Outcomes Assessment
Master of Arts in Professional Communication
Spring 2007

Program Objectives

1. Graduates will possess a mastery of the history and use of theoretical and methodological Communication constructs and paradigms.

2. Graduates will be capable at conducting, applying, and synthesizing Communication research.

3. Graduates will be capable of doctoral study and/or professional employment.

4. Graduates will be capable of demonstrating effective communication skills; both interpersonal and public.

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

Graduate Students in Professional Communication have regularly reported the rigor of the program in terms of the expectations for reading and synthesizing the literature of the Communication discipline. It is clear that the program exceeds some students’ expectations of what graduate study will entail. In the Period reported at least two students have left the program after their first semester, reporting that either the program was “much harder” than expected or that their writing was not up to our standards. Those who stay and finish, however, report in exit interviews that the rigor is one very positive aspect of the program.

In 2002 – 2003, the Communication Research Methodologies and Methods course was split into two required courses (COMM601; COMM602). The move allows us to offer our students a much fuller understanding of both social and human science and their differences in epistemology, theories, methodologies, methods of data collection, analyses, and in the final product of these two sciences.

Discussion of Program

Because we are a very small faculty, we have consciously capped the number of students pursuing the degree at any one time at 25. We could accept more students should our faculty lines be increased, but will continue to cap the number enrolled in order that we can continue the quality of education provided; especially the amount of direct, one-on-one interaction our faculty can have with students in the graduate program.

Very few changes (other than updating classes with newer readings) have been made in this program since it began in 1997. While careful assessment has been ongoing, the
quality of the program and the success of the graduates has demonstrated that the Program regularly meets the Objectives set for it. Students who wish to use their degree as employment (approximately 80% of graduates) have been very successful both locally and nationally. Four of the graduates who have gone into the world of work in the period covered by this Review have each opened their own consulting businesses in Fairbanks and each reports more work than they can handle. Two graduates work currently work for the Chamber of Commerce. One now is Regional Human Resources Manager for the Lowe's Corporation in Seattle. Other graduates who wish to continue higher education in pursuit of the doctorate have been equally successful. One is at Rutgers in her third year. Another just completed his degree at the University of Oklahoma, compiling an enviable publication record, and has been hired as an Assistant Professor at Central Florida University. One student who went through the Interdisciplinary Ph. D. Program at UAF was highly praised by professors in Anthropology and Psychology in cognate work to her Communication study and graduated in 2002 – 2003. She is now an Assistant Professor at University of Alaska Southeast.

The general call in our society for persons skilled in human communication, its analysis, and organizational planning and development for better communication is making the Professional Communication degree a highly sought after credential; even in a small population region such as Alaska! The general shift to a service economy places extraordinary emphasis and concern on the ability to understand and accomplish ethical human communication. Our graduates report experiencing an empowerment from the degree that they did not expect at the beginning of their graduate work.
M. A. in Professional Communication
Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

The Master of Arts in Professional Communication seems to be the right degree at the right time for most of our graduates. Whether they seek immediate employment or admission into doctoral programs, our graduates are doing very well. Again, one of the strengths cited by our graduating students is the level and quality of the teaching in the program. Many students mention in exit interviews that the availability of professors to spend quality time outside the classroom discussing the literature is much stronger than others they interact with in other programs. Directly put, communication is not just what we teach, but what we do. Entry level graduate students often express a question of whether one needs both Comprehensive Examinations and a thesis. However, at graduation students express their appreciation and understanding of why these are our expectations. Recognizing the expectations of the degree as parallel to the expectations of whichever path they take from here (work or further education) our students are, in the end, happy with the rigor of the program. Graduate Program Directors from the several departments into which our graduates have gone recently report our graduates better prepared than students with M.A.s from other, better recognized universities. At the time of this report, all members of our faculty have served on and Chaired successful graduate thesis committees.

Weaknesses

Many graduate students moving through the program are here as Graduate Teaching Assistants. Few come to us expecting it, but many find that teaching at the university level is a highly attractive area of employment potential. Unfortunately, while the degree is an organizational communication degree as planned, none of our faculty has specifically trained in Communication Education. While we would like to offer both classes and research opportunities in this area, we are very limited in what is possible.

Another weakness of the program is our lack of an organized internship program. Our experience has been that often when our graduate students are placed in internship positions they are later hired by the organization in which they have experience. An organized internship program that can form a regular outreach to organizations in Alaska (non-profit, corporate, educational, etc.) has been in our long-range planning, but to date the faculty members of our department are all too time stretched to take on this important project.