***STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT PROGRAM***

***SUMMARY FORM AY 2017-2018***

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 15, 2018**. Worksheets should be sent electronically to [kjsanders@eiu.edu](mailto: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.

M.A. in Communication Studies

**Degree and**

**Program Name:**

# Submitted By:

Angela Jacobs

**PART ONE**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| What are the learning objectives? | How, where, and when are they assessed? | What are the expectations? | What are the results? | Committee/ person responsible? How are results shared? |
| 1. Students will demonstrate strong disciplinary knowledge of communication. | Disciplinary knowledge is assessed three ways throughout the graduate program:  1) Throughout student coursework with the Graduate Student Critical Thinking Rubric (Element 1- using theory to answer questions).  2) Throughout student coursework with the Graduate Research Paper Writing Rubric (Element 3 - literature review) which are both utilized in graduate courses.  3) At the end of the program after the completion of their capstone project using the literature review subscale of the Academic Thesis or Creative Thesis rubrics. | For this learning objective, students are evaluated on:  -Understanding of scholarship  -Correct interpretation of scholarship  -Correct application of scholarship  -Ability to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant scholarship  For the Graduate Student Critical Thinking and the Graduate Research Paper Writing rubrics we have the following expectations:   * Average student falls at the high end (greater than 6) of the competent range (4-7) * 90% of students rated as competent * 33% of students rated as highly competent   For the Academic Thesis and Creative Thesis rubrics we have the following expectations:   * Average student achieves competent (greater than 2.5) on the scale * 100% of students rated as competent * 75% of students rated as highly competent | Graduate Student Critical Thinking Rubric (Element 1):   * Average rubric score: 7.12 * 98.41% of rubrics were rated as at least competent * 49.21% of rubrics were rated as highly competent   Overall, we met our goals in this area. Students in their final semester demonstrate significantly higher scores (average score of 9.5) than those is their first semester (average score of 6.52). This suggests the content of the program increases our student’s ability to use theory to answer communication questions.  Graduate Research Paper Writing Rubric (Element 3):   * Average rubric score: 6.69 * 90.91% of rubrics were rated as competent * 43.64% of rubrics were rated as highly competent   We met our goals in this area. Similar to the Critical Thinking Rubric, students in their final semester demonstrate significantly higher scores (average score of 8.4) than those is their first semester (average score of 6.61) in terms of graduate research writing. This again suggests the content of the program increases our student’s ability to use theory to answer communication questions.  Academic and Creative Thesis Rubrics Literature Review Subscale:   * Average student score: 4.45 * 100% of students were rated as competent in both creative and academic thesis writing * 75% of students were rated as highly competent in **academic thesis writing** * 100% of students were rated as highly competent in **creative thesis writing**   Overall, students’ disciplinary knowledge met our expectations in every area. | Graduate Student Critical Thinking Rubric – graduate faculty teaching courses score rubrics for their classes.  Graduate Research Paper Writing Rubric – graduate faculty teaching courses score rubrics for their classes.  Academic and Creative Thesis Rubrics – evaluated by individual thesis committees.  All results are compiled by the Graduate Coordinator then assessed by the Graduate Committee before being shared with the entire graduate faculty at the start of the fall semester. |
| 2. Students will be able to understand, critique, and apply appropriate research methods in a broad range of situations and contexts. | Research knowledge is assessed directly two ways throughout the graduate program:  1) Students are assessed using the Academic Thesis or Creative Thesis rubric after they have completed their required thesis capstone project at the end of the program. Each project requires students to understand and apply research methods either by conducting an academic or creative thesis project.  2) Students also utilize, critique, and apply research methodologies throughout their graduate classes. We assess this learning goal through elements 4 (research methodology) and 5 (analysis) of the Graduate Research Paper Writing Rubric (utilized in graduate courses).  In support of this goal we also measure:  1) Number of original research presentations by students  2) Number of blind reviewed original research presentations by students at conferences | For this learning objective, students are evaluated on:  -Understanding of various methodologies  -Correct application of methods  -Ability to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate claims based upon a chosen methodology  For the Academic Thesis and Creative Thesis rubrics we have the following expectations:   * Average student achieves a score relative to 80% (116 on the creative thesis rubric and 112 on the academic thesis rubric)   For the Graduate Research Paper Writing rubric (elements 4 and 5) we have the following expectations:   * Average student falls at the high end (greater than 6) of the competent range (4-7) * 90% of students rated as competent * 50% of students rated as highly competent | Academic and Creative thesis rubrics:   * Creative: score of 127.58 (87.99%) * Academic: score of 125.83 (89.88%)   Graduate Research Paper Writing rubric:   * Element 4: Average score of 7.09 (out of 58 rubrics assessed) * Element 4: 96.55% of rubrics rated as at least competent * Element 4: 50% of rubrics rated as highly competent * Element 5: Average score of 6.98 (out of 63 rubrics assessed) * Element 5: 88.89% of rubrics rated as at least competent * Element 5: 47.62% of students rated as highly competent   This year we had 11 original research presentations by students.  This year we had 3 blind reviewed, original research presentations by students at conferences off campus.  The academic theses were excellent and the rubric scores demonstrate that.  We met all our goals for the graduate research paper rubrics with the exception of having 90% of the students rated as at least competent and 50% of the students rated as highly competent on Element 5. Our numbers indicate we are near this goal, but fell just shy with 88.89% of students rated at least competent and 47.62% rated as highly competent. We did have significantly more 1st & 2nd semester student rubrics (46) than final semester students (5), which may account for the lower numbers in this area. Fewer 4th semester rubrics is due in part because our students take fewer classes in their final semester and thus, are not rated as often as 1st & 2nd semester students. A second part is due to some rubrics not being returned during the assessment process. However, there is an increase from a score of 6.52 to a score of 8.8 on Element 5 from first to final semester. If more of the final-semester student rubrics were returned, I believe that we would have exceeded this goal.  The number of students presenting their research on and off campus demonstrates a program-wide commitment to student research. We will continue to encourage students to turn their projects into conference presentations. | Graduate Research Paper Writing Rubric – graduate faculty teaching courses score rubrics for their classes.  Academic and Creative Thesis Rubrics – evaluated by individual thesis committees.  All results are compiled by the Graduate Coordinator then assessed by the Graduate Committee before being shared with the entire graduate faculty at the start of the fall semester. |
| 3. Students are able to communicate effectively in written form. | Effective writing communication is assessed two ways throughout the graduate program:  1) The Graduate Research Paper Writing Rubric (utilized in graduate courses).  2) The Writing subscales on both the Academic Thesis and Creative Thesis rubrics, which are assessed after the completion of the capstone project at the end of the program. | For this learning objective, students are evaluated on their writing quality, including but not limited to, the following:  -Logical organization of writing  -Complexity of sentence structure  -Effective use of language  -Mechanical errors  -Ability to communicate an argument/main idea to the reader  -Ability to synthesize numerous concepts into a coherent argument  For the Graduate Research Paper Writing rubric we have the following expectations:   * Average student scores 75 (out of 100) * 90% of students rated as competent * 50% of students rated as highly competent   For the Writing subscales of the Academic Thesis and Creative Thesis rubrics we have the following expectations:   * Average student achieves a subscale score of highly competent (3.75 out of 5) | Graduate Research Paper Writing rubric (79 rubrics):   * Average student score: 70.87 * 90.48% of students were rated as competent * 39.68% of students were rated as highly competent   Academic and Creative thesis rubrics:   * Creative score: 4.51 * Academic score: 4.57   Results from the exit survey indicate graduating students believe the program greatly improved their writing quality (mean = 4.33 on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being strongly agree).  In general, we experienced a decrease in writing quality this past year. While we met our goal of 90% of students being rated as at least competent, we did not meet our goal for the average student score of 75 or above, or having 50% of students rate highly competent. The average student score this year was 70.87 and only 39.68% rated highly competent. These results may be due in part to the large number of 1st and 2nd semester students (46) compared to our 3rd and 4th semester students (17). However, our final semester students had an average writing score of 8.52 compared to 1st semester students 6.96, which demonstrates that students are increasing their writing skills over the course of our program. We also had an increase in our overall student population this year, creating larger class sizes than we’ve had in the past. This may have contributed to fewer writing opportunities in the classroom, as larger class sizes necessitate fewer writing assignments across all classes. We also had an increase in international student population (from 1 to 7 students) where English is not their primary language. This may have contributed to lower writing scores for 1st year students as our international students had to adjust to the English language and American classroom expectations.  I should note that we have spent significant time over the last three years working to increase the quality of our student’s writing; yet, the results demonstrate we need to work on this area more, especially with our new student and international student population. We also need to find ways to continue offering writing opportunities in the classroom while adapting to larger class sizes. | Academic and Creative Thesis Rubrics – evaluated by individual thesis committees.  Graduate Research Paper Writing Rubric – graduate faculty teaching courses score rubrics for their classes.  All results are compiled by the Graduate Coordinator then assessed by the Graduate Committee before being shared with the entire graduate faculty at the start of the fall semester. |
| 4. Students are able to communicate effectively in spoken form. | Effective spoken communication is assessed through the Graduate Speech Evaluation rubric, utilized for the final, department-wide oral presentation of the students’ capstone projects at the end of their program.  We also use students’ success in the oral defense of their theses as an indication of effective spoken communication. | For this learning objective, students are evaluated on:  -Organization  -Use of language  -Appropriate use of material  -Competent delivery  -Audience analysis  -Use of voice  Since most of our graduate students have a background in communication, we expect scores on the speech evaluation rubric to be high.  We expect:   * Average student score is highly competent (3.5 out of 4) * 100% of rubrics rated as competent (2.5 out of 4) * 75% of rubrics rated as highly competent (3.5 on a 4 point scale) | Results from the Graduate Speech Evaluation rubric (total of 20 rubrics):  The average student score from the speech evaluation rubric is 3.55 (highly competent). 100% of rubrics rated students as competent and 75% of rubrics rated students as highly competent.  In this past academic year 100% (5 out of 5) students successfully defended their thesis project orally.  Students’ ability to communicate effectively in spoken form met our expectations. These ratings are consistent with past assessment data regarding our students’ abilities to speak effectively. | The Graduate Speech Evaluation rubric is used by all graduate faculty to evaluate final oral presentations of graduate thesis projects.  All results are compiled by the Graduate Coordinator then assessed by the Graduate Committee before being shared with the entire graduate faculty at the start of the fall semester. |
| 5. Students will demonstrate effective critical thinking skills. | Effective critical thinking is assessed two ways throughout the graduate program:  1) The Graduate Student Critical Thinking Rubric (utilized in graduate courses)  2) The Findings/Conclusions and Results/Conclusions subscales of the Academic and Creative Thesis rubrics, which are assessed after the completion of the capstone project at the end of the program. | For this learning objective, students are evaluated on their ability to analyze, including but not limited to, the following:  -Ability to generate original insights  -Ability to develop and design new research  -Sensitivity to multiple perspectives  -Ability to assess reasoning  -Ability to assess arguments  -Identifying assumptions  For the Graduate Student Critical Thinking rubric we have the following expectations:   * Average student scores 60 (out of 80) * 90% of students rated as competent * 50% of students rated as highly competent   For the Findings/Conclusions and Results/Conclusions subscales of the Academic Thesis and Creative Thesis rubrics we have the following expectations:   * Average student achieves a subscale score of highly competent (3.75 out of 5) for the academic thesis * Average student achieves a subscale score of highly competent (3.75 out of 5) for the creative thesis | Graduate Student Critical Thinking rubric (63 rubrics):   * Average rubric score: 56.43 * 95.24% of rubrics were rated as competent * 41.27% of rubrics were rated as highly competent   Academic and Creative thesis rubrics Conclusions subscale:   * Creative: score of 4.33 * Academic: score of 4.41   Graduating students indicated that they believe the program greatly improved their critical thinking skills (mean = 4.33 on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being strongly agree).  Overall, student scores fell short of our expectations on the Graduate Student Critical Thinking rubric again this year. We need to continue to improve our ability to move critical thinking skills from competent to highly competent. While we exceeded our goal of 90% of students rated as at least competent (95.4%), we did not meet our goal that 50% of students would be rated as highly competent (only 41.27% were highly competent). Overall scores were also under our goal (56.3 rather than 60). However, we did see an increase in critical thinking scores from 1 semester (6.34) to 4th semester (9.06) students, which demonstrates that we are successfully helping students learn these skills before graduating our program.  Ratings for the academic and creative thesis results/conclusions subscale also exceeded our expectations (4.33 and 4.41) which again demonstrates that we are successfully teaching our students critical thinking skills within our program.  We will continue to work on ways we can help our 1st year students develop critical thinking skills. | Academic and Creative Thesis Rubrics – evaluated by individual thesis committees.  Graduate Student Critical Thinking Rubric – graduate faculty teaching courses score rubrics for their classes.  All results are compiled by the Graduate Coordinator then assessed by the Graduate Committee before being shared with the entire graduate faculty at the start of the fall semester. |

**PART TWO**

Describe 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.

The Department of Communication Studies continued to collect all the data outlined on the previous report. There were no changes made to what we collect or how we collect it since our last report. The small changes we made a few years ago regarding the identification of student’s current semester in the program on rubrics has been extraordinarily helpful in demonstrating to faculty (and students) the impact the program has on writing quality and critical thinking. We are consistently seeing that students in their 4th semester have advanced writing and critical thinking skills compared to those in their 1st semester. As we mentioned in our last report, this data has influenced the type of student we are willing to admit to our program. While we still admit only students that we feel can be successful, we now realize there are significant positive jumps made by students between their first and final years in the program in both critical thinking (6.34 to 9.06) and writing quality (6.96 to 8.52). These increases are such that we can take risks on borderline students knowing that we will prepare them to successfully complete their capstone project. While we did see a decrease in writing and critical thinking skills this year (even compared to last year), this may be due in part to our willingness to take bigger risks with the types of students we admit. I am confident, however, that we will see these student’s writing and critical thinking skills increase as they move through our program.

We also recently developed an online Masters degree option in Communication and Leadership and an online Graduate Certificate in Communication Processes. These additions to our program were born out of ongoing conversations our department has had concerning broader impacts of our program (e.g., employment/Ph.D. preparation and desired graduate school skills). The continued recognition that we need to meet our department goals, meet graduate school (and university) goals, and grow our programs has been an important influence in curricular and pedagogical changes over the last two years.

**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?

Our department has seen an overall positive impact from curriculum changes and pedagogical alterations as mentioned in our previous report. One issue that arose from our previous assessment data was that too many students were not graduating on time. We discovered that the reason students were not graduating on time was because they were not completing their theses in a timely manner (all other graduation requirements were being met). This was due in part to too much focus on the required comprehensive exam at the mid-point of a student’s graduate program. We also discovered that our curriculum did not allow a place for students to begin their thesis research. Therefore, the graduate faculty made the following changes beginning Fall 2016: we removed the comprehensive exam requirement and changed the department core by adding CMN 5020 (Communication Theory and CMN 5040 (Communication Research Methods), to provide students with a broad introduction to the various methods used in the field and added a thesis proposal as the required final project in the research course. Students now take Communication Theory during their first semester and Communication Research Methods during their second. We expected this course sequence to provide students with a broader understanding of the interaction between communication theory and research during their first year of graduate study, establishing a stronger foundation to complete their thesis during their second year. As is evidenced by our newest assessment data, these curricular changes have resulted in a substantially higher percentage of students completing their thesis requirements and graduating on time (from 33% graduation rates in 2016 to 62% in 2017 and 60% in 2018).

We wish to continue increasing our graduation rates to meet or exceed EIU’s current graduation rate of 71% (from 2015 data). Based on exit interviews from our 2017 student cohort, some students still felt that the thesis was preventing them graduating in a timely manner. A small percentage of students (33%) noted that they did not find the required thesis a useful part of their graduate training. These students also commented that the department seemed too focused on the pedagogy option and on equipping students to go on to Ph.D. institutions. Instead, students wanted a capstone option that would allow them to complete their degree program in a timely manner, but that would also align better with their career aspirations. Additionally, as our current assessment data indicates, some students struggle with writing, especially our 1st and 2nd year students. The idea of a thesis project produced anxiety for those students who didn’t feel they were strong writers and for those students who didn’t wish to go on to Ph.D. programs. As a result of this information, the graduate faculty have made additional changes to our program regarding the capstone experience. Beginning in Fall 2018, incoming students will have an option between taking comprehensive exams or writing an academic or creative thesis as their capstone experience. This option is different than our previous requirements where students took comprehensive exams during the mid-point of their graduate schooling and then wrote the thesis at the end of their 2nd year. Instead, students will choose either to take comprehensive exams at the end of their 2nd year of schooling, or write an academic or creative thesis during their 2nd year of schooling. We hope that these changes will decrease student anxiety about the capstone experience, and will continue to increase our graduation rates. Bringing back the comprehensive exam option also allows particular students to focus on skills more relevant to their career path rather than on continued academic training.

Current assessment data also indicates that we need to increase our efforts to increase writing and critical thinking skills for our graduate students. While the trend appears to be that 1st and 2nd year students rate lower in writing and critical thinking skills than do our 4th semester students, we need to find ways to help our new students develop these skills more quickly. One way that we have begun to do this is through an informal mentoring process where 2nd year students are paired with 1st year students. Student mentors are selected by the graduate coordinator and paired with 1st year students who need help with writing and critical thinking. Mentors meet with the mentees at least once a month. A second way we have begun to address these issues is by providing a weekly writing group for any student needing assistance with writing, and, to some extent, critical thinking. Students have the opportunity to meet one-on-one with a graduate faculty member to discuss their writing and/or any current assignments. These programs were implemented in the spring semester so results are inclusive at this time. Our hope is that these programs (e.g., student mentoring and writing groups) assist in increasing students’ writing and critical thinking skills earlier in their graduate training.

We have also expanded our graduate program offerings by adding an online option in Communication and Leadership for working professionals as well as a Graduate Certificate in Communication Processes program for teachers who wish to teach dual-credit public speaking classes. These programs begin Fall 2018. Next year we plan to examine our assessment practices in depth with regards to these curriculum changes. We will likely add or alter some of our assessment practices to examine if our current coursework and new online coursework are helping our students and meeting our learning goals. We will also likely want to collect data concerning the student mentoring and writing group programs to see if they are helpful in increasing student writing and critical thinking.