STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT PROGRAM SUMMARY FORM

Program Name: MA in Communication Studies
Dept: School of Communication and Journalism
College: Liberal Arts and Sciences
Submitted by: Angela Jacobs, Graduate Coordinator

Part 1:

CGS Learning Goal #1 A depth of content knowledge	Program Learning Goal(s): Students will demonstrate strong disciplinary knowledge of communication.
How are learners assessed?	Disciplinary knowledge is assessed three ways throughout the graduate program: 1) Graduate Student Critical Thinking Rubric (Element 1- using theory to answer questions). 2) Graduate Research Paper Writing Rubric (Element 3 - literature review) 3) Academic Thesis or Creative Thesis rubrics, or using the scholarship subscale of the comprehensive exam rubric.
What are the expectations for the students?	For this learning objective, students are evaluated on: 1) Understanding of scholarship 2) Correct interpretation of scholarship 3) Correct application of scholarship 4) An ability to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant scholarship
What are the expectations for the program?	For the Graduate Student Critical Thinking and the Graduate Research Paper Writing rubrics we have the following expectations: 1) Average student falls at the high end (greater than 6) of the competent range (4-7) 2) 90% of all students will be rated as competent 3) 33% of all students will be rated as highly competent For the Academic Thesis and Creative Thesis rubrics we have the following expectations:

	1) Average student achieves competent (greater than 2.5) on the scale 2) 100% of students rated as competent 3) 75% of students rated as highly competent For the Comprehensive Exam rubric we have the following expectations: 1) Average student falls at the high end (greater than 13) of the competent range (10-14) on the scale 2) 90% of students rated as competent 3) 50% of students rated as highly competent
What were the results?	**Graduate Student Critical Thinking Rubric (Element 1):** 1) Average rubric score: 7.35 (on-campus) 8.49 (online) 2) 92% on-campus and 96% online students rated as competent 3) 53% on-campus and 82% online students rated as highly competent **Graduate Research Paper Writing Rubric (Element 3):** 1) Average rubric score: 7.47 (on-campus) 8.33 (online) 2) 90% on-campus and 98% online students rated as competent 3) 47% on-campus and 74% online students rated as highly competent **Academic and Creative Thesis Rubrics Literature Review Subscale:** 1) Creative Thesis Average student score: 4.9 2) Traditional Thesis Average Student Score: 4.43 3) 100% of students rated as Highly Competent in Creative and Traditional thesis writing **Comprehensive Exam Scholarship Subscale:** 1) Average student score: 15.63 2) 100% of students were rated as competent 3) 63% of students were rated as highly competent

How are the results shared? How will these results be used?	The assessment report is an agenda item for graduate faculty meetings at the beginning of each term. Our graduate faculty discuss results and explore ways we can make improvements. One area we will continue to explore is why our online students tend to out-perform our on-campus students. One primary reason for this is simply because we have more online students and offer more online classes and thus, we have more assessment data for this group of students. This likely skews the data in favor of our online students. Our online program is also less research-focused than our on-campus program which also may influence assessments, where our on-campus students may be assessed somewhat harder (or more rigorously) on research papers and thesis/creative projects.
CGS Learning Goal #2: Critical thinking and problem-solving skills	Program Learning Goal(s): Students will demonstrate effective critical thinking skills.
How are learners assessed?	Effective critical thinking is assessed three ways throughout the graduate program: 1) The Graduate Student Critical Thinking Rubric 2) The Findings/Conclusions subscales of the Academic and Creative Thesis rubrics 3) Element 3 (analysis/synthesis) of the Comprehensive Exam Rubric
What are the expectations for the students?	For this learning objective, students are evaluated on the following: 1) Ability to generate original insights 2) Ability to develop and design new research 3) Sensitivity to multiple perspectives 4) Ability to assess reasoning 5) Ability to assess arguments 6) Ability to identify assumptions
What are the expectations for the program?	For the Graduate Student Critical Thinking rubric we have the following expectations: 1) Average student scores 60 (out of 80) 2) 90% of students rated as competent 3) 50% of students rated as highly competent

	For the Findings/Conclusions subscales of the Academic Thesis and Creative Thesis rubrics we have the following expectations:
	    1) 3.75 out of 5 for the academic thesis
	    2) 3.75 out of 5 for the creative thesis
	
	 For the Comprehensive Exam Rubric (Element 3) we have the following expectations:
	    1) Average student score of a 12 (out of 20)

What were the results?	**Graduate Student Critical Thinking rubric:**
	   1) Average rubric score: 55.46 (on-campus) and 68.16 (online)
	    2) 82% on-campus and 100% online students rated as competent
	    3) 39% on-campus and 71% online students rated as highly competent
	
	 Creative thesis rubrics Conclusions subscale:
	   1) Traditional Score: 4.5
	   2) Creative Score: 4.71
	 Comprehensive Exam rubric (Element 3)
	   Analysis/synthesis score: 14.88

How are the results shared? How will these results be used?	The biggest need in this area is to explore ways we can help our on-campus students improve their critical thinking skills; they fell slightly short of our goals. One of the ways we have addressed this in the past is through writing groups and peer-to-peer mentoring. Students who participated in these opportunities reported feeling more confident in their critical thinking and writing skills. As a faculty, we have begun discussing ways we might also adjust our course assignments to target critical thinking skills.

CGS Learning Goal #3: Effective oral and written communication skills	Program Learning Goal(s): Students are able to communicate effectively in written and spoken form.
How are learners assessed?	Effective written communication is assessed three 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. 3) Elements 4 (organization/development) and 5 (style and mechanics) of the Comprehensive Exam Rubric. Effective spoken communication is assessed through the Graduate Speech Evaluation rubric.
What are the expectations for the students?	For this learning objective, students are evaluated on their writing and speaking quality, including but not limited to, the following: 1) Organization 2) Complexity of sentence structure 3) Effective use of language 4) Ability to communicate an argument/main idea to an audience 5) Ability to synthesize numerous concepts into a coherent argument 6) Competent delivery 7) Audience analysis
What are the expectations for the program?	Graduate Research Paper Writing rubric expectations: 1) Average student scores 75 (out of 100) 2) 90% of students rated as competent 3) 50% of students rated as highly competent Writing subscales of the Academic Thesis and Creative Thesis rubrics expectations: 1) Average student achieves a subscale score of highly competent (3.75 out of 5) Comprehensive Exam Rubric expectations: 2) Average student score of a 7 (out of 10) across all rubrics for the selected subscales Speaking expectations: 1) Average student score is highly competent (3.5 out of 4)

	2) 100% of rubrics rated as competent (2.5 out of 4) 3) 75% of rubrics rated as highly competent (3.5 on a 4 point scale)
What were the results?	**Graduate Research Paper Writing rubric:** 1) Average student score: 72.07 (on-campus) and 84.06 (online) 2) 95% of on-campus and 100% of online students were rated as competent 3) 48.8% of on-campus and 67.35% of online students were rated as highly competent **Creative thesis rubrics**: 1) Creative Thesis score: 4.9 2) Academic Thesis Score: 4.43 **Comprehensive Exam rubrics (organization/development; Style & mechanics)** 1) Organization/Development score: 9 2) Style and Mechanics: 8.38 **Speaking rubric:** 1) Average student score: 3.33 (on-campus) and 3.75 (online) 2) 82% of on-campus and 100% of online students rated as competent 3) 65% of on-campus and 82% of onlline students rated highly competent
How are the results shared? How will these results be used?	Our online students are meeting (or exceeding) our goals in this area; our on-campus students fell short. While on-campus student performance in this area is up slightly from last evaluation period, they are still not meeting our established goals. One way we have tried to improve students' writing skills is through writing groups. Faculty have also referred students to the writing center for assistance. We have also begun discussing ways we might adjust our course assignments to target writing skills. We will continue to explore possible causes for our on-campus student's challenges with writing. Additionally, our on-campus students did not meet our speaking goals. Interestingly, in our exit interview, 20 % of students overall reported that they felt our graduate program did not improve their speaking skills. One potential reason for lower ratings in this area relates to types of speaking assignments given in classes. Some faculty report that they

	give informal presentation assignments rather than more formal assingments.. Increasing the number of formal assignments might help improve students' speaking skills.

CGS Learning Goal #4: Evidence of advanced scholarship through research and/or creative activity.	Program Learning Goal(s): Students will be able to understand, critique, and apply appropriate research methods in a broad range of situations and contexts.
How are learners assessed?	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. 2) 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
What are the expectations for the students?	For this learning objective, students are evaluated on: 1) Understanding of various methodologies 2) Correct application of methods 3) Ability to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate claims based upon a chosen methodology
What are the expectations for the program?	For the Academic Thesis and Creative Thesis rubrics we have the following expectations: 1) Average student achieves a score relative to 80% or a… 2) 116 on the creative thesis rubric 3) 112 on the academic thesis rubric) For the Graduate Research Paper Writing rubric (elements 4 and 5) we have the following expectations: 1) Average student falls at the high end (greater than 6) of the competent range (4-7) 2) 90% of students rated as competent

	3) 50% of students rated as highly competent Student Presentations: 1) 50% of students will participate in original research presentations 2) 10% of students will present at local, regional, or national conferences

What were the results?	**Academic and Creative thesis rubrics:**
	    Academic Score: 120 (85.71%)
	    Creative:score: 139 (95.92%)
	Graduate Research Paper Writing rubric (elements 4- research methodology)
	1) Average score of 6.72 (on-campus) and 8.61 (online)
	2) 91%of on-campus and 96% of online students rated competent
	3) 44% of on-campus and 79% of online students rated as highly competent
	Graduate Research Paper Writing rubric (elements 5- analysis)
	1) Average score of 6.79 (on-campus) and 7.98 (online)
	2) 91% of on-campus and 100% of online students rated competent
	3) 49% of on-campus and 67% of online students rated as highly competent
	
	• We had 4 students complete a thesis during the current evaluation period
	• 2 students presented at regional conferences

How are the results shared? How will these results be used?	We had four students complete theses during this past year. Our graduate faculty are engaged in ongoing conversations about how to increase student research both in- and outside the classroom. A large majority of our graduate students, however, are enrolled in our online program which does not require a thesis option, so we do not expect to have large numbers of students participating in thesis or creative thesis work. We would like to increase the number of on-campus students who participate in research and present at local, regional, and national conferences.

	This will be a heavier focus for us this next year.

CGS Learning Goal #5: Ethics and Professional Responsibility	Program Learning Goal(s): Students will demonstrate integrity in their research practices, professional discipline, show respect for diversity and inclusion, and value respectful and inclusive discourse.
How are learners assessed?	Ethical and professional responsibility is assessed in two ways throughout the graduate program: 1) self-assessment on exit survey 2) written class papers using graduate research paper writing rubric (element 9-references)
What are the expectations for the students?	For this learning objective, students are evaluated on: 1) Integrity in scholarship 2) Responsible and informed decision-making 3) Appropriate and effective interactions with diverse others 4) Use of inclusive language
What are the expectations for the program?	For the exit interview we have the following expectations: 1) 100% of students report the program prepared them to communicate appropriately and effectively with diverse others 2) 100% of students report they feel equipped to make informed and responsible decisions 3) 100% of students report they use inclusive language For the Graduate Research Paper rubric (element 9- reference) we have the following expectations: 1) Average student score of a 7 (out of 10) across all rubrics for the selected subscale. 2) 100% of students rated as competent 3) 50% of students rated as highly competent

What were the results?	Exit interview:
	1) 63% of students report communicating appropriately and effectively with diverse others
	2) 87% of students report making informed and responsible decisions
	3) 94% of students report use of inclusive language
	Graduate Research Paper rubric (element 9):
	1) Average score of 7.53 (on-campus) and 8.24 (online)
	2) 84% of on-campus and 96% of online students rated as competent
	3) 47% of on-campus and 69% of online students rated as highly competent
How are the results shared? How will these results be used?	Both online and on-campus students fell short of our established goals in this area. While we teach ethics in all of our classes, our students seemed uncertain about the ways in which they learned/engaged in ethics and responsible citizenship. We are continuing to explore ways we can incorporate ethics into the classroom; we will also continue to explore how we can better assess this learning goal.

Part 2

Describe what your program's assessment accomplishments since your last report was submitted. Discuss ways in which you have responded to the Graduate Assessment Summary Response from last year's report or simply describe what assessment work was initiated, continued, or completed.

The Communication Studies division continued to collect all of the data outlined on the previous report. During this evaluation period, we feel we gained more insight into the ways in which our students are meeting the ethical and responsible citizenship goal. We added questions to our exit surveys to fully to assess how well students felt our program equipped them to be ethical and informed decision-makers. We also added questions related to critical thinking, speaking, writing. What we have discovered is that our students feel that we are helping them become better critical thinkers and writers. Some students (20%), however, did not feel that we made them better speakers. This might be in response to a greater number of faculty assigning more informal presentations in the classroom that did not require students to give conference-like or formal presentations. We have begun discussing ways we can address this issue.

Since our last reporting period in 2021, we have also seen upward growth in our online program, which means we are collecting more data from our online program than our on-campus program. Similar to last year, we have separated out the findings for each program. We had also hoped to increase our on-campus student engagement with research related activities over this past year.

We did have two students present at local and regional conferences (this is up from 0 during the last evaluation period). We are also seeing more student-faculty collaboration on research projects; we had two students working on independent studies/practicums in which they engaged in research and/or creative activities with faculty; we also had four students complete thesis projects. While we would like to increase the number of students presenting at conferences, we are experiencing a decline in on-campus enrollment and an increase in online enrollment. The lower numbers of students doing research is simply because our largest enrollment comes from our online program, which does not have a thesis option nor do most of our online classes require full research projects. This means that a majority of our students are not required to produce research in the traditional sense. Our graduate faculty are working on ways to be more creative with both our on-campus and our online students to increase student research activities and their research presence on campus and at conferences.

Part 3

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 continued to see a positive impact from curriculum changes we've made since our last two reports. As mentioned in our last report, we saw a significant increase in our graduation rates once we implemented comprehensive exam options for our on-campus students. This change resulted in a substantially higher percentage of students completing their program requirements and graduating on time--from 60% in 2019 to 100% in 2021 and beyond. We continued that trend in 2023 with 99% of our on-campus students completing their degree in 2 years. We have one remaining student who will complete requirements in FA23. We have also remained flexible with our delivery of curriculum. As our online enrollment continued to grow, we added new classes. In 2021 we offered 7 graduate classes per semester; that number increased to 8 classes in 2022 and 9 classes in 2023. These changes lead to a 100% completion rate for our online certificate students. While it is harder to assess graduation rates for our online MA students (since some students take 1 class per semester while others take 2-3 classes), we did have 10 students in our online MA in Communication and Leadership program graduate during SU23 and SP23. We had a total of 29 students graduate during the SU/SP23 semesters.

Our online program also continues to attract students from across the nation (stretching from the west coast to the east coast).We have had students from places as far away as Germany. As mentioned above, we have undergone some curriculum changes that have helped us deliver our online program to a growing student population. In general, we have learned through our assessment data that our online population is thriving in both of our online programs (Certificate and MA). 100% of our online student population has met or exceeded our expectations on every learning goal with the exception of our newest leaning goal: Ethical and Professional Responsibility. We had 5 students from the Certificate in Communication Processes program choose to complete the full MA degree; this also lead to our decision to create more classes per semester. This has become a common trend; we had several students from our last evaluation period who were enrolled in the certificate program also roll over into the MA program. The certificate program has become a strong recruitment tool for our MA program.

Current assessment data indicates that we need continue to increase our on-campus students' critical thinking skills, writing, and speaking skills. We will continue to find ways to engage students in the classroom to help improve their skills in these areas. In talks with faculty, a few ways we are hoping to address these issues are to increase the number of formal presentations and writing assignments we do in the classroom. This can help provide students opportunities to practice their speaking and writing skills. We have also discussed ways we can create more research and creative project opportunities for our on-campus students. Faculty will also continue to encourage student engagement in research/creative activities.

Our assessment data also tells us that we need to find ways to improve student ethics and professional responsibility. Students in both the on-campus and online programs fell short of our goals in this area. One possible reason for this is that we are still working out the best way to assess ethics. For the current evaluation period, we used the exit interview to assess student knowledge and comfortability with ethics and professional responsibility. While we teach ethics in all of our communication courses, including offering an ethics class, CMN5015 Communication Ethics, we aren't sure if our students are always aware of that content. In light of this, we need to find ways to frame our conversations clearly so that students know what types of communicative activity counts as ethical communication. We also need to find ways to assess ethics and professional responsibility beyond the exit interview.