

## Proposal to the Program Review and Assessment Committee

### Assessing Outcomes and the Experiences that Lead to those Outcomes in the Communication Studies Undergraduate Major Department of Communication Studies March 2, 2012

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Project Title: **Assessing Outcomes and the Experiences that Lead to those Outcomes in the Communication Studies Undergraduate Major**

Project Dates:

- Development of pilot survey, Spring 2012
- Implementation of pilot survey, Spring 2012
- Initial analysis of pilot survey data, Spring 2012
- Refinement of pilot survey, Spring 2012
- Collection and analysis of pilot interview data, Spring 2012
- Continued collection and analysis of survey and interview data, Summer and Fall 2012
- Collection and analysis of Assignments, Spring and Summer 2012
- Development of Matrix, Summer and Fall 2012
- Develop self-study for external review, Summer and Fall 2012
- Develop ongoing assessment plans, Fall 2012

#### Project Checklist

Statement of support from the department chair or school dean by e-mail to [tbanta@iupui.edu](mailto:tbanta@iupui.edu) - as a separate file not included in the proposal.

- Email from Kristina Sheeler will be sent separately

Simple budget: A detailed budget is not necessary. Nevertheless, please include a brief paragraph/details indicating how you intend to spend the grant money.

IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval is **not** required for the **proposal**, but must be obtained prior to transfer of funds **if the proposal is selected**.

- Although we believe IRB approval is not required for the evaluation activities outlined here, we will submit the protocol to the IRB for their review and approval if they deem it necessary.

## **Assessing Outcomes and the Experiences that Lead to those Outcomes in the Communication Studies Undergraduate Major**

**Abstract:** In the spring of 2013 the Department of Communication Studies will undergo external program review. In anticipation of that review, we seek to develop measures and collect assessment data to prepare for the self-study. This proposal requests funding to 1) pilot a plan to collect quantitative and qualitative data assessing student learning outcomes, 2) determine strengths and weaknesses of our undergraduate program based on data analysis, and 3) develop a program of ongoing curricular assessment. Specifically, graduate students in COMM C501 Applied Quantitative Research, under the guidance of Professor Nancy Rhodes will develop and implement a pilot survey and collect interview data on undergraduate students in our undergraduate program. The graduate students in the C501 class will have the opportunity to learn course content by applying relevant concepts and theories in the collection and analysis of data that will be used for programmatic assessment purposes.

### **Purpose of Project**

Our plan for programmatic assessment is based on the American Association for Higher Education's "9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning" which acknowledges that "assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes" (Alexander, Banta, Cross, El-Khawas, Ewell, Hutchings, Marchese, McClenney, Mentkowski, Miller, Moran, and Wright). The Department of Communication Studies already has defined specific learning outcomes for its undergraduate majors (Alexander et al., principle 3). **This program review project has two primary goals:**

- 1) to determine program level effectiveness for achieving learning outcomes in anticipation of preparing a self-study for program review, and
- 2) to develop an ongoing plan for curricular assessment (Alexander et al. principle 5).

To achieve these goals, our team will assess student learning outcomes for Communication Studies majors as well as assignments and courses which contribute to those outcomes (Alexander et al., principle 4).

First, to determine program level effectiveness, this project seeks to develop and pilot measures which assess the extent to which the Department's student learning outcomes are being met programmatically. This project builds on assessment data collected in 2005-06 which assessed student satisfaction with their major while giving students enrolled in two undergraduate courses opportunities to meet pedagogical objectives of those courses. In general, students reported at that time a positive attitude about the Communication Studies major and students in the two classes were given practical experience in designing surveys, conducting interviews, facilitating focus groups, and analyzing data. Through this current assessment grant, we seek to determine not just student satisfaction, but student learning throughout the program, while also providing graduate students an opportunity to meet pedagogical goals of the research methods course. Graduate students under the guidance of Professor Nancy Rhodes will pilot a survey to students in our three core courses: COMM G100 Introduction to Communication Studies, COMM G201 Communication Theory, and COMM G310 Research Methods. Graduate students will conduct initial data analysis and then refine the survey with the goal of administering it to all Communication Studies majors at the point majors reach 27 credit hours in the major. Graduate students will also pilot semi-structured interviews with students who have completed at least 27 credit hours in the major. This portion of data collection and analysis will allow us to assess the extent to which student learning outcomes at the programmatic level are being met.

Based on survey and interview responses, our assessment team seeks to develop an ongoing plan for curricular assessment by 1) determining strengths and weaknesses of our program in terms of student learning and 2) developing a plan to address any weaknesses. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis will signal outcomes for which our program best prepares our students and least prepares our students. To address effectively the weakest areas of student learning, our assessment team must also assess specific courses and assignments and ensure that our courses and evaluation practices meet program goals and

guide students toward mastery of the Communication Studies learning outcomes. Faculty will be asked to submit select assignments and grading criteria and to identify specific departmental learning outcomes that each assignment addresses and evaluates. From this information our assessment team will assess each assignment as to its appropriateness, quality, and rigor in addressing, reinforcing, and evaluating the expressed objective. The assessment team will use this information to develop a curriculum matrix. The matrix will provide a visual representation of whether and how programmatic goals are introduced and reinforced. The course assignment review and curriculum matrix will provide answers to questions such as:

- Which courses introduce a particular departmental learning outcome?
- Are students given ample opportunities to practice each learning outcome in subsequent courses after it has been introduced?
- Are opportunities to practice each learning outcome structured incrementally to achieve reinforcement and learning?
- Do the assessment practices in each course effectively/accurately evaluate student performance of learning outcomes?

With this information our assessment team will be able to determine and build on program strengths as well as address program weaknesses throughout our curriculum. This information will also guide future course and curriculum revision.

**Intended outcomes of the project include:**

- Development of a survey to assess student learning outcomes of the Comm Studies major.
  - Pilot survey to students in core courses.
  - Analyze pilot survey data.
  - Refine survey.
  - Implementation of survey to all Communication Studies majors when they have completed 27 credit hours in the major.

- Ongoing collection of survey data indicating student learning of primary program outcomes.
- Semi-structured interviews with Communication Studies majors who have completed 27 credit hours in the major.
  - Content analysis of interview data to determine programmatic effectiveness and supplement survey data
- Determination of areas of strength and gaps based on survey and interview data analysis.
- Collection of select assignments for each Communication Studies course.
  - Analysis of select assignments to determine learning outcome(s) addressed, appropriateness, quality, and rigor.
  - Creation of curriculum matrix listing each course, student learning outcomes, and whether courses introduce or provide opportunities for practice and reinforcement of objectives through selected assignments.
- Determine goals for future course and curriculum development based on survey and interview data analysis, assignment analysis, and curriculum matrix.

### **Assessment Methods**

- Surveys
- Semi-structured interviews
- Individual course assignments with grading criteria

### **Data Analysis**

- Quantitative survey responses will be analyzed using traditional statistical measures. Qualitative responses will be content analyzed for emerging themes.
- Select assignments and grading criteria will be analyzed for their clarity and rigor in addressing student learning outcomes.

## **Evaluation and Dissemination**

During spring 2012 graduate students in COMM C501–Research Methods will evaluate the pilot projects under the guidance of Professor Nancy Rhodes to determine whether the data resulting from the surveys and interviews are reliable and useful. The goal will be to continue administering the surveys to majors upon completion of 27 credit hours in the major. The data gathered will become part of the department’s self-study for external review planned for spring 2013.

## **Use of Findings for Program Improvement**

We plan to use the findings generated here to continue course and curricular improvements to address student learning outcomes. We will continue to collect survey and interview data over time to determine whether our efforts have been successful.

## **Budget Description**

The budget will consist of:

- \$300 stipend COMM C 501 Research Methods instructor Nancy Rhodes
- \$1000 as a stipend shared among the assessment team
- \$900 to hire a graduate student hourly to help with ongoing survey administration and data analysis beyond the pilot semester
- \$300 for data collection resources and food as incentives during interviews and assessment work

## **Works Cited**

Alexander W. Astin; Trudy W. Banta; K. Patricia Cross; Elaine El-Khawas; Peter T. Ewell; Pat Hutchings; Theodore J. Marchese; Kay M. McClenney; Marcia Mentkowski; Margaret A. Miller; E. Thomas Moran; Barbara D. Wright. “9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning,” American Association for Higher Education, 1996.