Department: **Communication Studies**

Department Contact: Dr. Christina Sabee (Department Chair)

College: Liberal & Creative Arts

Please list your program learning goals.

In Spring 2012, Communication Studies adopted the following Program Learning Objectives [PLOs]:

1) **Theory:** Communication Studies majors will be able to articulate and use appropriate theories to analyze communication in a way that is methodologically consistent in paradigm and context.

2) **Ethics:** Communication Studies majors will be able to articulate ethical standards and will be disposed to engage in ethical practice within specific communication contexts.

3) **Application:** Communication Studies majors will apply course material to aspects of their personal life, social life, and/or their local communities (e.g., delivering public speeches, performances, or other community focused discourse, even if that delivery happens only in the classroom).

4) **Scholarship:** Communication Studies majors will be able to read critically and evaluate appropriately original scholarship in the discipline.

The following summary paragraph (reflecting PLOs) was also previously approved for inclusion on all upper-division Communication Studies syllabi:

Students earning a baccalaureate in Communication Studies demonstrate articulation and use of appropriate communication theories to multiple contexts, can articulate ethical standards and engage in ethical practice of communication, can read critically and evaluate appropriately communication scholarship, and can apply their knowledge of communication to personal, professional and political life.

What assessment finding(s) is the department addressing?

In AY 2015-16, the Communication Studies Department’s assessment activities were two-fold. First, COMM focused on ensuring that all syllabi for classes that can count toward the COMM major included the PLO summary paragraph as well as which PLOs are assessed in the class. Second, COMM created and tested a PLO evaluation rubric that was then used to assess student achievement of PLOs through ePortfolios created in COMM 670 (Capstone/Senior Seminar). Although COMM found that all four PLOs are
assessed in classes throughout the major and that COMM seniors were demonstrating achievement of all PLOs, COMM recognized the need to strengthen student awareness of PLOs throughout the major in order to further strengthen students’ demonstrated achievement of PLOs.

Our AY 2016-17 assessment project continued focus on communicating PLOs and their connection to course assignments to students via course syllabi, but also explored how more explicit coverage of PLOs and support for students archiving their course work (to later demonstrate PLO achievement) might be effectively incorporated into COMM GWAR classes, which students are required to complete in the first eight units of the major.

What was the process through which faculty considered a response to those findings?

In order to “close the loop” with regard to student awareness and understanding of PLOs, COMM engaged in assessment activities in two areas in AY 2016-17.

**Area I: Communicating COMM PLOs to Students and Effectively Assessing PLO Achievement**

Building on our AY 2015-16 assessment activities, in AY 2016-17, the COMM assessment committee:

1) led a workshop in August 2016 titled “What are you assessing and how?” that focused on COMM PLOs and linking them to assessment in our classes (this workshop was designed for upper-division COMM faculty);
   → Result: T/TT and Lecturer Faculty who participated in the “What are you assessing and how?” workshop described it as extremely useful. All participants received a thank you letter for their participation and the COMM Department Chair was provided with a list of participants for potential use in annual reviews.

2) reviewed all upper-division syllabi in fall 2016 to ensure PLOs and their connection to course assignments are communicated to students;
   → Result: Review of all upper-division COMM syllabi indicated that COMM continues to improve with regard to inclusion of the approved PLO summary paragraph and what PLOs are assessed in a class. In fall 2016, 85% of upper-division COMM syllabi accurately included the PLO summary paragraph (up from 81% in spring 2016 and 56% in fall 2015). In addition, in fall 2016, 91% of upper-division COMM syllabi indicated which PLOs are assessed in the class. The review also found that all four PLOs are being assessed throughout the major. All upper-division
faulty received a letter for each course they taught indicating if they were meeting PLO communication requirements or not. Specific support information was provided when needed and all faculty were reminded that the COMM Assessment Committee has created and maintains an iLearn collaborative site with university, college, and department syllabus policies, including PLO information.

3) focused on drop-in advising and GWAR classes as sites for communicating that students should preserve their completed course work for use in COMM 670 (i.e., the course in which they will explicitly showcase PLO achievement);

→ Result: In order to raise student awareness of the need to save their course work, flyers were created and made available at 90 hours of drop-in advising in the COMM department in both fall 2016 and spring 2017. The COMM Assessment Committee also sent a memo to all COMM GWAR instructors in fall 2016 (COMM GWAR must be completed in the first 8 units of the major) asking them to announce the need for students to retain their completed work throughout the major.

4) reviewed a sampling of COMM 670 ePortfolios to further evaluate the PLO assessment rubric created in AY 2015-16 and the degree to which COMM seniors are achieving PLOs;

→ Result: Use of the COMM PLO rubric in fall 2016 to assess student achievement of PLOs revealed that the rubric works very well. One minor modification of a global qualitative item was made to allow more precise distinction between "moderate achievement of PLOs" and "inconsistent achievement of PLOs." Capstone portfolios that were sampled and assessed resulted in overall lower PLO achievement ratings than in AY 2015-16. Reasons for lower achievement ratings included: a) students not having original class artifacts to support their explanation of PLO achievement; b) possible differences in faculty definitions of "theory," which is central to one PLO; and c) vague explanations by students of how artifacts that were retained reflect PLO achievement. COMM believes these issues can be addressed through the results of the project that constituted Area II of our AY 2016-17 assessment work.
Area II: Integrating Understandings of PLOs and Archiving Course Work Via an ePortfolio into COMM GWAR Courses

COMM faculty recognize COMM GWAR courses as a start to the major and COMM 670 (capstone/senior seminar) as a finish, express desires to see students introduced to PLOs and an ePortfolio as a resource for archiving course work at the start of their major, and have suggested that PLO familiarization and ePortfolio set up might be best achieved within an “introductory” GWAR course; therefore, the COMM Assessment Committee:

1) reviewed all fall 2016 COMM GWAR syllabi and writing assignments to identify genres of writing being emphasized, the goal being to determine what faculty are defining as writing in Communication Studies;
   Result: Many genres of writing are utilized in COMM (e.g., reflection, summary, application, synthesis, creative) and different courses emphasize different genres. COMM GWAR courses reflect diversity in that they require more than one genre of writing; however, review of COMM GWAR syllabi clearly demonstrates that persuasive writing/argument is consistently emphasized within a major writing assignment in all COMM GWAR classes. These assignments focus on either some form of analysis or synthesis of scholarly research. Support for student development in persuasive writing either through analysis or synthesis of scholarly literature (synthesis of scholarly literature may also involve evaluation or application) creates consistency and all COMM instructors can have a reasonable expectation of student experience with persuasive writing.

2) Electronically “interviewed” COMM GWAR instructors in order to help determine how COMM’s GWAR course might be strategically used to increase student understanding of the Communication Studies discipline and COMM program learning outcomes [PLOs]. The interview was designed to help the COMM Assessment Committee understand what experienced COMM GWAR instructors see as critical to GWAR course success and if some changes might help meet both student and program learning goals. Specific questions were asked regarding: a) genres of writing COMM GWAR instructors perceive as central to the COMM major and/or discipline; b) what is explicitly taught about writing in one’s COMM GWAR class; c) elements of their current COMM GWAR writing assignments and processes that they find especially impactful; d) perceived viability of integrating coverage of PLOs and ePortfolio in current COMM GWAR courses; and e) perceived strengths and weaknesses of a generalized introductory COMM GWAR course that includes PLOs, ePortfolio, overview of the discipline, and some signature assignments;
With regard to writing instruction in COMM GWAR, instructors report different ways of talking about and teaching writing and they all have assignments and processes they would hate to lose, but COMM GWAR instructors get at similar writing topics in their different ways. COMM GWAR instructors emphasize both writing content and style by addressing things like: research, creating a thesis statement, developing an argument, source citation and referencing (APA style seems to be emphasized), transitions, writing mechanics, and language choice. It is clear that COMM GWAR instructors have put a good deal of thought into how they support development of student writing. COMM GWAR instructors may appreciate more departmental opportunities to gather and discuss their “best practices” for teaching writing.

With regard to incorporating PLOs and Portfolium, COMM GWAR instructor responses ranged from lukewarm to enthusiastic. The one lukewarm response indicated concern with trying to do too much in one class (i.e., creating confusion by covering PLOs, Portfolium, subject content, and writing). Those expressing positivity or enthusiasm about including PLOs and Portfolium in COMM GWAR agreed that students should be better exposed to PLOs and what they mean early in the major, and they should have the opportunity to archive their course work through Portfolium. Most COMM GWAR instructors indicated that they can incorporate this content into existing GWAR classes, while others said this would eliminate too much subject content in a class that is already thin due to time devoted to writing instruction. (It is worth noting that with our new major revision that begins in fall 2017, a student’s GWAR class will no longer represent a course taken in a subject area, so some loss of subject content may be less of an issue).

While some current COMM GWAR instructors may choose not to teach GWAR or certain GWAR courses if they must introduce students to COMM PLOs and help them set up a portfolio for archiving their work, the vast majority of COMM GWAR instructors indicate that integrating PLOs and a portfolio for archiving COMM course work is appropriate and viable in GWAR. There is disagreement about how much time could be devoted to familiarizing GWAR students with PLOs, but the “temperature” leaned toward keeping the varied COMM GWAR courses we have and integrating significant discussion of PLOs and archiving work.

3) electronically “interviewed” a sample of former COMM GWAR students regarding specific examples of things they learned in GWAR that helped them with their writing, writing for Communication Studies, and/or
Completing written projects; how COMM GWAR impacted their writing for other COMM classes; and what aspects of the GWAR writing assignments they completed were especially helpful or impactful for writing for the Communication Studies major;

Result → Very few “interviews” were returned, but most students responding to the electronic interview reported COMM GWAR had a positive impact on their writing.

4) reported findings to COMM faculty, offering a proposal for incorporating PLOs and ePortfolio into current COMM GWAR classes.

Result → Faculty preference for incorporating PLOs and Portfolium into existing COMM GWAR classes (rather than creating a singular “introductory” COMM GWAR class) would maintain the COMM GWAR benefits students perceive; therefore, based on the review of COMM GWAR syllabi and electronic interviews of GWAR faculty and students, the COMM Assessment Committee proposed the following to the COMM faculty:

COMM GWAR Course Policies and Support
Section 1
All COMM GWAR courses must adhere to the following University GWAR course criteria:

Criterion #1, Class Size: Courses satisfying the GWAR should have an enrollment maximum of 20-25 students. In rare cases, if departmental conditions warrant, and a rationale is provided to justify the exception, CWEP may approve a course that exceeds the maximum.

Criterion #2, Number of Pages/Words: The overall assignments for the course will include a minimum of 15 pages [double-spaced], meaning the equivalent of 4000 words, of formal writing that demonstrates upper-division written English proficiency within the given discipline.

Criterion #3, How Writing Will Affect the Final Grade: At least 60% of the grade in GWAR courses must be based on written assignments and take-home essay exams (e.g., exams designed to allow for revision), which are evaluated for both content and quality of writing.

Criterion #4, Revision of Assignments: GWAR courses must include substantive revision of major, graded, written assignments in response to feedback.
Criterion #5, Types of Assignments: GWAR courses should include a variety of writing assignments that are sequenced and/or distributed throughout the semester, rather than concentrated at the end.

Criterion #6, In-class Attention to Writing: GWAR course syllabi should reflect significant class time devoted to instruction in writing conventions within the given discipline.

Criterion #7, Number of Units: GWAR courses, or course sequences, should be at least 3 units.

Section 2
Because COMM GWAR is required in the first 8 units of upper-division course work for the major (i.e., represents a “start” to the major), beginning in fall 2017 all COMM GWAR courses will reflect the following course expectations:

Course Expectation #1: A minimum of 2 days (assuming a twice weekly class) will be devoted to substantive engagement of COMM program learning objectives [PLOs], their meanings, and how specific course work connects to PLO achievement and evaluation.

Course Expectation #2: An additional .5 to 1 class meeting (assuming a twice weekly class) will enable students to create an ePortfolio account, learn how to create entries within the ePortfolio, and understand how they can use the ePortfolio to archive their COMM course work for later synthesis and showcasing of achievements in their COMM 670 (senior seminar/capstone) course.

Course Expectation #3: COMM GWAR instructors will work to elaborate, discuss, and tie course content back to specific PLOs throughout the semester, as appropriate.

Course Expectation #4: COMM GWAR students will complete at least one substantive writing assignment requiring persuasive writing/argumentation either in the form of: a) analysis or b) synthesis of primary scholarship (note: synthesis of primary scholarship may also include evaluation or application of the scholarship)

Course Expectation #5: Given the requirement that all GWAR course syllabi must reflect significant class time devoted to instruction in writing conventions within the discipline, all COMM
GWAR syllabi will include, but are not limited to, instruction in the following topics: a) developing a thesis statement, b) building an argument, c) citing sources and referencing, and d) editing and proofreading.

Section 3
Given the above COMM GWAR course expectations, beginning in fall 2017 all COMM GWAR instructors will include the following three standardized student learning objectives [SLOs], in addition to their own course content-related SLOs, on their GWAR syllabi:

SLO 1: Students will demonstrate understanding of COMM PLOs and be able to relate GWAR and other course work to PLOs.
SLO 2: Students will successfully set up an ePortfolio supported by SFSU and demonstrate ability to create, edit, and archive COMM course work in the ePortfolio.
SLO 3: Students will demonstrate proficiency in persuasive writing/written argumentation.

COMM GWAR instructors have freedom to determine, in the context of their course, how to integrate discussion of PLOs, use of an ePortfolio for archiving COMM course work, and persuasive writing.

COMM GWAR instructors have freedom to determine how they will assess the three required SLOs including, but not limited to:

a) requiring students to upload papers for GWAR and other current COMM courses into their newly established ePortfolio (SLO 2),
b) requiring a short paper wherein students identify and explain the COMM PLOs and explain how specific COMM assignments they are completing in the current semester relate to the PLOs (SLO 1),
c) incorporating quiz or exam questions related to PLOs and using an ePortfolio (SLO 1, 2).
d) requiring a written critical analysis (SLO 3)
e) requiring a mini (i.e., limited number of sources) literature review (SLO 3)

Section 4
The COMM Assessment Committee will support COMM GWAR instructors’ integration of the required SLOs by:

a) Facilitating a 2-hour COMM GWAR instructor community gathering in late-spring 2017. Eighty minutes of the
community gathering will focus on collaboratively discussing current COMM PLOs, what they mean to us, and how they are reflected in our current GWAR course assignments. Forty minutes will focus on familiarizing COMM GWAR instructors with Portfolium, the ePortfolio platform currently supported by SFSU’s Academic Technology [AT] division.
b) Continue to maintain the COMM Syllabus Policies iLearn Collaborative Site, which includes COMM PLOs and examples of how assignments in various COMM courses relate to PLOs. More examples of how assignments in specific COMM courses link to PLOs will be added as they are made available by faculty.
c) Adding sample COMM GWAR syllabi to the iLearn COMM Syllabus Policies Collaborative Site in order to reflect different ways of integrating PLOs and ePortfolio into the course calendar and assessment.
d) Adding review of COMM GWAR syllabi to ensure required SLO inclusion and evidence of PLO/ePortfolio engagement to its annual review of upper-division COMM syllabi.

What changes have you made or are you seeking to make in order to address the findings?

The COMM GWAR policy and support proposal described, above, was presented to COMM faculty at the March 2017 faculty meeting. The proposal was unanimously approved.

The COMM Assessment Committee will facilitate a gathering on May 12, 2017, to support COMM GWAR faculty in implementing the new policies. The stated goals of the gathering are: 1) to collaboratively discuss current COMM PLOs, their meanings, and their current assessment in our COMM GWAR courses in order to facilitate introduction and engagement of PLOs in future COMM GWAR instruction; and 2) to overview basic set up and navigation of a Portfolium ePortfolio account and entries, given the requirement to facilitate COMM GWAR students setting up an ePortfolio and using it to archive COMM course work for later synthesis and application in their capstone course.

During the gathering, the COMM Assessment Committee will:
1. provide a brief summary of new policies affecting COMM GWAR classes;
2. overview and facilitate discussion of PLO #1: Articulating and Using Theory;
3. overview and facilitate discussion of PLO #2: Articulating and Engaging in Ethical Communication Standards;
4. overview and facilitate discussion of PLO #3: Applying Course Knowledge to Personal, Professional, and/or Community Contexts;
5. overview and facilitate discussion of PLO #4: Reading Critically and Evaluating Primary Scholarship;
6. provide a detailed handout regarding setting up and using a Portfolium ePortfolio in COMM GWAR; and
7. facilitate discussion of take-aways and how COMM GWAR instructors can share additional resources.

What assessment activities do you plan to undertake next academic year? Is there a particular program learning goal that you would like to assess? Are there other assessment findings that you’d like to address? In light of your assessment work, changes in the field, or other influences, do you want to take the opportunity to revise the program goals next year? Will you move on to assess a different learning goal?

• In AY 2015-16, the COMM Assessment Committee established a means of program assessment using COMM 670 (Senior Seminar/Capstone) final projects, and developed a detailed rubric for assessing PLO achievement.
• In AY 2016-17, the COMM Assessment Committee researched and proposed COMM GWAR course policies to strengthen student understandings of PLOs early in the major and their ability to, later, showcase PLO achievement in COMM 670.
• Therefore, in AY 2017-18 the COMM Assessment Committee proposes to:
  1. review COMM syllabi in fall and spring for inclusion of approved PLO paragraph and connection of course assignments to PLOs, then communicate with faculty regarding syllabi;
  2. review COMM GWAR syllabi in fall and spring to ensure PLO coverage and Portfolium set up, then communicate with COMM GWAR instructors regarding COMM GWAR policies;
  3. continue to maintain the iLearn Collaborative Site regarding COMM syllabus policies;
  4. add faculty-identified resources for COMM GWAR PLO coverage (e.g., readings, videos, handouts, assignments) to the iLearn Syllabus Policies Collaborative Site;
  5. work with one to two faculty members per semester to develop PLO-course assignment connection handouts currently modeled on iLearn COMM Syllabus Policies Collaborative Site;
  6. facilitate faculty discussion of meanings of current PLOs, National Communication Association Learning Outcomes in Communication Project, and potential eliminations/revisions/additions to our current PLOs;
  7. put forth a revised COMM PLO proposal (i.e., department meeting action item) based on faculty discussions (if needed);
  8. initiate a process wherein each T/TT faculty member, in both fall and spring, assesses one COMM 670 ePortfolio for PLO achievement/program assessment (note: in AY 2017-18, given the assessment rubric’s specificity to current PLOs, this assessment may
be modified to focus only on current PLOs that are maintained following proposal items 6 & 7);  
9. write the department’s annual assessment report.