Department:

Communication Studies

Department Contact:

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College:

Liberal and Creative Arts

Please list your program learning goals.

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

1. 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. Communication Studies majors will be able to articulate ethical standards and will be disposed to engage in ethical practice within specific communication contexts.
3. 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. Communication Studies majors will be able to read critically and evaluate appropriately original scholarship in the discipline.

The following summary paragraph (reflecting the four PLOs) was also approved for inclusion on all Communication Studies syllabi for courses that can fulfill a requirement for the major:

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.
Which program goal did you choose to assess?

In AY 2017-18, the Communication Studies department assessed PLO #3: 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).

How was the assessment completed? What evidence did the faculty consider?

The Communication Studies department took several steps to build upon assessment projects completed in AY 2015-16 and AY 2016-17 and to forge new ground in our assessment activities.

1. One of our ongoing goals in the Communication Studies department is to communicate our PLOs to students throughout the Communication Studies major and help students understand that PLOs are achieved throughout their Communication Studies course work. One way our PLOs and their connection to course work are communicated to students is through faculty including the approved PLO summary paragraph on syllabi for courses that can meet a requirement for the Communication Studies major and further explaining on these syllabi which of the PLOs are assessed in the course.

   In both AY 2015-16 and AY 2016-17, the Communication Studies Assessment Committee undertook review of all syllabi for courses that fulfill major requirements, then communicated with faculty regarding their inclusion of required content (or lack thereof). This AY, the Communication Studies Assessment Committee undertook the same syllabus review process in fall 2017.

2. A second way that the Communication Studies department familiarizes students with the PLOs and their connection to course work is through a new policy (resulting from our AY 2016-17 assessment project) focused on COMM GWAR courses. Beginning in fall 2017, all COMM GWAR courses must include a minimum of two class periods (assuming a twice-weekly class) focused on the PLOs and their meanings. COMM GWAR instructors also help students see how their GWAR and other Communication Studies course assignments reflect the PLOs. Furthermore, COMM GWAR instructors now help students establish an ePortfolio wherein they can save completed course work throughout their major to later use to showcase PLO achievement in their capstone course.

   In fall 2017, the Communication Studies Assessment Committee reviewed all COMM GWAR syllabi to ensure evidence of at least two days focused on PLOs, set up of the ePortfolio, and inclusion of three standardized SLOs for
all COMM GWAR syllabi that relate to students understanding the Communication Studies PLOs and establishing the ePortfolio.¹

3. Aside from ensuring student awareness and understanding of PLOs, in AY 2015-16 the Communication Studies assessment project focused on establishing a means of assessing PLO achievement in conjunction with our capstone course’s final ePortfolio. In fall 2017, Communication Studies focused our assessment project on one of our PLOs: Communication Studies majors will apply course material to aspects of their personal life, social life, and/or their local communities. Ten randomly-selected Communication Studies capstone ePortfolio entries regarding “Application in Communication Studies” were reviewed using the previously-established rubric to determine the degree to which the PLO is being achieved.

4. Assessment of the PLO under study (i.e., Communication Studies majors will apply course material to aspects of their personal life, social life, and/or their local communities) was followed by a T/TT faculty discussion of the PLO. Our discussion focused on:

• What we mean by the PLO under study,
• What we envision a student will do to demonstrate achievement of the PLO under study,
• The degree to which Communication Studies majors are demonstrating achievement of the PLO under study; and
• How we can enhance support for student achievement (or demonstration of achievement) of the PLO under study.

What did you find? Is the learning goal being met?

1. Our first focus was on the inclusion of the Communication Studies PLO summary paragraph and information regarding which PLO(s) are assessed in a course on Communication Studies syllabi.

In fall 2017, 13 sections of lower-division courses that can be counted toward the COMM major were taught and 61 upper-division courses that can be counted toward the COMM major were taught. All of the lower-division syllabi were submitted to the Communication Studies AOC and 57

¹ 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 archive COMM course work in the ePortfolio.
SLO 3: Students will demonstrate proficiency in persuasive writing/written argumentation.
of the upper-division syllabi were submitted; hence, 70 COMM syllabi were available for review by the Communication Studies Assessment Committee. Review of these 70 syllabi revealed:

- 64% included the required PLO paragraph and stated which PLOs were assessed in the course;
- 16% included the required PLO paragraph, but did not state which PLOs were assessed in the course;
- 3% included an outdated PLO paragraph;
- 10% did not include the required PLO paragraph nor which PLOs are assessed in the course; and
- 7% included the list of PLOs instead of the summary paragraph.

The Communication Studies Assessment Committee noticed that the 10% of COMM syllabi not including any PLO information were all lower-division courses. Prior to AY 2017-18, only upper-division courses met COMM major requirements. The lower-division classes were all new in fall 2017 and newly met COMM major requirements. Persons teaching these courses may have never taught upper-division courses, so were unfamiliar with the inclusion of PLO information, or they may not have fully realized that PLO information should be included on all syllabi for courses meeting major requirements, not just upper-division requirements. Beyond this 10% of reviewed COMM syllabi, all instructors were making efforts to include PLO information, but adjustments or additions were needed in some cases.

To continue to improve PLO communication to students, the Communication Studies Assessment Committee put a personalized, course-specific memo in each faculty mailbox identifying the degree to which PLO syllabus policies were being met and providing needed information and examples where possible. The Communication Studies Assessment Committee also referred faculty to an iLearn COMM Syllabus Policy Collaborative Site, which includes University, College, and Department syllabus policy information (this site was created by the Communication Studies Assessment Committee in conjunction with the AY 2015-16 Assessment Project).

2. Our second focus was on policies that position COMM GWAR courses as a clear start to upper-division course work in the major. Beginning in fall 2017, all COMM GWAR syllabi must include three standardized SLOs, in addition to course-specific SLOs. COMM GWAR classes are also required to include a minimum of two days discussing COMM program learning outcomes [PLOs], their meanings, and how course work connects to PLO achievement. In addition, beginning in fall 2017, COMM GWAR students are supported in setting up a Portfolium ePortfolio, where they can save
all course work for later integration and application in their capstone course.

Thirteen COMM GWAR syllabi were reviewed by the Communication Studies Assessment Committee in fall 2017. They were examined for the presence of the three standardized SLOs and evidence of PLO engagement and ePortfolio set up. The Communication Studies Assessment Committee found:

- two syllabi included the required SLOs and demonstrated when PLO discussion and ePortfolio set up occurred;
- four syllabi included no evidence of the required SLOs nor discussion of the PLOs nor ePortfolio set up;
- two syllabi included the required SLOs and evidence of ePortfolio set up, but were not clear regarding when discussion of PLOs occurs;
- four syllabi included the required SLOs, but were unclear regarding when PLOs would be discussed and when the ePortfolio would be established; and
- one syllabus included evidence of setting up the ePortfolio, but did not include the required SLOs nor indicate when discussion of the PLOs occurs.

Given the “newness” of the COMM GWAR policies, instructors may have forgotten some of the required inclusions or may be refining how to include and reflect the information in their course/syllabi. The Communication Studies Assessment Committee wrote a personalized memo to each COMM GWAR instructor indicating if the required SLOs were included on their syllabus, if it was clear when discussion of PLOs occurred, and if it was clear when ePortfolios were set up. The Assessment Committee encouraged continued inclusion of required information as well as future inclusion of missing pieces.

3. The third element of the AY 2017-18 Communication Studies assessment plan emphasized assessing one of our four PLOs: Communication Studies majors will apply course material to aspects of their personal life, social life, and/or their local communities. In fall 2017, 10 ePortfolios from the Communication Studies capstone course were randomly selected using a random number generator and the entry regarding “Application in Communication Studies” was assessed using a rubric developed in the Communication Studies AY 2015-16 Assessment Project.

In the ePortfolio entry regarding “Application in Communication Studies,” capstone students explain what “application” means, different forms of application (e.g., analytic papers, speeches, performances), different types of application (i.e., to personal, professional, and community contexts), and the significance of being able to apply knowledge. They then identify a
specific assignment they completed within the Communication Studies major, explaining specific knowledge they developed in the course, how they applied that knowledge in the assignment, and how their work relates to personal, professional, and/or community communication contexts.

Assessment of the 10 randomly-selected ePortfolio entries revealed that students highlight diverse projects in their “Application in Communication Studies” ePortfolio entry. For example, some described speeches they created and delivered using principles of persuasion. Some explained specific theories they applied to analyze family communication. Some described principles of conflict resolution that they then used to analyze a conflict case study. Others described concepts related to discourse in interaction and how they applied these concepts through field notes. The diversity of highlighted projects reflects the pervasiveness of “application” throughout the Communication Studies major.

The 10 randomly selected “Application in Communication Studies” ePortfolio entries were evaluated using a rubric that rates the entry as follows:

Exemplary (3) = Student clearly, accurately, and fully articulates specific knowledge and demonstrates application of that knowledge to personal, professional, and/or political life through a well-developed summary of specific course work;
Adequate (2) = Student’s explanation and/or application of knowledge to personal, professional, and/or political life is vague or incomplete;
Inadequate (1) = Student’s explanation and/or application of knowledge to personal, professional, and/or political life reflects inaccurate understandings of the knowledge being applied; or
Absent (0) = Student provides no explanation and application of knowledge to personal, professional, and/or political life.

Of the 10 ePortfolio entries assessed, one was rated exemplary, six were rated adequate, two inadequate, and one absent. Further scrutiny revealed that the “adequate” entries demonstrated knowledge the students had developed and that they had clearly applied that knowledge in specific ways, but their explanations were somewhat underdeveloped or their explanation of how their application relates to personal, professional, and/or community life was underdeveloped. In other words, students demonstrated achievement of the PLO, but could better develop their showcasing of their achievement upon reflection. The entries assessed as “inadequate” either misidentified, to some degree, elements of the knowledge being described or reflected some degree of disconnect between the knowledge being described and its application. The entry
assessed as “absent” described knowledge (e.g., a theory) without clearly explaining how it was applied.

The Communication Studies Assessment Committee took several steps based on these findings:

First, it was clear that the “Application in Communication Studies” assessment rubric needed further refinement. Students are achieving the PLO as evidenced in the work that they showcase, but the means of assessing achievement was not fully capturing that. For future use, the Communication Studies Assessment Committee expanded the “Application” assessment rubric to include five ratings (instead of four). They are:

Exemplary (4) = Student clearly, accurately, and fully articulates specific knowledge and demonstrates application of that knowledge to personal, professional, and/or political life through a well-developed summary of specific course work;
Adequate (3) = Student articulates specific knowledge and demonstrates application of that knowledge to personal, professional, and/or political life, but the summary of course content and/or summary of application and/or connection to communication contexts could be further developed;
Acceptable (2) = Student’s explanation and/or application of knowledge to personal, professional, and/or political life is present, but vague or incomplete
Inadequate (1) = Student’s explanation and/or application of knowledge to personal, professional, and/or political life reflects inaccurate understandings of the knowledge being applied or what it means to apply knowledge to personal, professional, and/or political life; or
Absent (0) = Student provides no explanation and application of knowledge to personal, professional, and/or political life.

Second, the Communication Studies Assessment Committee reinforced steps that have already been taken to support student achievement of PLO #3 (i.e., Communication Studies majors will apply course material to aspects of their personal life, social life, and/or their local communities) and reflectively demonstrate their achievement. Specifically, the Assessment Committee reinforced that the Communication Studies Teagle-supported major redesign now positions COMM GWAR as a clear start to the major and the capstone course as a clear culmination of the major, positioning the capstone as a significant course wherein students should expect and produce rigorous work (when the course was first mandated, students saw it as something that was “added” and was a hoop to jump through). The Assessment Committee also reinforced that new COMM GWAR policies focusing on PLO discussion and ePortfolio set up
will start to affect students’ abilities to reflectively showcase their achievements in the capstone course as this year’s GWAR students move through the program.

Third, the Communication Studies Assessment Committee surveyed and then led discussion among T/TT Communication Studies faculty to revisit the “application” PLO and discuss how we can further support Communication Studies majors in achieving and demonstrating achievement of the PLO under study. We discussed:

- What we mean by the PLO under study;
- What we envision a student will do to establish their achievement of the PLO under study;
- The degree to which Communication Studies majors are demonstrating achievement of the PLO under study; and
- How we can enhance support for student achievement (and demonstration of achievement) of the PLO under study.

The Communication Studies Assessment Committee found via an open-ended survey that Communication Studies T/TT faculty explain the PLO under study in more and less abstract ways, but a clear theme of use, relevance, and contextual connections pervades our explanations. For example, faculty spoke of:

- students understanding the relevance and centrality of communication in various aspects of life (ranging from personal to collective);
- understanding communication as both instrumental and constitutive;
- what students talk about and read not just being theoretical or abstract, but students seeing how a concept or idea plays out in their everyday lives;
- academic learning as not detached from what is important in students’ lives;
- course material intersecting with students’ lived experiences.

Through the same open-ended survey, the Communication Studies Assessment Committee found that T/TT faculty agree that there are many ways students can demonstrate achievement of the PLO under study and that they value that breadth. For example, faculty spoke of students:

- demonstrating understanding of how to navigate conversations across social, cultural, and political differences;
- creating messages to accomplish community goals;
- documenting communication and explaining how it exemplifies a course concept;
- being able to explain how something could be applied or extended to a specific setting.
When the Communication Studies Assessment Committee brought the T/TT faculty together for discussion, the T/TT faculty agreed that our meanings and visions for the PLO under study were similar and that students are achieving the PLO in ways that reflect these meanings and visions. Faculty also agreed that the new COMM GWAR policies and major redesign will further support students’ abilities to reflectively demonstrate their achievement.

The Communication Studies Assessment Committee led discussion among T/TT faculty regarding how we might further enhance support for students’ reflective demonstration of their achievement of the PLO under study. Outcomes of this discussion are outlined as our goals for next year’s Communication Studies Assessment project.

What assessment activities do you plan to undertake next academic year?

In AY 2018-19, Communication Studies will focus on “closing the gap” in relation to PLO #3: Communication Studies majors will apply course material to aspects of their personal life, social life, and/or their local communities. Specifically, we will:

1. make small adjustments to the language of our “application” PLO and PLO summary paragraph so both are parallel and concrete;
2. create and distribute a signature writing assignment that requires students to articulate the meaning of the “application” PLO and how a specific assignment demonstrates achievement of the PLO (this assignment could be used by Communication Studies instructors in classes wherein they are assessing the “application” PLO; it will help students be better prepared to reflectively demonstrate PLO achievement in the capstone course);
3. meet with a sample of instructors whose syllabi indicate assessment of the “application” PLO to help the instructors articulate what the PLO means and how they are assessing it (if faculty better articulate this for themselves and their students, the students will be better positioned to reflectively demonstrate PLO achievement when they reach the capstone course);
4. create a video to be uploaded to the COMM Syllabus Policies iLearn Collaborative Site that helps all Communication Studies faculty better understand the ePortfolio students will create in the capstone course and how it requires them to demonstrate PLO achievement through specific assignments from their various courses (if faculty understand how their assignments relate to the capstone experience, they can better prepare students to connect their course work to the PLO); and
5. meet with Academic Technology to identify materials that speak to the value of ePortfolios outside of academia, so students can better
understand the relevance of showcasing PLO achievement (if student have further motivation, they may apply more rigor to demonstrating their achievements).