey.

**Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):**

For full information, see the *Action Plan Details* section of this report.

**Faculty discussion of compliance problem**

*Established in Cycle:* 2010-2011

During the faculty meeting in which the results of the assessments of the graduate programs are reviewed, I will seek recommendations...

**M 8: Teaching Evaluations**

Students who are teaching assistants or adjunct teachers will be evaluated annually by course supervisors based on evidence such as: student evaluations, classroom observation, samples of student work, grade distribution and interactions with course supervisors. These evaluations will be recorded on a standard form.

Source of Evidence: Student course evaluations on learning gains made

**Achievement Target:**

90% of students will receive a summary rating on the standard evaluation form that warrants reappointment or continuation as a teaching assistant

**Findings (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Met**

9/9 (100%) met this criterion. All 9 doctoral students who were teaching assistants received evaluations that warranted reappointment for the 11-12 year

**O 5: Advance personal and/or professional goals**

Students will be able to utilize what they've learned to advance their personal and/or professional goals.

### Related Measures:

#### **M 6: Alumni Survey**

A survey of recent alumni will be conducted. A question will ask former teaching assistants if their education adequately prepared them for their roles as teachers. A second question will ask former students to assess how their education has helped them achieve their personal and/or professional goals.

#### **Achievement Target:**

90% of students to report an affirmative answer to the question about goals.

#### **Findings (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Not Reported This Cycle**

One student graduated with the doctoral degree during this assessment period. This student did not respond to multiple requests to complete our annual assessment survey

#### **Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):**

For full information, see the *Action Plan Details* section of this report.

#### **Faculty discussion of compliance problem**

*Established in Cycle:* 2010-2011

During the faculty meeting in which the results of the assessments of the graduate programs are reviewed, I will seek recommendations...

#### **M 7: Employment**

We will ascertain the employment status of graduates within a year of matriculation.

Source of Evidence: Academic direct measure of learning - other

#### **Achievement Target:**

90% to have obtained suitable employment (i.e., a fulltime teaching position that includes benefits, nonteaching equivalent)

#### **Findings (2010-2011) - Achievement Target: Met**

1/1 (100%) met this criterion. One student completed the requirements for the doctoral degree during this time period. That student had previously secured a teaching position but secured a more desirable position as an assistant professor in a tenure track line.

### **Action Plan Details for This Cycle (by Established cycle, then alpha)**

#### **Maintain emphasis on research presentations**

Almost all of our current students recognize the importance of conducting and presenting research. We will continue to emphasize the importance of this in class, and especially in our professional development seminar.

**Established in Cycle:** 2005-2006

**Implementation Status:** Finished

**Priority:** Medium

**Implementation Description:** July 1, 2007

**Responsible Person/Group:** Dr. Tardy; Graduate Faculty

**Additional Resources Requested:** We need increased financial support to help students pay the costs of attending professional conferences at which we want them to make presentations.

### **Maintain faculty supervision of student teachers**

Available evidence suggests that current procedures adequately prepare students for their roles as teachers. When students encounter problems, their faculty supervisor can help the student manage, solve or overcome them. One faculty member indicated he planned to spend more time discussing topic selection with the graduate student teachings our public speaking class (SCM 111).

**Established in Cycle:** 2005-2006

**Implementation Status:** Finished

**Priority:** Medium

**Implementation Description:** August 23, 2006

**Responsible Person/Group:** Dr. Tardy; SCM Faculty

### **Monitor time to completion of dissertation.**

Students have not proceeded as rapidly from comprehensive exams to prospectus and from prospectus to dissertation as we would like. However, this is not necessarily a sign of deficient preparation. All three students in this case were employed and pursuing other endeavors in addition to working on their dissertation. We will continue to monitor this for evidence that failure to proceed through these requirements indicates deficient preparation. We will have a better idea of this in another 2 years, after the current cohort of students who entered under the revamped curriculum have graduated.

**Established in Cycle:** 2005-2006

**Implementation Status:** Finished

**Priority:** Medium

**Implementation Description:** July 1, 2007

**Responsible Person/Group:** Dr. Tardy

### **Reevaluation of assessment plan**

The Graduate Committee of the Communication Studies Department will be asked to review the learning objective and the assessment results. They will be asked to consider whether curricular or administrative changes are warranted, or if the target objective should be changed.

**Established in Cycle:** 2009-2010

**Implementation Status:** Finished

**Priority:** High

**Implementation Description:** Charge given to Graduate Committee.

**Completion Date:** 12/10/2010

**Responsible Person/Group:** Dr. Charles Tardy

### **Vigilant attention to record keeping.**

We will be more vigilant this year to ensure that these data are collected from graduate committees.

**Established in Cycle:** 2009-2010

**Implementation Status:** Planned

**Priority:** High

**Implementation Description:** We will provide the forms for the evaluation of the comprehensive exams to committee members at the time of the oral defense of the exam and collect them

immediately afterwards.

**Completion Date:** 05/11/2011

**Responsible Person/Group:** Director of Graduate Studies.

### **Faculty discussion of compliance problem**

During the faculty meeting in which the results of the assessments of the graduate programs are reviewed, I will seek recommendations for addressing the problem of noncompliance with our request for participation in the alumni survey.

**Established in Cycle:** 2010-2011

**Implementation Status:** Planned

**Priority:** High

#### **Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):**

**Measure:** Alumni Survey | **Outcome/Objective:** Advance personal and/or professional goals | Become communication teachers

**Implementation Description:** I will include this as announced agenda item prior to a regularly scheduled faculty meeting.

**Responsible Person/Group:** Department chair

### **Refer issue to the graduate curriculum committee.**

The graduate curriculum committee will be asked to review the assessment results and to specifically address these findings.

**Established in Cycle:** 2010-2011

**Implementation Status:** Planned

**Priority:** High

#### **Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):**

**Measure:** Dissertation | **Outcome/Objective:** Employ research methods

**Measure:** Public Forum Presentation/Publication | **Outcome/Objective:** Employ research methods

**Implementation Description:** I will include this item in my annual charge to this standing committee. They will meet and report to the entire faculty any recommendations that are warranted.

**Responsible Person/Group:** Department chair.

## **Analysis Answers**

### **What specifically did your assessments show regarding proven strengths or progress you made on outcomes/objectives?**

The department is successfully developing doctoral students into professionals capable of conducting research, teaching in the discipline, and obtaining employment. We met 9 of 11 (82%) achievement targets, and partially met the remaining 2. (Data were not available for 2 more outcome targets.) We are particularly pleased with the success of our students competing in a difficult job market. Though we only had one student who completed doctoral requirements during this period, the experiences of our 3rd year students confirm this assessment. We had several who took tenure track and adjunct positions before completing the Ph.D. degree



## **What specifically did your assessments show regarding any outcomes/objectives that will require continued attention?**

The two partially met objectives indicate areas of continuing concern. Though our curriculum appears successful in facilitating students' completion of degree requirements, not all of our students move through the program as planned. We need to take efforts to prepare or encourage all students to make expected progress. Also, we need to consider the publications of our alumni. Although recent graduates are generally making public presentations based on their dissertations, alumni fall short of publication goals. Faculty members are working with recent graduates on publication, but this may take longer than expected to produce the desired results. Also, we should continue to monitor the experiences of our graduates in the job market. The preceding year we had only one student who actively sought an academic position and she acquired a job at a community college. While our doctoral students aspire for positions at colleges and universities, the economy has reduced the availability of these jobs. We need to continue to assess this situation and take steps to prepare current students for the job market as it exists today.

## **Annual Reports**

### **Program Summary**

Program Summary the Department of Communication Studies has 11 faculty: seven professors (Conville, Erickson, Hosman, Meyer, Saunders, Siltanen, and Tardy), two associate professors (Jung and Venette) and two assistant professors (Maugh and Atkins-Sayre). Of these, Saunders is President of the University, Siltanen is Dean of Graduate Studies, and Atkins-Sayre is Director of the Speaking Center. Maugh teaches on the Gulf Coast campus and directs the Speaking and Writing Center there. The remaining individuals have regular faculty appointments on the Hattiesburg campus. We have three broad but interconnected missions: to educate doctoral and masters students for careers as teachers and professionals; prepare undergraduate majors for productive lives as citizens; and, enhance the communication skills of non-majors.

Ph.D. Program. One student finished doctoral degree requirements in the past year. He moved from one academic position to another, securing a tenure-track faculty position. Several a.b.d. students took full-time positions. Despite the sluggish economy and reduced opportunities for academic employment, our students still are able to secure employment options.

M.A./M.S. Program. We graduated three masters students. One continued in her position as a development officer at a large university, one secured a position as a communications director of a nonprofit organization, and a third entered a doctoral program at top-ranked program.

B.A. Program. We graduated approximately 25 students in 2010-11. Some graduates assumed positions in sales and management. Others continued their education in graduate programs in a variety of areas (economic development; public affairs; communication). Some apparently assumed or continued work in service positions.

Service Mission. Last year we taught 54 sections of courses for students whose major requires or encourages them to take our classes. Though our courses are not required in the General Education Curriculum, they fulfill one of its stipulations. An analysis performed last year by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness indicates that approximately 87% of undergraduate programs have elected to require their students to take one of our classes.

Contribution to the Institution. Our faculty contributes significantly to university projects, initiatives, and ongoing activities. We serve and perform leadership roles for such groups as the Institutional Review Board, Faculty Senate, Graduate Council, QEP/FAV Steering Committee; Dean's Advisory

Council; etc. Our department also provides leadership and staff for the operation of university's speaking centers on both the Hattiesburg and Gulf Park campuses.

Highlights the department celebrated several major accomplishments over the last year:

\*scholarship. Faculty published articles in scholarly journals and chapters in books. Faculty and graduate students made presentations at the annual meetings of the National Communication Association, National Association of Communication Centers, the Southern States Communication Association, Mississippi Communication Association and the Gulf-South Summit on Service Learning.

\* professional service. One faculty member was elected to the leadership cycle of the Southern States Communication Association which begins as Vice-President Elect. Another faculty member served as Chair of the National Communication Centers Association, which also entailed leading a division of the National Communication Association. Another serves as chair of a standing committee of the National Communication Association.

\*promotion. One faculty member was promoted to associate professor. This is the second year in a row we promoted an assistant professor.

\*graduate student research presentations. For the second year in a row, more than 90% of our doctoral students made research presentations at conferences.

\*continued development of the Speaking Centers on both campuses. An undergraduate tutor on the Hattiesburg campus won the best paper award for research that he presented at the annual convention of the National Communication Center Association. Additionally that association awarded one of our doctoral students its tutor of the year award. Research and service being undertaken by center staff connect its activities to the profession and provide exceptional opportunities for the engagement of Southern Miss students. Utilization of centers in Hattiesburg and Gulf Park continues to increase.

\*outreach to alumni. We held a homecoming reception for alumni last fall; organized a reception for graduate alumni at the Southern States Communication Association Annual Convention and a dinner with them at the National Communication Association Annual convention; and hosted former student John Brown (Assistant to the Mayor of Hattiesburg) for our annual department banquet.

\*summer writing workshop for graduate students. Nine resident and non-resident graduate students participated in a two-day workshop designed to foster their writing skills and facilitate their work on dissertations and theses.

\*new ideas for the capstone course. In the fall we taught the capstone course that emphasized careers and in the spring we taught one that utilized an organizational consultant model to give students practical experience which might help them with their job searches.

\*academic success of alumni. One alumnus served as Vice-President of the Southern States Communication Association; another completed her dissertation at Rutgers University; and two others were admitted into prestigious doctoral programs.

\*department planning. Faculty committees made substantial progress developing new degree options for our majors, a graduate certificate in organizational communication, and a department procedures manual. Conclusion this was a productive year for the department. Faculty members have been successful in research, teaching, and service. Though university budget shortfalls continue to cloud

our plans for the future, I am certain that our department will continue to enhance the lives of our students and advance institutional goals.

### **Continuous Improvement Initiatives**

The department undertook several initiatives to enhance the education of doctoral students. The graduate committee studied and recommended the implementation of a certificate program in teaching that would enhance the preparation of our doctoral students to perform the responsibilities of college teaching. However because of the instability of the instructional technology program (the university considered eliminating this degree program) we decided to delay this proposal. The department did implement a second certificate program in organizational communication. A third initiative that was designed to enhance the progress of graduate students, particularly doctoral students working on theses, was a 2-day writing workshop that was led by faculty during the summer. Eight doctoral students participated in these sessions and each made tangible progress on dissertation proposals or on another manuscript. Also, faculty continue post-graduation mentoring efforts. Several faculty members are working with their former advisees to assist them publishing their dissertations. Though these efforts may prove effective, they have proved more problematic than imagined.

### **Closing the Loop**

A review of the department's previously formulated actions plans was undertaken. Some actions plans were implemented effective and no longer needed. For example, we revised our brief assessment questionnaire to provide more useful data concerning students' employment. Other action plans were appropriately implemented but no longer needed. For example, we have monitored curricular changes and have decided that these were helpful. There is no longer a need to attend specifically to these changes. Some action plans have become part of normal department procedures. For example, we routinely refer assessment results to the graduate curriculum committees. This committee examines the reports and makes recommendation to the faculty concerning department procedures as well the assessment plan. Likewise, the action plan related to the supervision of teaching assistants is now routinely conducted. A faculty member is assigned the responsibility of monitoring and supervising the graduate assistants who teach each of the service courses offered by our department. There has been a natural attrition and institutionalization of our action plans.