

2024-2025 Academic Assessment Report
Bachelor of Arts in Communication (COMMBA)
May 15, 2025

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 and Rhetoric. 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.

The duplicated major count in 2024 was 963. The department also serves 124 students in the COMM-M minor, and another 14 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 181 BA degrees in calendar year 2024, which were tied for second of the most BA degrees granted from a single department in Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences in calendar year 2024.

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 Director of Undergraduate Studies reviews and analyzes the data and discusses the data with the Chair and Vice-Chair. Their recommendations and this report are shared with the faculty.

Placement and Salary Data from the Fulbright College Career Connections Center*

Placement data about UA COMMBA graduates echoes national trends of the marketability of a COMM degree. Communication alumni from the years 2020-2024 were surveyed by Industry Sector Lightcast. Below is a summary of those results. These data do not assess cases of underemployment or employment in a job not related to the field of study.

COMM BA alumni surveyed reported a wide range of industries in which they are employed doing a variety of occupations. Of those surveyed, 65% indicated they are working within a communication-related field, earning an average annual income of \$50,300. Almost one half of those surveyed (46%) state they live within the northwest Arkansas region. The tables below show type industries and occupations indicated.

***Industry of Employment**

<u>Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services</u>	<u>11%</u>
<u>Educational Services</u>	<u>6.3%</u>
<u>Real Estate</u>	<u>4.4%</u>
<u>Administrative and Support Services</u>	<u>3.3%</u>
<u>Publishing Services</u>	<u>2.9%</u>
<u>Food Service and Drinking Places</u>	<u>2.9%</u>
<u>Merchant Wholesalers, Durable Goods</u>	<u>2.7%</u>

<u>Merchant Wholesalers, Nondurable Goods</u>	<u>2.7%</u>
<u>General Merchandise Retailers</u>	<u>2.5%</u>
<u>Truck Transportation</u>	<u>2.4%</u>

***Positions**

<u>Marketing Manager</u>	<u>6.3%</u>
<u>Public Relations Specialist</u>	<u>5.9%</u>
<u>Customer Service Representative</u>	<u>5.3%</u>
<u>Sales Representative, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products</u>	<u>4.5%</u>
<u>Account Managers</u>	<u>4.1%</u>
<u>Sales Manager</u>	<u>3.9%</u>
<u>Human Resources Specialists</u>	<u>3.9%</u>
<u>Sales Representative of Services, Except Advertising, Insurance, Financial Services, and Travel</u>	<u>3.9%</u>
<u>Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists</u>	<u>2.9%</u>
<u>Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive</u>	<u>2.9</u>
<u>Manager, All Other</u>	<u>2.7%</u>
<u>Real Estate Sales Agent</u>	<u>2.2%</u>
<u>First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Worker</u>	<u>2%</u>
<u>Sales Representative</u>	<u>1.8%</u>
<u>Project Manager</u>	<u>1.2%</u>
<u>Public Relations Manager</u>	<u>1.6%</u>
<u>Business Operations Specialist</u>	<u>1.6%</u>
<u>Executive Secretaries and Executive Administrative Assistant</u>	<u>1.6%</u>
<u>General and Operations Manager</u>	<u>1.6%</u>
<u>Human Resources Managers</u>	<u>1.4%</u>
<u>Meeting, Convention, and Event Planners</u>	<u>1.4%</u>
<u>Training and Development Specialist</u>	<u>1.4%</u>
<u>Chief Executive</u>	<u>1.2%</u>
<u>Business Development Managers</u>	<u>1.0%</u>

<u>Financial Manager</u>	<u>1.0%</u>
<u>Computer User Support Specialist</u>	<u>1.0%</u>
<u>Educational, Guidance, and Career Counselors and Advisors</u>	<u>1.0%</u>
<u>Social and Human Service Assistant</u>	<u>1.0%</u>
<u>Marketing Coordinator</u>	<u>1.0%</u>
<u>Recruitment Consultant</u>	<u>.8%</u>
<u>Marketing Manager</u>	<u>.8%</u>
	<u>.1%</u>

***The top companies employing UA Communication alumni.**

University of Arkansas, Walmart, JB Hunt, Tyson Foods, Insight Global Supply, Deloitte, Gartner, Sam's Club, Enterprise Rent-A-Car

*Source: Fulbright College Career Connections

Salary data from this same report indicates that COMMBA graduates are making an estimated \$50,300 with the potential to earn up to \$86,000, 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, 202 COMM majors completed the FWR from Fall 2024-Spring 2025. 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.

This same assessment was used for Spring 2025 graduates. All COMM majors who applied for graduation Spring 2025 were contacted via email and asked to complete the BA exit survey online. This strategy yielded a response rate of 14%. The mean age was 23.7 years. Respondents were mostly female (89%) and White/Caucasian (95%), Asian American/Pacific Islander (5%). Over half of all respondents (58%) reported cumulative GPAs of 3.5 or higher.

High Impact Learning

Students were asked about participating in high impact learning opportunities. Their responses indicated that 36% completed internships, 57% were involved in service-learning projects, and 36% were engaged in independent study projects or wrote theses.

Post Graduation Plans

When asked about their plans for after graduation, 26% already have jobs, 37% are seeking employment, and 37% are planning to attend graduate or professional schools.

Satisfaction with COMM Major & Courses

Satisfaction with their COMM major

Students were asked five questions about their experiences while being a Communication major. Their responses reveal that they were highly satisfied with their educational experiences ($M = 4.74/5.00$ with $5.00 =$ strongly agree or extremely well), if they were starting college again, they would choose to major in Communication ($4.63/5.00$), and they would recommend Communication as a major to other students ($M = 4.84/5.00$). Less satisfaction was shown for their experiences with advising in choosing courses in their major ($M = 3.79/5.00$) and for the course information being an accurate picture of the courses offered by the department ($M = 3.79/5.00$).

Satisfaction with COMM instructors

Students' responses reveal a high degree of satisfaction with their COMM instructors. To assess these views, five questions were asked. Communication faculty are regarded as supportive ($M = 4.79/5.00$),

committed to academic excellence ($M = 4.79/5.00$), available for consultation ($M = 4.68/5.00$), and concerned about their success ($M = 4.58/5.00$). Students also strongly agree/agree that the quality of teaching in the COMM department is excellent ($M = 4.74/5.00$).

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. Sixty-six percent of respondents thought they were extremely or very well prepared to understand communication research and communication theories, principles, and concepts. Seventy-seven percent of respondents 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 2022-2023 assessment, which indicated fewer respondents felt confident to engage in communication theory and research and that their COMM courses prepared them well. Students referenced COMM 23303: Communication Research, COMM 33403: Contemporary Communication Theory, COMM 23403 Small Group Communication, COMM 37003 Organizational Communication, and COMM 33803: Persuasion 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 (94%), adjusting messages during the communication process (89%), developing excellent oral/written communication skills (94%), locating and using relevant information (89%), selecting appropriate channels or technologies to communicate (83%), presenting messages in multiple channels and contexts (89%), and adapting messages to the diverse needs of the audience and context (78%). Students referenced SPCH 10003: Public Speaking, COMM 23503: Argumentation and Advocacy, and COMM 36703: COMM 36703: Mediated Communication, and COMM 48403 Computer-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 ($M = 4.42/5.00$), provide mindful responses to messages ($M = 4.39/5.00$), and identify embedded meanings in messages ($M = 4.16/5.00$). Respondents believed they were extremely or very well prepared to articulate message characteristics in a variety of channels ($M = 4.11/5.00$). Students referenced COMM 33803: Persuasion and COMM 35003: 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 (M = 4.58/5.00), explain the connection between communication and culture (M = 4.53/5.00), recognize cultural similarities and differences (M = 4.63/5.00), explain how one's own cultural perspective affect their communication (M = 4.58/5.00), and adapt their communication in diverse cultural contexts (M = 4.47/5.00). Students referenced COMM 43203: Communication and Conflict, COMM 47403: Representational Issues in Film, COMM 10203 Communication in a Diverse World, COMM 23503: Argumentation and Advocacy COMM 37003 Organizational Communication, COMM 31503: Visual Communication, COMM 48403: Computer Mediated Communication, COMM 23403: Small Group Communication, and COMM 43403: 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 (M = 4.32/5.00); identify the challenges facing communities and the role of communication in resolving them (M = 4.47/5.00); and frame, evaluate, and use communication to respond to challenge facing communities (M = 4.58/5.00). Students referenced COMM 3373: Leadership Communication, COMM 46703: Introduction to Rhetorical Communication, COMM 46403: Environmental Communication, COMM 23403: Small Group Communication, COMM 37303, COMM 43403: COMM 43403: Intercultural Communication, COMM 37003: Organizational Communication, SPCH 10003: Public Speaking, 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 (M = 3.47/5.00) while more feel prepared to address local, national, and global issues (M = 3.78/5.00). Students referenced COMM 3373: Leadership Communication, COMM 23503: Argumentation and Advocacy, COMM 37303: Organizational Communication, COMM 36703: Mediated Communication, and COMM 48403: Computer-Mediated Communication as specific courses that helped them develop these skills.

Overall Student Perceptions of Communication Classes

Students were asked to reflect on their views of the courses they completed in Communication. Generally, students indicated the courses cover relevant content (M = 4.74/5.0), a broad range of topics (M = 4.68/5.0), and cover the content in good depth and detail (M = 4.63/5.00). The only category in which courses were not viewed as strongly regarded rigor as students do not perceive them to be difficult (M = 2.95/5.00).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This reported 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, both in on-campus learning and 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 reveal that all students believe more information is needed to help them understand the major and be advised into courses. Similarly, 58% of respondents indicated that they selected courses without considering one of the department's five emphasis areas. Within the past five 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. Professional advisors need to offer greater guidance for students to develop their plans of study with such greater focus. Previously, Director of Undergraduate Studies and director of foundational programs in Fulbright Advising hosted a series of five "after-hours" information sessions with new and prospective majors 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 re-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 communication capstone course (which will replace the FWR and fulfill GELO 6.1 in future semesters), 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 suggest that most respondents did not feel their communication courses were very difficult. Faculty are discussing strategies to increase the rigor of courses.
- 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 opportunities in more courses in the department.

Submitted by:
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