PROGRAM REVIEW

M.A. in PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

February 2013

Assessment Plan: A revised assessment plan is attached to this file.

Assessment Information Collected: According to the Department’s assessment plan, we collect data on graduate student performance in two ways: first, every May the faculty as a whole in discussion and review format evaluates the performance of each graduate across the courses for strengths, weaknesses, and areas of improvement; Secondly, each graduate must successfully pass four comprehensive exams in January of their second year in the program. The focus of our evaluation is on the intended outcomes/objectives. Every May the faculty meets with graduate students who are completing their degree to discuss in a roundtable format strengths, weakness, and areas of success as well as needs for improvement in instruction and curriculum. We have found over the past several years that this focus group with the graduate students provides the faculty with productive feedback on the graduate program’s effectiveness.

An additional area of assessment relates to the teaching assistantship program. The faculty conducts a mentoring course for graduate teaching assistants every semester. This one-credit course allows the faculty first-hand knowledge of the teaching performance of each graduate teaching assistant. Each graduate student is observed in the classroom twice during the semester by faculty. Also each graduate teaching assistant must complete two peer-evaluations of other graduate teaching assistants. This means each graduate student teaching assistant receives four sources of evaluation during each semester. We have found that this practice is invaluable to students and to faculty in regard to their development as effective instructors in the department’s service courses. In addition, we collect data every semester from an inter-rater reliability session to maintain consistency across the public speaking service courses the graduate teaching assistants facilitate.

Summary of Student Learning Outcomes and of Programmatic Revisions for the Previous Five Academic Years: Over the past five years, we have continued to find evidence that graduate students and graduate teaching assistants are successful in the master’s program. Goal One & Two, Objective One, which focuses on mastery of the history and use of theoretical and methodological communication constructs and paradigms, comprises the first year of graduate study in the program. We continue to find that students develop a professional approach and the academic knowledge to be successful in the program. Goals One & Two, Objective Two, which stipulates that graduate students will be capable of conducting, applying, and synthesizing communication research is evident through the ongoing development and completion of their thesis projects. Goals One & Two, Objective three, which focuses on graduate students’ ability to apply knowledge of professional communication to qualify for doctoral study and/or professional employment is evident with the successful employment and/or continuing academic study. Approximately 5% of graduates from our program go on to doctoral programs. The 5% figure is based on the past five years of graduates; there is evidence that suggests a normal and expected time delay for students before considering PhD work or advanced degrees. If one reviews
more than five years of data the number goes up. Goals One & Two, Objective four requires that graduate students will be capable of demonstrating effective communication skills, both interpersonal and public is evident through professional public speaking ability in the classroom as well as in venues outside the classroom. Every graduate student is strongly encouraged to present a paper to a professional organization within the discipline. In February 2010, the faculty and the entire graduate cohort helped host as well as presented papers at the Western States Communication Association (WSCA) annual convention that was held in Anchorage. This was the first time that WSCA had held its professional meetings and convention in Alaska. Every year there are at least four or five conferences that graduate students and faculty attend and conduct presentations. The National Communication Association (NCA) and WSCA as well as Northwest Communication Association (NWCA) are attended regularly every year. Other venues for public address that graduate students have opportunities to share their professional expertise are training and development projects in organizations. In some cases the graduate student has secured employment from this professional opportunity. Goal three, Objective One states that graduate students will have classroom interactions that frame the interrelationship between human communication and creation, maintenance, and transformation of human social contexts. The entire curriculum of the graduate program highlights these interrelationships all the way from interpersonal communication to organizational communication and intercultural communication and diversity in the workplace. Goal Four, Objective One states that graduate will have classroom interactions that address gender and other difference as everyday experiential contexts. Diversity is integrated into all of our courses; however, one of the program requirements is COMM 680, Communication in Diversity in the Professional World. Graduate students in this course must apply their professional communication skill and knowledge to argue and role play actual diversity legal cases as well as apply theory to problem solve diversity issues. Students respond well and are successful in this course. The topic of diversity in the professional world is one of the comprehensive exams in our program as well. Goal 5, Objective One states that graduate students will have classroom interactions that proffer the ethical as grounding of all human communication. Communication ethics are integrated into every graduate course and the projects assigned in the courses. Students respond well to ethical challenges and issues in these projects. An aspect of our mission statement highlights ethical communication as a foundational practice in professional communication.

NARRATIVE RESPONSES ON SELECTED ISSUES:

(a) **Prospective market for M.A. Program graduates:** The Alaska Career Ladder of the State Department of Labor lists a number of careers projected to grow by at least 10% or more. Our graduates can and will continue to find employment in these jobs, which include: specialists and managers in Human Resources, Public Relations, Training and Development, and Social and Community Service. According to research, effective communication abilities and skill in both interpersonal and professional contexts as well as in oral presentation are skills most sought by employers (Curtis & Zaid, 2002; Winsor, Curtis, & Stephens, 1997). A liberal arts degree, the B.A. in Communication, provides students with these valued skills. Also, graduates from our program continue to be successful in gaining admission to other Master’s level programs both
within and outside the discipline (e.g., M.B.A., M.Ed, M.S.W.). With the advent of the job market crash in 2009, the M.A. in Professional Communication gives graduates a competitive edge.

(b) **Significant service achievements by faculty:** see B.A. Program review for details

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