

PRAC Grant Summary Report
Department of Communication Studies
May 2013

In April 2012 the Department of Communication Studies received a grant from the Program Review and Assessment Committee (PRAC) which allowed us to collect data as we prepared our self-study for external program review. What follows is a summary of the ongoing assessment efforts developed as a result of the grant.

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment: Undergraduate Program

The specific project supported by the grant integrated the department's programmatic assessment needs and the pedagogical objectives of our graduate research methods course, COMM C501. Combining the self-study and the methods course allowed us to provide students with the opportunity to learn course content by applying relevant concepts and theories in the collection and analysis of data that could then be used by the department for programmatic assessment purposes.

In C501 students learn to design survey instruments, conduct research interviews, and analyze quantitative data. With the support of this grant, these assignments were modified so the students could apply their research skills by surveying and interviewing current BA students and BA alumni in Communication Studies in support of the department's assessment needs. The end result was a pilot survey that provides the basis for our ongoing undergraduate program assessment efforts. By linking the teaching of these methods to the assessment needs of the department, students were given real-world experience in utilizing the methods. The data provided through these efforts contribute valuable information about how the students served by the department assess us.

We surveyed three audiences in the fall of 2012 to assess undergraduate student learning outcomes: G100 Intro to Comm Studies students, capstone course undergraduate students, and our BA alumni. These surveys were based on the pilot survey developed by our graduate students in COMM C501 during spring 2012. While the data are preliminary, it does give us a baseline on which to develop future assessment opportunities.

The pilot survey distributed to each of these audiences consisted of 65 questions distributed via a web link through Oncourse. The link was embedded directly in the Oncourse site of the G100 sections, which may explain the high level of participation. The capstone students and alumni were directed to an external web link (outside their course sections) via the Oncourse Test and Surveys tool, which may have contributed to the lower than desirable participation rate.

G100 Intro to Comm Studies Survey, Fall 2012: G100 Introduction to Communication Studies is supposed to be the first class students take in the major. This survey effort is an attempt to learn what our students bring with them to the major; however, *only 38% of respondents indicated this was their first Communication Studies course*. Thus, the majority of respondents have had some communication instruction in the past. Further, nearly 1/3 of the students in this introductory course are graduating seniors. **This fact deserves more attention in our department faculty meetings to determine whether this is an advising or scheduling issue or something else.** See Table 1 for demographic information for G100 survey respondents.

TABLE 1: Demographic Information, G100 Survey

Participants: 55 total enrolled; 85.5% participation rate		47 students (13 male/34 female)
• BA Majors		44 students
• GPA		$M = 2.951$ (self-reported)
• First-time, full-time students		23
• 4-year External/internal transfer students		14/3
• 2-year externals transfer students		2
• Stop-out adult students (25+)		5
Estimated semesters to degree completions:	1-2 semesters	14
	4-6 semesters	29
	6-10 semesters	4
Total credit hours of communication courses taken only at IUPUI including current term:	6.0 cr. or fewer	28
	7.0-12.0 credits	10
	13.0 – 18.0 credits	8
	More than 19.0 credits	1

We learned that G100 students have strong preferences regarding academic advising, as the following responses indicate:

(Q.8) Preference for seeking academic advice at IUPUI:

- 34.0 % prefer to meet with Comm. Studies faculty advisors
- Fewer than 1.0 % prefer to meet with University College advisors
- 1.1% seek information from other Comm. Studies majors
- Fewer than 0.5% seek information from the department website or IUPUI Bulletin

(Q.9) Frequency for seeking academic advice at IUPUI:

- 68.1% meet with an academic advisor every semester'
- 1.5% meet with an academic advisor once each year
- 1.5% will only meet with an academic advisor if mandated

(Q.10 - 12) Related information

- 14.9 % prefer to meet with the same advisor until graduation
- 50% met with a Comm. Studies advisor prior to enrollment in G100
- 38.3% currently taking G100 as their first Communication Studies course

Capstone Student Survey: Students are supposed to enroll in a capstone experience near the end of their undergraduate program. Only five students completed the survey from over 150 solicited; thus we are careful about generalizing from this information. We need to embed this survey into course assignments in future semesters to ensure better participation.

From these few responses, we learned that the majority of respondents:

- Are first time-full-time to IUPUI Communication Studies (which is not a normal characteristic of our majors)
- Meet with the faculty in the Communication Studies department for advising
- Meet with an advisor every semester

- Would prefer to meet with the same faculty advisor in the department until they graduate

BA Alumni Survey: Eleven alumni completed the survey (one male, 10 female). We had to rely largely on personal contact information since the alumni email information we received from our Development Office was out-of-date. The majority of the survey contacts were made through Facebook.

A summary of the results of each of these surveys appears on the next page. Survey questions were developed with our student learning outcomes (SLOs) in mind. For reference, our department SLOs are:

Upon graduation, communication studies majors will possess the knowledge, skills, and ability to explain, apply and evaluate communication concepts. Specifically students will:

1. Explain that communication is:
 - 1A. A process
 - 1B. Grounded in context
 - 1C. Inherently reflexive.
2. Apply communication concepts toward a better understanding of self, other, and community.
 - 2A. Engage in mindful listening
 - 2B. Demonstrate audience-centeredness
 - 2C. Demonstrate critical understanding of personal communication style
 - 2D. Demonstrate critical understanding of others' communication styles
 - 2E. Manage/resolve communication conflict
 - 2F. Paraphrase the perspective of the other (including cross-culture)
 - 2G. Communicate in a civically engaged manner
3. Employ a critical framework for constructing and evaluating messages across contexts.
 - 3A. Use communication theory to create effective messages across contexts
 - 3B. Use communication theory to recommend practical solutions to communication problems
 - 3C. Evaluate messages across contexts using methodological criteria
 - 3D. Practice critical consumption of symbol use
 - 3E. Practice responsible/ethical communication across contexts

TABLE 2: Comparative Survey Responses Related to Student Learning Outcomes

Likert-type Scale: Strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1)	Corresponding Student Learning Outcome	G100				CAPSTONE				ALUMNI			
		Student Responses (N=47)			Mean	Student Responses (N=5)			Mean	Student Responses (N=11)			Mean
Surveys conducted Fall Semester 2012		Disagree-Strongly Disagree	Un-Decided	Agree - Strongly Agree		Disagree-Strongly Disagree	Neutral	Agree - Strongly Agree		Disagree-Strongly Disagree	Neutral	Agree - Strongly Agree	
Questions relate to courses taken in Communication Studies at IUPUI only.													
Courses helped students understand that communication is a process used to achieve an outcome	1.a				4.1				4.4	2	0	8	3.9
Courses helped students understand reflexive nature of communication	1.c	3	12	32	3.7	0	0	5	4.4	2	1	8	4.1
Courses helped students be successful communicator in a variety of contexts	3	2	9	36	3.9	0	0	5	4.4	1	1	9	4.2
Courses helped students understand relevance of context in solving communication problems	1.b	2	10	35	3.9	0	0	5	4.4	1	1	9	4.5
Courses helped students understand the role of cultural differences in creating and interpreting communication messages	2.f	2	8	37	4	0	0	5	4.8	0	1	10	4.2
Courses prepared students to be mindful listeners.	2.a	3	10	34	4	0	0	5	4.6	1	4	6	4.3
Courses taught students importance of nonverbal communication in constructing message meaning.		2	10	35	3.9	0	0	5	5	1	2	8	4.6
Courses prepared students to utilize a variety of research methods for evaluating communication messages.	3.c	1	21	25	3.6	0	1	4	4.2	0	3	8	4.1
Courses helped student become better communicator with peers and co-workers		1	9	37	4	0	0	5	4.4	1	2	8	4.2
Courses provided students with theoretical knowledge to intervene in unwanted communication patterns	3.a, b	5	16	26	3.6	0	1	4	4.2	1	4	6	3.8
Courses prepared students to resolve communication conflict between groups and individuals with diverse backgrounds	2.e	4	15	28	3.7	0	0	5	4.2	1	2	8	4
Courses taught students to be ethical communicators	3.e	2	15	32	3.8	0	0	5	4.8	0	3	8	4.44
Courses taught students theories to predict communication outcomes in a variety of contexts		6	15	26	3.6	0	2	3	4	1	4	6	3.9
Courses helped students define their own communication style	2.c	3	16	28	3.8	1	1	4	4.2	1	2	8	4.2
Courses taught students to consider background and culture of audience in preparing for speeches	2.b	4	11	32	3.9	0	0	5	4.4	0	2	9	4.78
Courses helped students understand the extent to which audience plays a role in creating message meaning	2.b	1	9	37	4	0	0	5	4.6	1	2	8	4.2
Courses helped students understand that the communication style of others is as important as their own	2.d	3	14	30	3.8	0	0	5	5	1	2	8	4.2
Courses helped students become a better communicator with family/friends		1	13	33	3.9	0	0	5	4.6	1	2	8	4.2

In terms of student learning, these preliminary results appear positive. Mean scores improve from G100 to capstone, and most drop off slightly from capstone to alumni. Given the small number of capstone students and alumni who completed the survey, we are hesitant to make much of these responses. Yet the positive trend is encouraging. In particular, SLO 1.b on the importance of context, 2.b on culture, and 3.e on ethics are strengths in student learning that students maintained as alumni. SLO 2.d on understanding the communication style of others demonstrated the largest growth in learning from G100 to capstone.

TABLE 3: Comparative Survey Results Related to Student Perceptions of our Program

Likert-type Scale: Strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1)	G100				CAPSTONE				ALUMNI			
	Student Responses (N=47)			Mean	Student Responses (N=5)			Mean	Student Responses (N=11)			Mean
Surveys conducted Fall Semester 2012	Disagree-Strongly Disagree	Un-Decided	Agree - Strongly Agree		Disagree-Strongly Disagree	Neutral	Agree - Strongly Agree		Disagree-Strongly Disagree	Neutral	Agree - Strongly Agree	
Questions relate to courses taken in Communication Studies at IUPUI only.												
Program will help/helped students secure the job they want after graduation	2	9	36	4.1	0	0	4	4.2	7	1	3	2.5
Program provides/ed students with convenient course offerings	7	4	36	3.9	0	0	5	4.4	3	1	7	3.4
Program provides/ed students with opportunities to interact with faculty	3	7	37	4	0	0	5	4.8	2	1	8	4
Students are satisfied with the faculty in Communication Studies.	2	10	35	4	0	0	5	4.6	3	1	7	3.7
Students are satisfied with the staff in Communication Studies.	0	12	35	4.1	0	0	5	4.4	2	3	6	3.6
Students are satisfied with support staff in other IUPUI departments.	2	14	31	3.8	1	0	4	3.8	2	1	8	3.6
Program provides/ed opportunities for co-curricular activities	2	7	38	4	0	0	5	4.4	2	2	7	3.7
Program provides/ed communication knowledge to be successful in the workplace	1	4	42	4.3	0	0	5	4.8	2	2	7	3.7
Program provides/ed skills to be successful in the workplace	1	7	39	4.1	0	0	5	4.8	2	2	7	3.8
Students are satisfied with the courses in Communication Studies	1	8	38	4.2	0	0	5	5	3	1	7	3.6
Students are satisfied with the choice to major in Communication Studies	1	7	39	4.3	0	0	5	4.6	2	2	7	3.6

In terms of trends, the mean response of every Student perception item improved from G100 to capstone, which we would expect. However, the mean of the majority of responses dropped from capstone to alumni, and some rather significantly. In particular, alumni do not perceive that the program helped them secure the job they wanted after graduation. While this could certainly be explained, in part, by the economy, it does suggest that we need to do a better job helping our students see how their communication studies major prepares them for a variety of careers in the 21st century.

Analysis of Undergraduate Student Focus Groups

In addition to pilot survey development, graduate students in COMM C501 conducted focus groups with undergraduate majors to determine whether student learning outcomes (SLOs) were being met. Students in 300/400 level courses were recruited, but only seven students participated in the focus groups. Even with a small sample, student participants demonstrated a high degree of learning.

The largest number of total instances of a single set of SLOs supported the strongest learning indicators for SLO 1.a, 1.b, & 1.c with SLO 3.a & b indicating the second strongest area of learning for this sample. Clearly these data indicate that the student participants can explain in both written and oral formats that communication is a process that is grounded in context and inherently reflexive.

Focus group 1 results indicated 49 instances of representing communication as a process that is grounded in context and inherently reflexive compared with 81 instances in FG2 with a total of 130 instances across both groups and a mean for SLO 1.abc of 65. FG1 results showed approximately 25 instances of using theory and FG2 had approximately 42 instances of using theory. The total number of instances were 67 with a mean for SLO 3.ab of 33.5

TABLE 4: Focus Group Support of SLOs

Part Grp	N	SLO 1ABC	SLO 2AB	SLO 2CD, 2F, 3E	SLO 2E, 2G	SLO 3AB
FG 1	4	49	20	21	14	25
FG 2	3	81	19	24	33	42
Total	7	130	39	45	47	67
Mean	3.5	65	19.5	22.5	23.5	33.5

One reason for the large variation between FG1 and FG2 might be contributed to the time pizzas arrived. SLO 1.abc was the first set of responses from both focus groups. FG1 had their pizza before the session began, but FG2 did not get their pizza until about 2/3 of the way through the session. FG2 had more comments related to the SLOs, perhaps because they perceived they had to talk more until the pizza arrived, whereas FG1 was eating and talking. Content analysis indicated that students demonstrated a strong understanding of SLOs 2.ab although that area had the smallest total instances in the areas of mindful listening and audience centeredness.

Manage/resolve communication conflict (2.e) and communicate in a civically engaged manner (2.g) did not have clear language indicators (single 1-2 word phrases); however, a few longer student responses indicated some understanding of steps to resolve communication conflict.

Finally, it should be noted that interview questions used for the focus groups did not truly evaluate learning outcomes 3.c and 3.d.

From this initial focus group work, it appears that this group of participants could demonstrate their communication learning in oral and written forms. We are pleased with what this initial data suggests about what our students are learning as related to our SLOs.

What We've Learned about the Undergraduate Program

We believe from our initial assessment efforts that our students are learning what we hope they're learning. Continuing student perception data and focus group data corroborate this conclusion; continuing students perceive they are effective or very effective in communication-related items and focus group participants can talk about their communication learning using key word choices which indicate specific learning outcomes have been achieved. Survey data indicates improvement in student learning from G100 to the capstone-level, with a slight decrease as students become alumni. Yet the level of learning retained at the alumni level is still strong, with most item means 4.0 or higher on a 5-point scale. We are cautious in generalizing too much from this initial effort, however, given the small number of participants, and we look forward to continuing the assessment process made possible through this PRAC grant.

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment: Graduate Program

As an extension of the work of COMM G501, one student continued the assessment work in the form of an applied project. In consultation with the department, she developed and piloted a survey of our MA alumni in October 2012. The survey consisted of 26 questions and was distributed as a web link via the Oncourse Test and Survey tool to the MA alumni for whom we have email contact information. We received 16 responses from the nearly 70 alumni of the program. Of those 16 participants, seven provided contact information and 13 reported willingness to participate in future assessment activities for the department.

Table 5: Demographic Information of MA Alumni Survey Respondents Participants: 16 total		13 female/3 male
• M.A. GPA		<i>M</i> = 3.8 (self-reported)
• Thesis/ALP		12/4
• After completion of M.A. in Communication Studies		<i>Secured new position related to comm</i> = 4 <i>Continued in current position</i> = 5 <i>Applied for and began working on PhD</i> = 7
Semesters to degree completions:	2-3 semesters	2
	4-5 semesters	2
	6+ semesters (3-5 years)	12

The results of the survey responses are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: MA Alumni Survey Results

Survey Questions (Likert-type Scale, Strongly Agree 5 – Strongly Disagree 1)	Mean	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
Q.1 My MA in Applied Communication helped me secure the type of job I desired. (1 no response)	3.33	3	1	2	5	4
Q.2 If my goal was to pursue a PhD, the MA program in Applied Communication helped prepare me for PhD study.	4.36	0	1	0	3	6
Q.3 The Applied Communication MA program provided me with opportunities to interact with faculty in and out of the classroom.	4.61	1	0	1	4	10
Q.4 Overall I am satisfied with the faculty in the IUPUI Department of Communication Studies at IUPUI.	4.26	1	2	0	5	8

Q.5 What are the strengths of the faculty in the Applied Communication MA program? (open-ended responses)		Experts in field, creative, community involvement				
Q.6 Overall I am satisfied with the MA advising I received in the IUPUI Department of Communication Studies.	4.05	1	1	0	8	6
Q.7 My advisor was knowledgeable concerning important topics (e.g., comps, thesis requirements, ALP)	4.32	1	0	0	6	9
Q.8 My MA degree in Applied Communication helped prepare me to work successfully with an organization to diagnose communication problems.	3.72	0	1	4	8	3
Q.9 My MA degree in Applied Communication helped prepare me to apply communication theory to assess communication problems.	4.42	0	0	1	8	7
Q.10 The MA program in Applied Communication at IUPUI provided me with the tools to approach communication problems from a variety of methodological perspectives.	4.21	0	0	3	7	6
Q.11 The Applied Communication MA program was academically rigorous.	4.16	0	1	1	8	6
Q.12 My professors respected my ideas.	4.42	0	1	2	3	10
Q.13 The curriculum of the MA program in Applied Communication prepared me for my thesis or ALP.	4.37	0	0	2	5	9
Q.14 The process of Comprehensive Final Exams was a valid learning experience.	3.84	3	2	1	4	6
Q.15 Work on my Thesis or Applied Learning Project (ALP) was beneficial to me.	4.56	0	2	1	3	10
Q.16 I felt comfortable expressing my ideas and opinions in class.	4.53	0	1	1	4	10
Q.17 I developed a sense of community with other students in my program.	4.32	0	1	2	3	10
Q.18 How did the MA program in Applied Communication improve your ability to apply communication theory to solve communication problems? Give an example of an instance in which you applied communication theory to solve a communication problem. (open-ended responses)		11 responses with concrete examples of solving communication problems				
Q.19 If you participated in research activities with faculty while in the MA in Applied. (open-ended responses)		5 responses providing samples of research collaboration with communication faculty				

Q.20 If you presented at conventions while in the MA program in Applied Communication, please list those experiences below. (open-ended responses)		4 graduate students indicated they presented at conferences				
Q.21 If you participated in any applied projects in which you worked with an organization during your time in the MA program in Applied Communication, with which organizations did you work? (open-ended responses)		6 graduate students participated in an Applied Research Project				
Q.22 Overall, I am satisfied with the courses I took in Applied Communication at IUPUI.	4.5	1	0	1	5	9
Q.23 If you were not fully satisfied with all MA classes in Applied Communication, please provide further explanation below. (open-ended responses)		3 students provided comments about graduate courses in the M.A. Communication Studies Program				
Q.24 Overall, I am satisfied with my choice to complete a MA in Applied Communication major at IUPUI.	4.39	1	0	2	2	11
Q.25 If you were not fully satisfied with your choice of MA program, please provide further explanation below. (open-ended responses)		3 students provided negative feedback on major helping them get a job.				
Q.26 What did you like best about the Applied Communication MA program at IUPUI? What are the strengths of the program? (open-ended responses)						

The following are select student responses (bold added) taken directly from the Graduate Alumni Survey, Question 26 on what students liked about the program:

- Strengths include the receptiveness of **faculty to mentoring**, the applied nature of the program and emphasis on use, and location with many opportunities for collaboration.
- Interesting courses offered. **Strength and passion of the faculty.**
- There are several faculty members that I really enjoyed and this made the program quite enjoyable. The **strengths of the program are the faculty members.**
- The faculty is fantastic. or is it are fantastic? Luckily it wasn't a master's in grammar
- The **faculty** were always supportive and accommodating. There were options to both prepare for **further academic study and applying communication in the workplace.** I felt supported by my fellow students and made several close friendships, which I maintain several years later.
- I enjoyed the **student community** - I think the more we can enhance that, the better.
- What I liked most about my time in the Applied Communication MA program was the ability to **explore theories and their applications both inside and outside the classroom.** The relationships I developed in the program - with both faculty and fellow students - helped me expand my communication knowledge base and develop new skills that were valuable in the real world.
- As mentioned above the faculty and staff were a huge strength to the program. I was able to become very close with my cohort of students I entered the program with.

- I have always appreciated the diverse range of specific topics that are allowed to be researched in class as long as assignment criteria are met. Additionally, it is very helpful to have the opportunity to begin work on one's thesis as part of a class assignment. This is good for two reasons. 1) It is a comfort to be able to begin working early on the biggest undertaking of the program. 2) Getting an early start provides ample time to discover the road that appeared to be very fruitful would likely lead to a dead end. This way, it is only a minor setback. Both adjustments and progress can continue to be made when it is time to focus solely on the thesis.
- It was a good introduction to the communication discipline and the **professors were approachable and accessible**. Offers flexibility in developing a master's program specific to your goals, whether it is within or outside of academia.
- **Excellent faculty** - some a little more engaged than others however; a lot of opportunities for teaching, research, conferences and rigorous coursework; also great work/life balance with most of the students - so there is an opportunity for some great friendships out of class; also very strong PhD placement among graduates - I was very happy to be accepted into my top choice!

Students in the MA in Applied Communication program will have opportunities to:

1. Apply communication theories to specific communication issues and problems in the workplace and the community and use communication-specific theory to predict human interaction.
2. Design and execute communication strategies and create programs to address contemporary communication problems.
3. Demonstrate an advanced theoretical knowledge in preparation for Ph.D. studies

Questions 8, 9, 10, and 18 speak directly to learning outcomes one and two above. The majority of respondents indicated that they either agree or strongly agree that the program helped prepare them to apply communication theory, diagnose and assess communication problems, and approach communication problems from a variety of methodological perspectives. The open ended responses to question 18 indicate students could provide concrete examples of the ways in which they applied communication theory to diagnose and assess communication problems.

Outcome three, preparation for Ph.D. studies, is demonstrated in question two, in which 9 of the 10 responses to this question indicated respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the program helped prepare them for PhD study, if that was a goal identified by the participant.

Other strengths of the MA program, based on survey results, include opportunities to interact with faculty, advisor knowledge, program rigor, and the comfort level of students expressing their ideas and in opportunities to develop a student community. Open ended responses most often indicate the faculty as a strength of the program.

What We've Learned about our Graduate Program

We believe that we have a strong, innovative MA program based not only on alumni feedback but also on our recent award from the Master's Education Section of the National Communication Association. Students mentioned they enjoyed working with faculty and the applied, collaborative nature of the program in their open-ended comments.

We believe students are learning what we hope they're learning. Survey responses and open-ended comments from MA program alumni demonstrate students can apply communication theory, diagnose

communication problems, and approach communication situations from a variety of methodological perspectives.

We acknowledge there are areas where we can improve our program. An area we may want to investigate in the future is the process of comprehensive exams, which 1/3 of MA alumni respondents felt was not a valid learning experience. Three students indicated they were not satisfied with the program because it did not help them find a job upon graduation. We may want to consider ways to enhance the community collaborations open to our students to increase their opportunities for career success upon graduation.

All in all we are pleased with the assessment efforts made possible through this PRAC grant and look forward to continuing to improve our efforts. Thank you for the possibilities made possible through this grant.