

Detailed Assessment Report
As of: 10/04/2013 09:57 AM EST
2012-2013 Communication (Mass Communication) PhD

Mission / Purpose

The mission of the Ph.D. in Communication - Mass Communication Emphasis is to prepare students for careers as teacher-scholars in higher education or in administrative and/or research positions in mass communication and related fields.

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 mass communication research.

Related Measures:

M 1:Comprehensive Exam

The doctoral comprehensive examination is offered in the spring and fall semester. It consists of both a written and an oral examination. The written exam covers sixteen hours spread across several days. The exam is devised by the student's academic committee following consultation with the student and tests the student in the areas of expertise and competence that the student and committee have agreed upon in the plan of study, including mass communication theories and research.

Each committee member reads and evaluates answers to his or her part of the exam (sometimes the entire exam) and judges the student's answers to be defendable or unacceptable. If the writing is unacceptable, the student must re-take that professor's portion of the exam. (Alternatively, if the written answers are, in the committee's judgment, weak, the entire exam may have to be retaken.) One re-write is allowed.

The oral examination phase is scheduled only when the entire committee agrees that all written answers are defensible. Questions asked in the oral examination phase often stem directly from the student's written answers, seeking clarification or elaboration. However, any question pertinent to the student's graduate education may be asked in the oral phase. At the end of the oral examination, the student's academic committee makes a determination as to whether the student has passed the comprehensive examination. The committee makes one of three choices:

- (1) Unconditional pass: full approval
- (2) Conditional pass: some remedial action is required
- (3) Unconditional fail

A conditional pass means that some remedial work is necessary before a final judgment can be made. Such work might include readings, course work, a written paper, an additional written examination, or some other appropriate remedial action. After the remedial work is completed, the committee must then determine if the student's work merits an unconditional pass or an unconditional fail.

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

Target:

90 percent of doctoral candidates will demonstrate competence in mass communication theories by passing the theory portion of the comps exam.

Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met

100 percent of doctoral candidates (1/1) demonstrated competence in mass communication theories by passing the theory portion of the comps exam.

M 2:Doctoral dissertation

The dissertation is a major research project which must make an original and significant contribution to knowledge in an area of the field of communication in which the student is developing expertise. The dissertation topic is approved by the student's dissertation committee and the completed work is submitted to and defended before this committee. The dissertation committee may or may not be composed of the same faculty who made up the student's academic committee. The dissertation committee should be composed of those faculty members who have expertise that is more relevant to the student's topic area. The dissertation committee is ordinarily composed of five members of the Graduate Faculty of the School of Mass Communication and Journalism who hold doctoral committee graduate faculty status. When an outside minor is part of the student's plan of study, one of the five committee members must be from the minor field.

The first step in completing the dissertation is completion of a prospectus. The prospectus presents a detailed picture of what the student plans to study, why the topic is important to the field, what questions the dissertation will answer, and the manner in which the questions will be answered. The length and format of the prospectus will be determined by the dissertation committee chair (dissertation director). When the dissertation director is satisfied that the prospectus has been properly prepared, it must then be approved by the entire dissertation committee. All committee members should receive a copy of the prospectus at least 14 days prior to the prospectus meeting. After the prospectus is approved the student files a formal Application for Admission to Candidacy and Degree with the clerk in the Graduate Studies office. At this point, the student is officially considered a doctoral degree candidate.

The second step in the dissertation is completing and orally defending the dissertation itself. The student should obtain the current version of the Graduate Office Policies for Preparing Theses and Dissertations and the thesis and dissertation calendar from the Graduate Readers' office. After the dissertation committee chair has approved a reading copy, the candidate should schedule an oral defense of the dissertation and provide each committee member with a copy of the reading copy at least 14 days prior to the scheduled defense. Committee members may make suggestions for additional analyses and revisions. Usually the committee chair makes sure that such revisions are made.

The doctoral dissertation is committee directed under the supervision of the dissertation committee chair. Ordinarily, dissertation chapters are submitted first to the committee chair for comment and critique and are subsequently revised to the chair's satisfaction before being passed on by the chair to the other committee members. Candidates must understand that revisions are based on the professional, scholarly judgment of committee members and are deemed to be in the best interest of the candidate, the program, and the discipline. Therefore, revisions are a normal part of the dissertation process and must be made as specified. The dissertation is read by the Graduate Reader for USM's style and format requirements. Approval by the Graduate Reader does not constitute approval by the dissertation committee.

Source of Evidence: Senior thesis or culminating major project

Target:

90 percent of doctoral dissertations will demonstrate mastery of theory through its application in their dissertation.

Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met

100 percent of doctoral dissertations (5/5) demonstrated mastery of theory through its application in their dissertation.

SLO 2:Quantitative Research

Students will be able to conduct quantitative method research and critique existing scholarship that includes quantitative methods.

Related Measures:

M 1:Comprehensive Exam

The doctoral comprehensive examination is offered in the spring and fall semester. It consists of both a written and an oral examination. The written exam covers sixteen hours spread across several days. The exam is devised by the student's academic committee following consultation with the student and tests the student in the areas of expertise and competence that the student and committee have agreed upon in the plan of study, including mass communication theories and research.

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

Target:

90 percent of doctoral candidates will demonstrate competence in comprehending and evaluating quantitative research in their responses to relevant comps questions.

Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met

100 percent of doctoral candidates (1/1) demonstrated competence in comprehending and evaluating quantitative research in their responses to relevant comps questions.

M 2:Doctoral dissertation

The dissertation is a major research project which must make an original and significant contribution to knowledge in an area of the field of communication in which the student is developing expertise. The dissertation topic is approved by the student's dissertation committee and the completed work is submitted to and defended before this committee. The dissertation committee may or may not be composed of the same faculty who made up the student's academic committee. The dissertation committee should be composed of those faculty members who have expertise that is more relevant to the student's topic area. The dissertation committee is ordinarily composed of five members of the Graduate Faculty of the School of Mass Communication and Journalism who hold doctoral committee graduate faculty status. When an outside minor is part of the student's plan of study, one of the five committee members must be from the minor field.

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Source of Evidence: Senior thesis or culminating major project

Target:

90 percent of the doctoral dissertations that apply quantitative research methods will reflect expertise in research techniques and applications.

Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met

100 percent (3/3) of the doctoral dissertations that apply quantitative research methods reflected expertise in research techniques and applications.

SLO 3:Qualitative Research

Students will be able to conduct qualitative method research and critique existing scholarship that includes qualitative methods.

Related Measures:

M 1:Comprehensive Exam

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The oral examination phase is scheduled only when the entire committee agrees that all written answers are defensible. Questions asked in the oral examination phase often stem directly from the student's written answers, seeking clarification or elaboration. However, any question pertinent to the student's graduate education may be asked in the oral phase. At the end of the oral examination, the student's academic committee makes a determination as to whether the student has passed the comprehensive examination. The committee makes one of three choices:

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

Target:

90 percent of doctoral candidates will demonstrate competence in comprehending and evaluating qualitative research in their responses to relevant comps questions.

Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met

100 percent of doctoral candidates (1/1) demonstrated competence in comprehending and evaluating qualitative research in their responses to relevant comps questions.

M 2:Doctoral dissertation

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The first step in completing the dissertation is completion of a prospectus. The prospectus presents a detailed picture of what the student plans to study, why the topic is important to the field, what questions the dissertation will answer, and the manner in which the questions will be answered. The length and format of the prospectus will be determined by the dissertation committee chair (dissertation director). When the dissertation director is satisfied that the prospectus has been properly prepared, it must then be approved by the entire dissertation committee. All committee members should receive a copy of the prospectus at least 14 days prior to the prospectus meeting. After the prospectus is approved the student files a formal Application for Admission to Candidacy and Degree with the clerk in the Graduate Studies office. At this point, the student is officially considered a doctoral degree candidate.

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Source of Evidence: Senior thesis or culminating major project

Target:

90 percent of the doctoral dissertations that apply qualitative research methods will reflect expertise in research techniques and applications.

Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met

100 percent (2/2) of the doctoral dissertations that apply qualitative research methods reflected expertise in research techniques and applications.

SLO 4:Concentration Area

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

Related Measures:

M 1:Comprehensive Exam

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Each committee member reads and evaluates answers to his or her part of the exam (sometimes the entire exam) and judges the student's answers to be defendable or unacceptable. If the writing is unacceptable, the student must re-take that professor's portion of the exam. (Alternatively, if the written answers are, in the committee's judgment, weak, the entire exam may have to be retaken.) One re-write is allowed.

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

Target:

90 percent of doctoral candidates will demonstrate basic knowledge of two or more areas

of research and expertise in at least one major area of research (empirical, critical/cultural, or historical) during their comprehensive exam.

Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met

100 percent of doctoral candidates (1/1) demonstrated basic knowledge of two or more areas of research and expertise in at least one major area of research (empirical, critical/cultural, or historical) during their comprehensive exam.

M 2:Doctoral dissertation

The dissertation is a major research project which must make an original and significant contribution to knowledge in an area of the field of communication in which the student is developing expertise. The dissertation topic is approved by the student's dissertation committee and the completed work is submitted to and defended before this committee. The dissertation committee may or may not be composed of the same faculty who made up the student's academic committee. The dissertation committee should be composed of those faculty members who have expertise that is more relevant to the student's topic area. The dissertation committee is ordinarily composed of five members of the Graduate Faculty of the School of Mass Communication and Journalism who hold doctoral committee graduate faculty status. When an outside minor is part of the student's plan of study, one of the five committee members must be from the minor field.

The first step in completing the dissertation is completion of a prospectus. The prospectus presents a detailed picture of what the student plans to study, why the topic is important to the field, what questions the dissertation will answer, and the manner in which the questions will be answered. The length and format of the prospectus will be determined by the dissertation committee chair (dissertation director). When the dissertation director is satisfied that the prospectus has been properly prepared, it must then be approved by the entire dissertation committee. All committee members should receive a copy of the prospectus at least 14 days prior to the prospectus meeting. After the prospectus is approved the student files a formal Application for Admission to Candidacy and Degree with the clerk in the Graduate Studies office. At this point, the student is officially considered a doctoral degree candidate.

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Source of Evidence: Senior thesis or culminating major project

Target:

90 percent of doctoral students will demonstrate expertise in at least one major area of mass communication (advertising, publication relations, law, history, and media and society) by completing a dissertation on a topic in this area.

Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met

100 percent of doctoral students (5/5) demonstrated expertise in at least one major area of mass communication (advertising, publication relations, law, history, and media and society) by completing a dissertation on a topic in this area.

SLO 5:Produce Scholarly Research

Students will produce scholarly research in mass communication.

Related Measures:

M 2:Doctoral dissertation

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The first step in completing the dissertation is completion of a prospectus. The prospectus presents a detailed picture of what the student plans to study, why the topic is important to the field, what questions the dissertation will answer, and the manner in which the questions will be answered. The length and format of the prospectus will be determined by the dissertation committee chair (dissertation director). When the dissertation director is satisfied that the prospectus has been properly prepared, it must then be approved by the entire dissertation committee. All committee members should receive a copy of the prospectus at least 14 days prior to the prospectus meeting. After the prospectus is approved the student files a formal Application for Admission to Candidacy and Degree with the clerk in the Graduate Studies office. At this point, the student is officially considered a doctoral degree candidate.

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Source of Evidence: Senior thesis or culminating major project

Target:

90 percent of doctoral students will demonstrate competency in producing scholarly research by having their dissertations accepted by their dissertation committee.

Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met

100 percent of doctoral students (5/5) demonstrated competency in producing scholarly research by having their dissertations accepted by their dissertation committee.

M 3:Scholarly Research

Scholarly writing for publication or convention presentation.

Source of Evidence: Project, either individual or group

Target:

80 percent of doctoral students will submit scholarly work for publication or convention presentation to demonstrate competence in producing quality research.

Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met

85.3 percent of active doctoral students who are currently enrolled (29/34) have submitted scholarly work for publication or convention presentation to demonstrate competence in producing quality research.

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

Mass Communication Theories Action Plan

A more rigorous screening process has been adopted to review applications for the Ph.D program. All graduate faculty will review applications and make recommendations to ensure the quality of the admitted students. Students are also required to submit a mini-proposal for dissertation at the time of Plan of Study meeting. Students will also work with committee chair to prepare for the comprehensive exam and the dissertation during the last semester of course work.

Established in Cycle: 2011-2012

Implementation Status: In-Progress

Priority: Low

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 2012-2013. The majority of the students successfully passed the comprehensive exam and dissertation defense. In the comprehensive exam, they demonstrated knowledge in mass communication theories and research. They also demonstrated a good understanding of the research process and the ability to apply mass communication theories to research in their specialized areas. It shows that our theory and research courses have helped prepare students for the comprehensive exam. The student's advisory committee also helped prepare the student for the dissertation process. In 2011, we added a new requirement for the plan of study meeting. Students have to submit a mini-proposal for dissertation at the planning meeting so that they can be more focused in terms of coursework and research activities, which will eventually help them in completing a dissertation. 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, our students have presented a good number of research papers at regional and national conferences, including several top paper awards, which has helped improve the School's, and the university's, national reputation. 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?

In the 2011-2012 academic year, we had one student who had problems with the theory part of the comprehensive exam. This year, all students passed the comprehensive exams successfully. A more rigorous screening process has been adopted to review applications for the Ph.D program. All graduate faculty review applications and make recommendations together to ensure the quality of the admitted students. Students are advised to take an Independent Study course with his/her committee chair to prepare for the comprehensive exam. We will continue monitoring students' performance in this area in the upcoming year.

We also need to put more effort into recruiting students for the doctoral program. A new brochure has been developed and will be sent to mass communication programs in the southeast region. We will participate in the Graduate Student Expo at the 2013 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) conference in D.C.

Annual Report Section Responses

Program Summary

The School of Mass Communication and Journalism offers the Doctor of Philosophy in Communication with an emphasis in Mass Communication. The mission of the program is to prepare students for careers as teacher-scholars in higher education or in administrative and/or research positions in mass communication and related fields. A minimum of 54 hours beyond the master's degree is required. This includes course work in the major field, an optional 12-hour minor outside the School of Mass Communication and Journalism, and 12 hours for a dissertation. If an outside minor is not chosen, the 12 hours are added to the major field. This 54-hour total does not include hours taken for your research tools. Students must satisfy up to 15 hours of research tools approved by the academic committee. A student in a doctoral program is guided by the student's major professor and four other persons on the student's academic advisory committee. Other than the four required courses in the "core," a student's course work is worked out with a committee in the emphasis area of choice. We currently offer the following emphasis areas: advertising, public relations, mass communication history and law, media, culture and society, and international communication.

In the 2012-2013 academic year, our doctoral students presented 28 research papers at regional and

national conferences and published 2 articles in research journals. One paper won a division Top Poster award at the 2012 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) conference. One paper won the Kathanne W. Greene Award by the Committee of Services and Resources for Women at the University of Southern Mississippi. One paper was the Yarbrough Scholar Award winner in Communications and Social Sciences at the USM Graduate Student Research symposium. A doctoral dissertation won Margaret Blanchard dissertation prize Honorable Mention from the American Journalism Historians Association (AJHA). The School received the 2013 Southern States Communication Association (SSCA) Minority Retention and Recruitment Award.

Continuous Improvement Initiatives/Additional Action Plans

The School of Mass Communication and Journalism will continue to maintain a robust assessment plan to measure the Mass Communication Ph.D program performance and effectively utilize our findings to help improve learning outcomes. We believe there are three areas we need to focus on - students' knowledge of mass communication theories and concepts, research skills and teaching ability.

(1) Concentration: 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 their research, and select their own interest area. They are required to submit a mini-proposal for dissertation at the time of Plan of Study meeting, usually in the second semester, so they can stay focused when it comes to coursework as well as research activities. They are advised to take at least one Independent Study with their committee chairs to review literature and conduct research in their specialized areas. These efforts have helped students develop a clear career goal and prepare themselves for future employment.

(2) Research: Doctoral students are required to complete a research paper in almost every graduate course and encouraged to send the paper 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 PhD Student Award and Top Master's Student Award given out by the School every year. The School also has two fellowships to support student research.

(3) Teaching: Every doctoral student has an opportunity to be involved in class instruction. Most full-time students gain teaching experience through graduate assistantships. Usually they assist professors during the first or the second year, and then they start teaching a course as the instructor of record in the third year, if possible. Since the majority of our graduates chose to teach after graduation, we feel that we need to prepare them for their career. A pedagogy course was added three years ago to help students understand teaching philosophies and master classroom strategies. Students are also encouraged to learn instructional technologies. Most graduate courses have materials on Blackboard. Some students have taken a course or two with the Instructional Technology department. The School also has an award to honor the Top Student Teacher every year.

We also need to put more effort into recruiting students for the doctoral program. A new brochure has been developed and will be sent to mass communication programs in the southeast region. We will participate in the Graduate Student Expo at the 2013 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) conference in D.C.

Closing the Loop/Action Plan Tracking

In the previous academic year, we had one student who had problems with the theory part of the comprehensive exam. This year, all students passed the comprehensive exams successfully. A more rigorous screening process has been adopted to review applications for the Ph.D program. Students are advised to take an Independent Study course with his/her committee chair to prepare for the comprehensive exam. We will continue monitoring students' performance in this area in the upcoming year.

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