



DOROTHY F. SCHMIDT COLLEGE OF ARTS & LETTERS

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

All students in the Communication Studies BA program are required to complete SPC 4271, a variable-format capstone course designed to synthesize theoretical, critical, and performance/applied strands from previous course work in the major. Each of the capstone course formats aims to facilitate a contextualized examination of public communication and civic life in a democratic culture, culminating in application through civic engagement. This capstone course integrates knowledge and skills students have acquired by completing the required COM 2053 (Introduction to Communication and Civic Life), and course work in four main curricular areas: theory, methods, performance, and context, providing students with the awareness, knowledge, motivation and skills to develop communication strategies to address the problems of a global society.

While all sections of the capstone share the general orientation described above, the specific configuration of assignments and overall course structure will be determined by the instructor. Methods used in past capstone sections are included below as an illustration of the kind of work students might carry out in completing their capstone projects.

CONTENT KNOWLEDGE (Declarative Knowledge): Students will use concepts from diverse approaches to communication theory (potentially including rhetorical, intercultural, and/or critical-cultural approaches) to develop communication frameworks for examining relationships between discourse and democracy, particularly as they pertain to the cultures, norms, and activities of civic life.

COMMUNICATION (Oral Communication, Written Communication, Team/Collaborative Communication) and CRITICAL THINKING (Analytic Skills, Practical Skills): Students in the Communication Studies BA program will demonstrate skills in effective citizenship that include “a well-developed capacity for effective communication, including moral and political discourse; skills in political

participation; the capacity to work effectively with people, including those who are very different from oneself; and the ability to organize other people for action.”¹

Students in SPC 4271 choose from various capstone formats offered during the semester that organize the application of disciplinary concepts and theories to civic life and engagement in unique ways. Different formats will be offered from semester to semester. Possible formats include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **On-Campus Speech/Communication Tutoring:** This capstone model requires students to design and implement an on-campus resource for students who need assistance in preparing and executing presentations for educational, political, cultural, or professional contexts.
- **In-Class Speech Workshops for Non-Communication Majors:** This capstone model requires students to create and carry out presentations for specific majors outside of the School of Communication and Multimedia Studies that teach the relevance of core communication studies concepts to non-majors.
- **Democratic Politics and Culture Classroom Simulations:** This capstone model utilizes programs like “Reacting to the Past” and “The Game of Politics” in which student enact political deliberation in a weeks-long simulation of a specific historical moment central to the development of democratic politics and civic life.
- **On-Campus Public Events:** This capstone model tasks students with planning, organizing, and implementing a public event that translates communication studies insights, themes, and concepts for a public audience. The events may be organized around a specific political issue, social movement, or civic organization.
- **Community Organization Analysis:** This capstone model equips students with the conceptual and theoretical resources to effect social change using public dialogue, facilitation, community organizing, public meetings, participatory processes, and social protest. Over the course of several projects, students work in small groups to develop a sophisticated understanding of community building in a democratic society through public dialogue facilitation, community organizing, and comprehensive public participation plans.

Each of these formats share a common orientation toward translating key concepts and theories of communication studies research into practical, applied skills that can be utilized by everyday citizens participating in public life. Students will select appropriate

¹ Anne Colby, “Fostering the Moral and Civic Development of College Students,” in *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*, ed. Larry P. Nucci and Darcia Narvaez (New York: Routledge, 2008), 393.

topics or projects as directed by the instructor. To ensure that the project is informed by appropriate communication theory and research, the instructor will assign periodic graded assessments such as short papers, quizzes, and group reports designed to evaluate students' understanding of the required reading and class discussions used in the development and implementation of their civic engagement project. Students will also connect conceptual materials to their civic engagement experience by completing assignments such as oral and written progress reports, reflective writing assignments, and cumulative final reports that will be graded by the instructor.

CONTENT KNOWLEDGE (Technical Skills): Students will demonstrate skills in facilitating discussion of scholarly readings in the discipline that theorize the centrality of communication and culture for civic life. Readings could include such topics as the prerequisite skills for democratic civic engagement and intercultural competence for a global society.

Students in SPC 4271 will engage in classroom discussions of scholarly readings that (1) describe the main concepts, arguments, and supporting evidence in the readings, (2) relate topics specific to democratic and civic life to other core communication theories or disciplinary themes, (3) conceptualize communication in relation to real world practices, especially to the civic engagement semester projects, and (4) critically evaluate the readings in the context of the expertise developed throughout the Communication Studies BA curriculum. The specific structure of the group discussion facilitation portion of the capstone will be determined by the instructor, and may include the submission of a group discussion facilitation plan, a clear description of the group's division of labor, and a bibliography of works consulted.



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At the conclusion of the student's coursework they will need to complete either a thesis or a comprehensive exam process. The evaluation of both processes are guided by the principle assessment criteria for the degree which include:

- Graduates will have ability to identify one or more significant issues being debated by theorists and researchers in their field(s) of communication study.
- Graduates will have ability to establish the nature and scope of existing theory and research pertaining to the selected issue(s) and devise a research project designed to fill a gap in this knowledge.
- Graduates will have ability to identify one or more significant issues being debated by theorists and researchers in their field(s) of communication study.

The Graduate Committee faculty members in the areas of study will read and evaluate the student's work and assess it based on criteria below

A. Examination and evaluation of M.A. Thesis, particularly the "Issues to be Addressed" and "Background and Justification" sections or their equivalent, by two faculty members who served on the student's thesis committee. On a three-point scale (high pass, pass, low pass), each graduate at semester's end (Summer graduates will be included in the Fall evaluations) must achieve a pass or better on at least one of the three outcomes and a low pass or better on the two remaining outcomes.

B. Non-Thesis: Examination and evaluation of answers to one or more essay questions on the Comprehensive M.A. examination, which ask the student to identify such issues, by two faculty members who served on the student's exam committee. On a three-point scale (high pass, pass, low pass), each graduate at semester's end (Summer graduates will be included in the Fall evaluations) must achieve a pass or better on at least one of the three outcomes

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

MFA students are required to produce a thesis (which may incorporate a major project). This project should highlight the student's successful attainment of the three principle learning goals for the MFA which include:

- Students will be able to demonstrate technical literacy.
- Students will be able to develop original ideas.
- Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of relevant artistic and industrial contexts

Although there are multiple layers of assessment focused on annual portfolio productions by students, the program assessment keys off of the thesis. The MFA assessment committee, which may be separate from the thesis committee proper but does not have to be, consists of two to four faculty members, at least two of whom must be from the graduate MFA faculty. Other members of the assessment committee may be drawn from Computer Engineering or other appropriate disciplines depending upon the nature of the thesis or project under evaluation. The assessment chair must be from the MFA graduate faculty.

All student work will be competent on all dimensions. Every student will have work that attains the level of outstanding on several dimensions. The core knowledge base includes:

- Being able to describe major developments in the history of multimedia production
- Being able to use varied tactics for new media production
- Being able to explain the process of implementation of technological developments in the public and private sectors

- Being able to use a range of critical methods for analyzing animation, interactivity, and new media works
- Demonstrated understanding of interface design and methods
- Ability to engage in self-critiques using the lexicon of new media
- Familiarity with industrial structures and production pipelines
- Knowledge of object-oriented software methodology and methods
- Knowledge of user interfaces, non-functional objectives, and design patterns
- Familiarity with the structures, intelligent use, and the implementation of modern database systems
- Ability to deploy best media management practices, following recent trends
- Ability to map technical skill sets onto a broad range of industry settings, and using a broad range of visualization strategies