

Detailed Assessment Report  
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2011-2012 Communication (Mass Communication) MA/MS

### Mission / Purpose

The mission of the Master's Program in Communication - Mass Communication Emphasis is to prepare students for advanced mass communication education, professional advancement in career fields associated with media and communication organizations, and for teaching at the secondary and lower division collegiate levels of instruction. The program does this by providing a solid grounding in a broad range of mass communication theory and research methods, as well as the opportunity to develop expertise in such areas as advertising, public relations, media convergence, and international mass communication.

### Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives, with Any Associations and Related Measures, Targets, Findings, and Action Plans

#### **SLO 1: Mass Communication Theories**

Students will be able to read, understand, and critique mass communication theories and integrate them into research.

#### Related Measures:

##### **M 1: Comprehensive Exam**

Master's degree candidates must pass a six-hour written comprehensive examination that tests the accumulation and integration of knowledge from his or her area of study as well as the ability to evaluate information and ideas. This examination may not be taken until all core and research method courses are completed and the student has no more than six hours of coursework left. The student must stay enrolled in the semester for at least 3 hours when the comprehensive examination is taken.

The comprehensive examination is administered by the Graduate Coordinator. Students may be asked questions from any faculty member from whom they have had courses. Faculty members who submit questions read the answers to their own questions. If a student fails to write a satisfactory answer for any part(s) of the exam, the student will be asked to rewrite the section(s) (either a similar type of question or a second attempt at the same question). The format for the rewrite will be determined by the faculty member who gives the questions. If, after rewriting, the student has still not passed part(s) of the exam, the student's academic committee will meet in order to decide if the student has passed or failed the entire examination.

Source of Evidence: Comprehensive/end-of-program subject matter exam

#### **Target:**

90 percent of students will demonstrate competence in mass communication theories by passing questions for required theory courses (MC 607 and MC 608) during their masters comprehensive examination.

#### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

90.9 percent of students (10/11) demonstrated competence in mass communication theories by passing questions for required theory courses (MC 607 and MC 608) during their masters comprehensive examination.

##### **M 3: Research papers**

Students are required to write research papers for core courses and other writing-intensive courses and are encouraged to submit their papers to conferences and journals.

Source of Evidence: Written assignment(s), usually scored by a rubric

**Target:**

80 percent of students will demonstrate competence in mass communication theory by writing research papers in required theory courses (MC 607 and MC 608) and other writing-intensive courses.

**Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

Because we have Summer, Fall and Spring admission, this category was measured each semester. Overall, 89.1 percent of students demonstrated competence in mass communication theory by writing research papers in required theory courses (MC 607 and MC 608) and other writing-intensive courses - Summer 87.5% (14/16), Fall 86.7% (13/15), and Spring 93.3% (14/15).

**SLO 2:Mass Communication Research**

Students will be able to conduct research using methods common to the field and critique existing research in mass communication.

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

Master's degree candidates must pass a six-hour written comprehensive examination that tests the accumulation and integration of knowledge from his or her area of study as well as the ability to evaluate information and ideas. This examination may not be taken until all core and research method courses are completed and the student has no more than six hours of coursework left. The student must stay enrolled in the semester for at least 3 hours when the comprehensive examination is taken.

The comprehensive examination is administered by the Graduate Coordinator. Students may be asked questions from any faculty member from whom they have had courses. Faculty members who submit questions read the answers to their own questions. If a student fails to write a satisfactory answer for any part(s) of the exam, the student will be asked to rewrite the section(s) (either a similar type of question or a second attempt at the same question). The format for the rewrite will be determined by the faculty member who gives the questions. If, after rewriting, the student has still not passed part(s) of the exam, the student's academic committee will meet in order to decide if the student has passed or failed the entire examination.

Source of Evidence: Comprehensive/end-of-program subject matter exam

**Target:**

90 percent of students will demonstrate competence in mass communication research by passing questions for required research courses (MC 720, MC 721, or MC 722) during their masters comprehensive examination.

**Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

90.9 percent of students (10/11) demonstrated competence in mass communication research by passing questions for required research courses (MC 720, MC 721, or MC 722) during their masters comprehensive examination.

**M 3:Research papers**

Students are required to write research papers for core courses and other writing-intensive courses and are encouraged to submit their papers to conferences and journals.

Source of Evidence: Written assignment(s), usually scored by a rubric

**Target:**

80 percent of students will demonstrate competence in mass communication research by writing research papers in required research courses (MC 720, MC 721 or MC 722) and other research courses.

### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

Because we have Summer, Fall and Spring admission, this category was measured each semester. Overall, 82.6 percent of students demonstrated competence in mass communication research by writing research papers in required research courses (MC 720, MC 721 or MC 722) and other research courses - Summer 87.5% (14/16), Fall 86.7% (13/15), and Spring 86.7% (13/15).

### **SLO 3:Concentration Area**

Students will demonstrate competence in theories and research in a selected concentration within the discipline.

#### **Related Measures:**

##### **M 1:Comprehensive Exam**

Master's degree candidates must pass a six-hour written comprehensive examination that tests the accumulation and integration of knowledge from his or her area of study as well as the ability to evaluate information and ideas. This examination may not be taken until all core and research method courses are completed and the student has no more than six hours of coursework left. The student must stay enrolled in the semester for at least 3 hours when the comprehensive examination is taken.

The comprehensive examination is administered by the Graduate Coordinator. Students may be asked questions from any faculty member from whom they have had courses. Faculty members who submit questions read the answers to their own questions. If a student fails to write a satisfactory answer for any part(s) of the exam, the student will be asked to rewrite the section(s) (either a similar type of question or a second attempt at the same question). The format for the rewrite will be determined by the faculty member who gives the questions. If, after rewriting, the student has still not passed part(s) of the exam, the student's academic committee will meet in order to decide if the student has passed or failed the entire examination.

Source of Evidence: Comprehensive/end-of-program subject matter exam

##### **Target:**

90 percent of students will demonstrate competence in the theories and practices of their concentration within the discipline by passing comprehensive examination questions related to this area.

### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

100 percent of students (11/11) demonstrated competence in the theories and practices of their concentration within the discipline by passing comprehensive examination questions related to this area.

##### **M 3:Research papers**

Students are required to write research papers for core courses and other writing-intensive courses and are encouraged to submit their papers to conferences and journals.

Source of Evidence: Written assignment(s), usually scored by a rubric

##### **Target:**

80 percent of students will demonstrate competence in the theories and practices of their concentration within the discipline by writing research papers on topics in this area for various theory and research courses.

### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

Because we have Summer, Fall and Spring admission, this category was measured each semester. Overall, 91.3 percent of students demonstrated competence in the theories and practices of their concentration within the discipline by writing research papers on topics in this area for various

theory and research courses - Summer 93.7% (15/16), Fall 86.7% (13/15), and Spring 93.3% (14/15).

#### **SLO 4:Application of Skills - Scholarly Research**

Students will produce scholarly research in mass communication.

##### Related Measures:

##### **M 1:Comprehensive Exam**

Master's degree candidates must pass a six-hour written comprehensive examination that tests the accumulation and integration of knowledge from his or her area of study as well as the ability to evaluate information and ideas. This examination may not be taken until all core and research method courses are completed and the student has no more than six hours of coursework left. The student must stay enrolled in the semester for at least 3 hours when the comprehensive examination is taken.

The comprehensive examination is administered by the Graduate Coordinator. Students may be asked questions from any faculty member from whom they have had courses. Faculty members who submit questions read the answers to their own questions. If a student fails to write a satisfactory answer for any part(s) of the exam, the student will be asked to rewrite the section(s) (either a similar type of question or a second attempt at the same question). The format for the rewrite will be determined by the faculty member who gives the questions. If, after rewriting, the student has still not passed part(s) of the exam, the student's academic committee will meet in order to decide if the student has passed or failed the entire examination.

Source of Evidence: Comprehensive/end-of-program subject matter exam

##### **Target:**

90 percent of students will demonstrate competence in comprehending and evaluating scholarly research by answering related questions during their masters comprehensive examination.

##### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

90.9 percent of students (10/11) demonstrated competence in comprehending and evaluating scholarly research by answering related questions during their master's comprehensive examination.

##### **M 3:Research papers**

Students are required to write research papers for core courses and other writing-intensive courses and are encouraged to submit their papers to conferences and journals.

Source of Evidence: Written assignment(s), usually scored by a rubric

##### **Target:**

80 percent of students will demonstrate competence in producing scholarly research by writing research papers for various classes. 50% of students will submit scholarly work for publication or convention presentation.

##### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Partially Met**

Because we have Summer, Fall and Spring admission, this category was measured each semester. Overall, 87 percent of students demonstrated competence in producing scholarly research by writing research papers for various classes - Summer 81.3% (13/16), Fall 86.7% (13/15), and Spring 86.7% (14/15). However, less than 50% of students in the Mass Communication MA/MS programs submitted scholarly work for publication or convention presentation - Summer 62.5% (10/16), Fall 26.7% (4/15), and Spring 53.3% (8/15).

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

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

### **MS/MC scholarly research action plan**

*Established in Cycle: 2011-2012*

Less than 50% of students in the Mass Communication MA/MS programs submitted scholarly work for publication or convention presen...

### **SLO 5:Application of Skills - Project/Internship**

Students will apply knowledge of mass communication in major projects and internships.

#### **Related Measures:**

#### **M 4:Thesis/Project**

Students in the Mass Communication programs have an option to either complete a thesis, a major project or a professional internship in a media setting. The degree of Master of Arts entails the writing of a thesis (698. Thesis, 6 hrs). Thesis committee comprised of three graduate faculty members is recommended by the department chair and appointed by the dean of the Graduate School. After the thesis has been accepted and after all required course work has been completed, a final oral examination on the thesis will be conducted by the student's thesis committee and any other faculty members designated by the dean of the Graduate School.

The internship and the project is administered by the Graduate Coordinator. The project needs to be approved by the Graduate Coordinator and the Director of the School. The internship requires 20 hours per week. The student will be evaluated and graded by his/her supervisor at the end of the internship. Students are also required to submit a brief summary of the internship as well as self-evaluation. The internship and the project is administered by the Graduate Coordinator. The project needs to be approved by the Graduate Coordinator and the Director of the School. The internship requires 20 hours per week. The student will be evaluated and graded by his/her supervisor at the end of the internship. Students are also required to submit a brief summary of the internship as well as self-evaluation.

Source of Evidence: Project, either individual or group

#### **Target:**

80 percent of students who choose to do a major project will achieve ratings of good-to-excellent on professional applications measures, as judged by their professors or project contacts.

#### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

100 percent of students (12/12) who chose to do a thesis or a major project achieved ratings of good-to-excellent on professional applications measures, as judged by their professors or project contacts.

#### **M 5:Internship Evaluation**

Students in the Master of Science programs have an option to complete a major project or a professional internship in mass communication. The internship is administered by the Graduate Coordinator. The internship requires 20 hours per week. The student will be evaluated and graded by his/her supervisor at the end of the internship.

Source of Evidence: Field work, internship, or teaching evaluation

#### **Target:**

80 percent of students who choose to do an internship will achieve ratings of good-to-excellent on professional applications measures, as judged by their internship supervisors.

#### **Findings (2011-2012) - Target: Met**

100 percent of students (3/3) who chose to do an internship achieved ratings of good-to-excellent (A or A+) on professional applications measures, as judged by their internship supervisors.

## Details of Action Plans for This Cycle (by Established cycle, then alpha)

### **MS/MC scholarly research action plan**

Less than 50% of students in the Mass Communication MA/MS programs submitted scholarly work for publication or convention presentation in the fall semester of 2011 (26.7%; 4/15). More than 50% of students did so in Summer 2011 and Spring 2012. This is because there were more courses that required students to complete and submit research papers in summer and spring semesters. Since most students start the program in the fall, there are more core courses offered in the fall semester that focus on basic theories and concepts in mass communication. We will try to encourage students who are more prepared to submit research scholarly work for publication or convention presentation in the fall semester, but we believe the priority in the first semester (for most students) should be studying concepts, so we are satisfied as long as the overall percentage during an academic year is above 50%.

**Established in Cycle:** 2011-2012

**Implementation Status:** Planned

**Priority:** Low

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

**Measure:** Research papers | **Outcome/Objective:** Application of Skills - Scholarly Research

**Responsible Person/Group:** Graduate faculty in the School of Mass Communication and Journalism

## Analysis Questions and Analysis Answers

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

We are overall pleased with the performance of our students on multiple assessment measures in 2011-2012. The majority of the students in the master's programs in Mass Communication successfully passed the comprehensive exam. In the comprehensive exam, they demonstrated knowledge in mass communication theories and research. They also demonstrated the ability to apply mass communication concepts in their specialized areas. It shows that our theory and research courses have helped prepare students for the comprehensive exam. Many instructors require students to complete a research paper and submit it to a conference. A Graduate Research Forum was created to help cultivate research atmosphere among students. Students can present their research and exchange ideas at the monthly forum meetings. The forum also serves as a venue for graduate students and faculty to interact outside the classroom. Last year, 100 percent of students (12/12) who chose to do a thesis or a major project achieved ratings of good-to-excellent on professional applications measures, as judged by their professors or project contacts. Student evaluations were overall positive. Over half of the students were able to find employment within a year after graduation. In addition, two students have been admitted to Ph.D. programs at the University of Texas-Austin and the University of Minnesota and both received full scholarships. Even though this is our first time using WEAVE to evaluate learning outcomes, these findings are consistent with our own observations from the past few years. We will continue to look closely at our outcomes and measures in the upcoming year to ensure that our students are succeeding our program.

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

Less than 50% of students in the Mass Communication MA/MS programs submitted scholarly work for publication or convention presentation in the fall semester of 2011 (26.7%; 4/15), which did not meet our target of 50%. Since most students start the program in the fall, there are more core courses offered in the fall semester that focus on basic theories and concepts in mass communication, instead of working on independent research project. In addition, most students in the Mass Communication program chose the MS (non-thesis) option, which means less focus on scholarly research and more focus on professional development. We will try to encourage students who are more prepared to submit research scholarly work for publication or convention presentation in the fall semester, but we believe the priority in the first semester (for most students) should be studying concepts, so we are satisfied as long as the overall percentage during an academic year is above 50%.

## Annual Report Section Responses

### **Program Summary**

The mission of the Master's Program in Communication - Mass Communication Emphasis is to prepare students for advanced mass communication education, professional advancement in career fields associated with media and communication organizations, and for teaching at the secondary and lower division collegiate levels of instruction. The program does this by providing a solid grounding in a broad range of mass communication theory and research methods, as well as the opportunity to develop expertise in such areas as advertising, public relations, media convergence, and international mass communication. For the Master's Degree in Communication-thesis option (MA)-30 hours of course work is required; 33 hours of course work for the non-thesis option (MS).

In the 2011-2012 academic year, students in the Mass Communication MA/MS programs presented 5 research papers at regional and national conferences and published 2 articles in research journals. One paper is currently under review for the Journal of Marketing Communications. Two students received full scholarships from doctoral programs in the University of Texas - Austin and the University of Minnesota. One student organized PubCamp MS 2011, a social media conference, on the University of Southern Mississippi campus. Over 90 representatives from media, local businesses, and government departments registered for the conference.

### **Continuous Improvement Initiatives**

The School of Mass Communication and Journalism will continue to maintain a robust assessment plan to measure the Mass Communication MA/MS program performance and effectively utilize our findings to help improve learning outcomes. We believe there are two areas we need to focus on - students' knowledge of mass communication theories and research, and professional training.

(1) Mass Communication theories and research: Students are expected to not only master key mass communication theories but also become an expert in a specialized area. New students are introduced to graduate faculty in the beginning of the program so they can get to know the faculty and work with them in their interest areas. Many instructors require students to complete a research paper in class and encourage them to submit it to a conference. A list of mass communication conferences was compiled by the Graduate Coordinator and was posted online. A reminder email will be sent to all students before the deadline for conference submission. The School would try its best to fund conference travel if a student's paper was accepted. A Graduate Research Forum was created to help cultivate research atmosphere among students. Students can present their research and exchange ideas at the monthly forum meetings. They are also encouraged to take advantage of research opportunities on campus, including present research at the Graduate Student Research Symposium and publish articles in the Synergy Journal. Students' research achievements are taken into account for the Top Master's Student Award given out by the School every year.

(2) Professional training: Most students will have completed at least one internship upon graduation. To help students fully take advantage of the internship experience and help the School of Mass Communication and Journalism receive feedback from both the employer and the student, more detailed instructions were added to the internship forms, including agreement form, evaluation form and student feedback form. Many students in the program have full-time or part-time jobs while in school. Some of them have to commute from Jackson, Gulfport, or neighboring states such as Alabama and Louisiana. Therefore, several online/hybrid courses were developed last year so students would be able to have a more flexible course schedule with less distractions. Students are also encouraged to attend career fair/portfolio workshops, join professional organizations (such as SPJ, PRSSA), and work for the Student Media Center (such as the Student Printz and WUSM radio station). These effort should help students develop a stronger resume and prepare themselves for future employment.

### **Closing the Loop**

Less than 50% of students in the Mass Communication MA/MS programs submitted scholarly work for publication or convention presentation in the fall semester of 2011 (26.7%; 4/15), which did not meet our target of 50%. Since most students start the program in the fall, there are more core courses offered in the fall

semester that focus on basic theories and concepts in mass communication, instead of working on independent research project. In addition, most students in the Mass Communication program chose the MS (non-thesis) option, which means less focus on scholarly research and more focus on professional development. We will try to encourage students who are more prepared to submit research scholarly work for publication or convention presentation in the fall semester, but we believe the priority in the first semester (for most students) should be studying concepts, so we are satisfied as long as the overall percentage during an academic year is above 50%.