

**2022-2023 Academic Assessment Report
Bachelor of Arts in Communication (COMMBA)
September 14, 2023**

The Department of Communication is committed to excellence in scholarship, instruction, and expression of human communication. We nurture a thriving intellectual community by bridging the humanities and social sciences. Discovery, learning, diversity, and engagement are the hallmarks of this community. The Department of Communication strives to enhance its national reputation for a diverse undergraduate curriculum and innovative online learning.

Classes are grouped into five emphasis areas: Film Studies, Interpersonal Communication, Mediated Communication, Organizations & Communities, and Public Communication. Although students are not required to declare or complete an emphasis area, they are encouraged to tailor their course selections to areas that best fit their academic interests and career goals. Across this curriculum, the department's undergraduate courses generated 33,554 student semester credit hours (SSCH) from Summer of 2022 to Spring of 2023 (a slight decrease over the previous year).

841 unique students were enrolled in the program, keeping the program's total student count relatively stable compared to the previous year. The department also serves 110 students in the COMM-M minor, and another 18 students who include the COMM minor in their Interdisciplinary Studies major. The program continues to maintain a high level of degree productivity. The Department of Communication granted 225 BA degrees in calendar year 2022, which were the most BA degrees granted from a single department in Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences in calendar year 2022.

Student Learning Outcomes

Each of the learning outcomes listed below includes levels of student achievement appropriate to lower- and upper-level courses. With this as a framework, the faculty can use these learning outcomes to assess both the curriculum and individual courses. Students completing the BA in Communication should be able to:

- LO1. Employ communication theories, perspectives, principles, and concepts.
- LO2. Engage in communication inquiry by interpreting, evaluating, applying, and formulating communication scholarship.
- LO3. Create messages appropriate to the audience, purpose, and context through:
 - developing excellent oral and written communication skills;
 - locating and using information relevant to the goals, audiences, purposes and contexts;
 - selecting creative, appropriate modalities and technologies to accomplish communicative goals;
 - adapting messages to the diverse needs of individuals, groups and contexts;
 - presenting messages in multiple communication modalities and contexts;
 - adjusting messages while in the process of communicating; and
 - critically reflecting on one's own messages after the communication event.
- LO4. Critically analyze messages by

- identifying embedded meanings,
 - articulating message characteristics in a variety of mediated and non-mediated channels,
 - recognizing the influence of messages, and
 - enacting mindful responses to messages.
- LO5. Utilize communication to embrace differences by
- articulating the connection between communication and culture;
 - appreciating, articulating cultural similarities and differences;
 - respecting diverse perspectives and the ways they influence communication;
 - articulating one's own cultural standpoint and its effects on communication and world view; and
 - adapting one's communication in diverse cultural contexts.
- LO6. Influence public discourse by:
- explaining the importance of communication in civic life.
 - identifying the challenges facing communities and the role of communication in resolving them.
 - framing, evaluating, and using communication to respond to local, national, and global issues.
- LO7. From a communication perspective, advocate a course of action to
- address local, national, and global issues.
 - empower individuals to promote human rights, dignity, and freedom.

Assessing Methods and Findings

The department's Vice-Chair coordinates the assessment of the BA program in collaboration with other faculty. They jointly develop the assessment methods, procedures, and data collection. The department employed three methods of assessment (below). The Undergraduate Committee reviews and analyzes the data. They discuss their findings and observations with the Vice-Chair and Director of Undergraduate Studies. Their recommendations and this report are shared with the faculty.

Placement and Salary Data from the Career Development Center

Recent graduates' professional activities are one way to gauge the value of the knowledge and skills taught in the COMMBA program on the job market. Data on student career outcomes was taken from the UA Career Development Center's *Class of 2022 Career Outcomes Report* (the most recent report available). Data were available for 49.1% of total graduates for the year (n = 109). Of those students, 55.0% were entering employment and 32.1% were entering graduate or professional degree programs. This is a total placement rate of 87.2%.

Salary data from this same report indicates that the median salary for recent COMMBA graduates was \$37,750 and the mean salary was \$48,669, which compares favorably to programs across campus and in the Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences.

Fulbright Writing Requirement

All Communication majors are required to complete the Fulbright Writing Requirement prior to graduation. These papers are intended to address Student Learning Outcomes 1, 2, and 3 in all

cases. Depending on the specific course, these papers also address one or more of Learning Outcomes 4, 5, 6, and 7. The department's conditions for the paper are:

- Students must write the paper in a COMM course numbered 3000 or higher.
 - The department has designated upper-level, small-enrollment courses (those with an enrollment cap of 35 students or less) for the FWR.
 - Those courses will either assign a paper that meets the department's conditions for the FWR or will make such a paper an optional assignment. In some cases, the optional paper might be substituted for another assignment; in other cases, it might be used solely to fulfill the FWR and not count toward the student's course grade. This is done at the discretion of the instructor.
- The paper must be researched from materials outside the required course readings. Course instructors may also have additional requirements for the assignment, so students should consult their instructor.
- The paper should be 10 or more pages in length. Again, consult the course instructor for any additional assignment requirements.
- The student's paper must score a grade of "C" or higher to complete the FWR. The final course grade does not fulfill the requirement, only the grade earned on the paper.

At the end of each semester, instructors of FWR-designated courses submit a list of COMM majors who have completed the requirement to the Director of Undergraduate Studies. In total, 210 COMM majors completed the FWR from Summer 2022-Spring 2023. These grades affirm that the students have met Learning Outcomes 1-3, in addition to any course-specific objectives associated with Learning Outcomes 4-7.

Student Survey Methods & Procedures

In the 2020-2021 academic year, the department developed a survey for graduating students. This exit survey covered several topics, including satisfaction with COMM courses and the major; satisfaction with COMM instructors and advising; perceived self-efficacy in each set of student learning outcomes; and a set of demographic factors (e.g., gender identification, race/ethnic identification, cumulative GPA) to compare subgroups of students.

After developing and pilot testing the survey in Fall 2021, the department implemented the survey in the Spring 2022 semester. This same assessment was used for Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 graduates. All COMM majors who applied for graduation in Fall 2022 or Spring 2023 were contacted via email and asked to complete the BA exit survey online. This strategy yielded a response rate of 15%. Respondents were mostly female (83.3%) and White (71.0%), followed by Hispanic or Latino (14.3%) and Asian American/Pacific Islander (6.5%). Over half of all respondents (58.1%) reported cumulative GPAs of 3.5 or higher, skewing the sample based on the average GPAs of COMM majors. Nearly two-thirds of these respondents reported that they did not choose courses with any one emphasis area of the department (64.5%), while others reported emphasizing organization and community communication (22.6%), interpersonal communication (16.1%), mediated communication (12.9%), film studies (9.7%), and rhetoric and public communication (9.7%).

Satisfaction with COMM Major & Courses

Most students were satisfied with the COMM BA program, at least as measured by three items measuring this topic. Over four-fifths of respondents (84.6%) were satisfied with their educational experience in Communication. Nearly three-quarters (71.4%) either somewhat or strongly agreed that they would recommend the major to other students and either somewhat or strongly agreed that if they could start college over, they would select the same major (72.4%).

Similar levels of satisfaction were reported with the COMM courses these respondents completed. Most respondents (90.3%) somewhat or strongly agreed that their COMM courses covered relevant content, covered a broad range of topics (90.3%), and covered topics in depth and detail (83.4%). Nearly four-fifths of all respondents (83.9%) were satisfied overall with their COMM courses. Fewer students agreed that their COMM courses were very difficult (20.0%). Finally, about half (46.7%) of students agreed that the department should offer more diversity-related content in its courses (only 13.3% disagreed and 30.0% had no opinion)

Satisfaction with Instructors & Advising

Students were largely satisfied with their COMM instructors. Nearly all respondents (89.6%) agreed that COMM faculty are committed to academic excellence and that the quality of instruction in the department is excellent (85.7%). Most respondents also agreed that faculty members are supportive (82.8%) and concerned about students' success (86.2%), and available for consultation (75.8%). Finally, slightly over three-fourths of respondents agreed that faculty are both available for consultation (75.8%) and treat students from diverse backgrounds with respect (75.9%).

Approximately three-fifths (58.6%) of respondents agreed that their advisors usually had the information they needed to choose courses for their major. Slightly less than half (48.3%) agreed that the course information they received from their advisors was an accurate picture of the courses offered by the COMM department.

Student Learning Outcomes

A detailed set of survey items measured students' beliefs that their COMM courses helped them develop knowledge and skills in each of the major's intended learning outcomes: theory and research (LO1 and LO2), message creation (LO3) and analysis (LO4), embracing differences when communicating with different people and audiences (LO5), influencing public discourse (LO6), and advocating courses of action (LO7).

Research and theory skills (LO1 and LO2). Three items measured respondents' beliefs about how well their COMM courses prepared them with theory and research skills. Seventy percent of respondents thought they were extremely or very well prepared to understand communication research and communication theories, principles, and concepts. Slightly more than seventy percent of respondents (70.3%) felt this level of preparedness when it comes to engaging in communication research themselves. These scores reflect an increase in perceived theory and research skills from the 2021-2022 assessment, which indicated approximately half of the respondents felt confident to engage in communication theory and research and that their COMM courses prepared them well. Students referenced COMM 2323: Communication

Research, COMM 3343: Contemporary Communication Theory, and COMM 4423: Disaster and Risk Communication as specific courses that helped them develop these skills.

Message creation skills (LO3). Greater proportions of respondents felt the COMM degree prepared them extremely or very well to create messages appropriate to their audience, purpose, and context. Most believe that they received this level of preparation for critically reflecting on their own messages (76.7%), adjusting messages during the communication process (88.5%), developing excellent oral/written communication skills (79.0%), locating and using relevant information (73.3%), selecting appropriate channels or technologies to communicate (76.7%), presenting messages in multiple channels and contexts (86.7%), and adapting messages to the diverse needs of the audience and context (80.0%). Students referenced COMM 1313: Public Speaking, COMM 2353: Argumentation and Advocacy, and COMM 3673: Mediated Communication as specific courses that helped them develop these skills.

Message analysis skills (LO4). Four items measured students' beliefs that their COMM courses prepared them with skills necessary to critically analyze messages. Many believe that they were extremely or very well prepared to recognize the influence of messages (72.0%), provide mindful responses to messages (79.3%), and identify embedded meanings in messages (62.0%). Slightly more than half of respondents believed they were extremely or very well prepared to articulate message characteristics in a variety of channels (58.6%), Students referenced COMM 3383: Persuasion and COMM 3503: Popular Communication and Culture as specific courses that helped them develop these skills.

Embracing communicative differences (LO5). Five items measured students' beliefs that their COMM courses prepared them with skills necessary to embrace differences among people by using specific communication skills. Higher levels of students believe that they are extremely or very well prepared to respect the ways that diverse perspectives influence communication (68.9%), explain the connection between communication and culture (65.5%), recognize cultural similarities and differences (72.4%), explain how one's own cultural perspective affect their communication (76.0%), and adapt their communication in diverse cultural contexts (68.9%). Students referenced COMM 2353: Argumentation and Advocacy and COMM 4343: Intercultural Communication as specific courses that helped them develop these skills.

Influencing public discourse (LO6). Three items measured students' beliefs that their COMM courses prepared them with skills necessary to influence public discourse with specific communication skills. More than half of respondents reported feeling extremely or very well prepared to explain the importance of communication in civic life (64.3%); identify the challenges facing communities and the role of communication in resolving them (56.0%); and frame, evaluate, and use communication to respond to challenge facing communities (58.6%). Students referenced COMM 3373: Leadership Communication and COMM 4373: Political Communication as specific courses that helped them develop these skills.

Advocating for courses of action (LO7). Two items measured students' beliefs that their COMM courses prepared them to advocate for a course of action. Less than half of respondents felt extremely or well prepared to empower other individuals to promote human rights, diversity, and freedom (40.7%) and address local, national, and global issues (29.2%). Students referenced

COMM 4373: Political Communication and COMM 4863: Seminar in Media as specific courses that helped them develop these skills.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A general assessment of the BA in Communication indicates that the program is largely successful. The department's faculty continue to devote inordinate amounts of time and attention to their teaching as they negotiated the transition back to on-campus learning (including the delivery of our online degree program). Student placement and salary data continue to indicate that COMM graduates are sought after members of both the private sector and graduate/professional degree programs.

With these successes, of course, are multiple areas where the department's faculty might focus their attention in the next academic year. The following recommendations are therefore offered:

- Senior exit survey data reveals that approximately 40-50% of students believe more information is needed to help them understand the major and be advised into courses. Similarly, nearly two-thirds of respondents indicated that they selected courses without considering one the department's five emphasis areas. Over the last three years, the Department restructured the BA program to have emphasis areas and 2000-level prerequisite courses to help students articulate a more specific focus or direction of their major to potential employers and graduate and professional programs. The findings from this year's exit survey suggest more work is needed to help students develop a plan of study. Based on recommendations from the 2022 report, the undergraduate director and director of foundational programs in Fulbright Advising hosted a series of five "after-hours" information sessions with new and prospective majors during the 2022-2023 academic year to help students develop a plan of study. The sessions also included a mobile advising activity that facilitated communication between the students and their advisor. However, attendance was low (10 students total). The department should consider shifting these information sessions and advising apps to different formats including:
 - A "Welcome to the Major" Blackboard course for students with less than 15-hours in the major. This course will include information about the emphasis areas the FWR, the world language and culture requirement, as well as other relevant information.
 - Short videos highlighting each emphasis area. These videos would supplement the information already available about the emphasis areas on the Department's website and could be filmed and edited using equipment available in the Center for Communication Research.
- Senior exit survey data suggests that most respondents did not feel their communication courses were very difficult. Faculty identified course rigor as a topic they would like to pursue during the Department's strategic planning sessions in the 2021-2022 academic year. The department's undergraduate committee should consider ways to address this issue and report back to the faculty during the 2023-2024 academic year.
- The department should consider addressing the results regarding LO7 (see above) through smaller course caps in upper-level courses (thereby facilitating more engaged, applied course assignments) and expanded service-learning courses in the department.

Submitted by:
Dr. Matthew Spialek, Acting Chair