**STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT PROGRAM**
**SUMMARY FORM  AY 2007-2008**

**Degree and Program Name:**
M.A., Communication Studies

**Submitted By:**
Melanie Mills

### PART ONE

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<th>What are the learning objectives?</th>
<th>How, where, and when are they assessed?</th>
<th>What are the expectations?</th>
<th>What are the results?</th>
<th>Committee/person responsible? How are results shared?</th>
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| 1. Students will have a strong theoretical knowledge of communication. | Core comprehensive exams are required of all students. They are administered after students complete their final core class. All graduate faculty participate in exam evaluation according to departmentally developed rubrics. | Students are expected to demonstrate minimal competency defined as the ability to:  
- Demonstrate familiarity with relevant scholarly literature.  
- Correctly interpret and apply the relevant literature to the answer.  
- Be able to identify conceptual, theoretical and methodological issues relevant to the area of study in sufficient depth and breadth.  
- Answer all parts of the question in a direct and relevant manner.  
- Rely on scholarly sources and the student’s own insights to provide an original answer to the question. | Sixteen students attempted core comprehensive exams in the spring. Of these, six passed on their first attempt. Seven passed rewrites. Two failed out of the program. One is taking the summer to study and rewrite in the next academic year. This amounts to an 81% pass rate (13/16) for this academic year. | Results are shared with the graduate committee and the individual faculty who write comprehensive exam questions. |

Please complete a separate worksheet for each academic program (major, minor) at each level (undergraduate, graduate) in your department. Worksheets are due to CASA this year by **June 13, 2008**. Worksheets should be sent electronically to kjsanders@eiu.edu and should also be submitted to your college dean. For information about assessment or help with your assessment plans, visit the Assessment webpage at http://www.eiu.edu/~assess/ or contact Karla Sanders in CASA at 581-6056.
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<th>2. Students will be able to apply communication theory in a broad range of situations and contexts.</th>
<th>Individual course assignments, elective comprehensive exam questions, creative projects, and creative theses. The graduate faculty have agreed upon assignments for core classes, a rubric for comprehensive exam evaluation, and committee structures for thesis projects.</th>
<th>Elective comprehensive exams are required of all non-thesis students and are taken during the students’ final semester in the program.</th>
<th>Six students took elective comprehensive exams during this period. Five passed and one failed.</th>
<th>Elective comprehensive exam results are distributed to the graduate committee and individual graduate faculty who write the questions.</th>
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<td>3. Students will complete advanced research in communication</td>
<td>Approximately ½ of the core comprehensive exams are devoted to measuring research skills. Students are encouraged to submit research for presentation and publication to various outlets.</td>
<td>Expectations for the research component of the core exams are the same as those stated above. Theses are completed during the final semesters of a student’s matriculation. Students are encouraged to present their research at the grad student expo, academic conferences, and submit research to academic peer-reviewed journals.</td>
<td>Students taking core comprehensive exams achieved an 81% passing rate. One student completed a thesis. Two students presented papers at national and regional conferences. One was awarded a national top paper designation. Fourteen students presented papers or posters during the EIU grad expo.</td>
<td>Exam results are distributed as noted above. The research for the thesis is being revised for publication. The department chair collects information on graduate student research that is available to the faculty. Graduate student research is promoted and recognized at departmental faculty meetings.</td>
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<td>4. Students will be adequately prepared to pursue a Ph.D. if desired.</td>
<td>Students pursuing Ph.D.s work in conjunction with their committee during their entire tenure to discuss appropriate programs, application strategies, etc. Data is collected on the number of students applying for and accepted into Ph.D. programs. Students are apprised of Ph.D. standards of learning whether they choose to pursue an advance degree or not.</td>
<td>We desire all students pursuing a Ph.D. program to get accepted into a first choice program. We expect that all students are prepared to qualify for Ph.D. programs whether they continue or not.</td>
<td>One student from this year’s graduating class applied for and was accepted into a first choice Ph.D. program. Alumni in first choice programs have indicated that their preparation in our program was strong. Faculty at their institutions indicate they are interested in more of our students in the future.</td>
<td>Ph.D. acceptance is announced at departmental faculty meetings.</td>
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5. Students will obtain employment consistent with their career goals and objectives.

Students who graduate are encouraged to stay in contact with the graduate program to allow us to track careers, bring them back to campus for special events, etc.

Students in the pedagogy option are evaluated by their practicum director on campus after their pedagogy coursework and before their community college internship. They are evaluated by an on site internship supervisor in their final semester.

All students participate in exit interviews. One of the questions is how well the program prepared them for their desired careers.

We advise and train our students to find a career that fits their academic preparation. Students in the pedagogy option are expected to demonstrate community college teaching competencies that:

- Reflect an ability to apply their coursework in the community college setting.
- Demonstrate strong academic preparation.
- Demonstrate effective classroom management and performance.
- Show good understanding of departmental and institutional citizenship.

Students are expected to be able to articulate career goals and how their study plans “fit” their aspirations.

Of the students graduating this year, six are already employed in careers that utilize their degrees. The remaining students are interviewing or on the job market at the end of the summer.

All of the four students who have completed the pedagogy option received high evaluations from both their students and their internship supervisors, all of whom indicate that they would hire the intern if they had the option to do so. Two of the students are employed at community colleges and the other two are interviewing this summer.

Career offers are circulated informally among the faculty.

The graduate coordinator is responsible for negotiating internship contracts to cover student expenses. Faculty use their professional networks to help place pedagogy students and discuss opportunities in faculty meetings.

All faculty are expected to engage in career mentoring. These activities are discussed informally among the faculty.

(Continue objectives as needed. Cells will expand to accommodate your text.)

**PART TWO**

Describe what your program’s assessment accomplishments since your last report was submitted. Discuss ways in which you have responded to the CASA Director’s comments on last year’s report or simply describe what assessment work was initiated, continued, or completed.
This is my first assessment report as graduate coordinator. Because it was my first year in the position, I began with a graduate student orientation to clarify departmental information and processes. This included a discussion of these learning objectives. I met with each student in the program during the first two weeks of the semester to assess their personal learning goals, discuss coursework, and generally get to know them. This improved my ability to direct their coursework choices and to direct them toward appropriate career mentors.

I also called our first ever (during my 23 years in the department anyway!) graduate faculty retreat. This was an all day meeting where we discussed goals and objectives for the program, and evaluated our assessment procedures (in the classroom and in the program). The graduate faculty has changed significantly in the last couple of years and it was critical to use assessment data to evaluate the mission and performance of the program, as well as to consider where we might want to go in the future.

The graduate committee revisited procedures for the comprehensive exams, concluding that a third rewrite was not fruitful based on the failure rates of students who wrote for a third time. The faculty also determined that allowing students to bring in one page of notes to the exam was interfering with their ability to conceptualize theory on a broad context-free level. This was determined by comparing notes collected from students taking core comprehensive exams to their answers. Much of the information in the notes was included verbatim on the exam in ways that did not always reflect good application of the material to the questions. For this reason, the graduate committee recommended, and the faculty approved, no notes for comprehensive exams.

To fairly distribute workload, and also to provide students with more varied feedback on their comprehensive exams, the faculty agreed to have everyone evaluate comprehensive exams. To do this fairly, an evaluation rubric (approved by the graduate faculty) was distributed to all faculty for their consideration as they read exams. This promoted more faculty discussion of core course content that should lead to better understanding of how the core relates to subsequent courses in the program. This kind of discussion can lead to a more coherent and better articulated curriculum.

I set up program displays at two regional undergraduate honors conferences, in addition to the graduate open house on campus, to recruit exceptional students to our program. We are steadily getting more outside applications to the program which helps to diversify our student population and increase the richness of learning experiences in the program. This gave me an opportunity to network with coordinators of other graduate programs, both for benchmarking information and also to establish pipelines to other schools -- from BA only programs and also to Ph.D. granting institutions for our students who wish to continue their education. This kind of activity addresses the 4th learning objective. Networking at conferences has also helped me to establish relationships with community colleges for students in our new pedagogy option (internship opportunities).

Finally, this was the first year for assessment data from the Communication Pedagogy option in our program. The graduate committee will evaluate the assessment data, instruments, and procedures for the option in the coming year. Preliminary analysis suggests that we are assessing student learning in all areas identified by the Council on Graduate Studies.
PART THREE
Summarize changes and improvements in curriculum, instruction, and learning that have resulted from the implementation of your assessment program. How have you used the data? What have you learned? In light of what you have learned through your assessment efforts this year and in past years, what are your plans for the future?

The expansion last year of the research methods course from a single four-credit class to two three-credit classes has met with much success. Students are able to complete two research projects during their degree program vs. only one previously. Previous exit interviews suggested that students were overwhelmed with information in the single class. Exit interviews this year indicated that students appreciated and learned better with quantitative and qualitative research methods in separate courses. While the comprehensive exam pass rate increased slightly, it is too early to tell if splitting the research methods course was a major contributing factor.

Changing the program to a two year degree (effective Fall 2006) required a program transition that we are successfully weathering. It affected the program structure, assistantship awards, summer classes, and thesis timetables. Add the change of personnel in the graduate coordinator position and we have experienced a lot of change in a short period of time. We have used our assessment data to restructure the program -- e.g. number of core courses, number of hours students typically take each semester (from 12 to 9, which has improved student workload and presumably learning), the necessity of summer classes for degree completion in the previous one year option, requiring core comps of all students (vs. only those not writing a thesis), and the new pedagogy option (since many of our alumni teach in community colleges). Assessment data has allowed us to make data driven decisions to improve our program.

Our future plans include an extensive self-study. Three members of the graduate faculty volunteered to work with me and with the chair to compile program information in order to move more effectively into the future. We have also agreed to have an external program review once this information is compiled in order to get external feedback on our program to use toward its improvement. The charge to the self-study working group is to:

* Review the mission and vision of the graduate program and revise as appropriate with the input of the graduate faculty and other groups.

* Review the success and status of the program utilizing assessment data and collect additional data as appropriate.

* Survey the alumni of the program to gather information in regard to the satisfaction of graduates, preparation for careers, and recommendations for program improvement.

* Benchmark appropriate institutions for comparisons of programs and evaluation of current programs success.

Ultimately, we would like to achieve a First Choice designation in the Graduate School.