

Undergraduate Assessment of Student Learning Report for 2014-2015

A. Program Information

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Program: Mass Communications

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B. Outcome Reporting

According to the School's document, the 2014-2015 direct assessment entailed using answers to questions relating to our 12 learning objectives on the A.Q. Miller School assessment exam, which is routinely administered to students in the MC 110 Mass Communication in Society class (N=534) to establish a baseline, and then to seniors (N=122) enrolled in the School's three capstone classes. This method of assessment provides an indication of how our curriculum impacts learning in the 12 areas of assessment by providing the contrast between the knowledge of pre-majors and seniors completing our program. The pre-test/post-test model is popular among ACEJMC accredited institutions; in fact, the organization's site visit team endorsed this method during their 2013 accreditation visit. Therefore, we stand by this method, and we will continue to use it.

Additionally, we have established levels of program expectations using a point system, as outlined in the K-State Office of University Assessment's "Outcomes" section of K-State Online. Using exam scores for each of the 12 learning objectives, we are weighting student performances on the questions relating to each SLO. Under these criteria, three points (a minimum student score of 75%) exceeds program expectations, two of four (50%) meets program expectations and one of four (25%) is the minimum acceptable level of acceptance. Therefore, we are reporting three categories: "Meets or Exceeds Program Expectations" is 50% or above, which means that a student correctly answered at least two questions; "Meets Minimum Program Expectations" is 25%, where one question is answered correctly; and "Does Not Meet Expectations" is where NO questions were answered correctly in an SLO question grouping.

Additionally, the Committee resolved some unfinished business from last year, as we were unable to achieve consensus on a reliable way to assess SLO 10 ("critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness"). This year, the committee established a qualitative procedure to help us develop a reliable method for assessing SLO 10, whereby students in each of the capstone classes—MC 580 Media Convergence; MC 640 Advertising Campaigns and MC 645 Public Relations Campaigns—were given an in-class exercise to evaluate work produced in previous semesters, using a rubric to assess and discuss six common criteria: topic treatment, writing proficiency, tools and techniques, research, application of theoretical concepts and originality and creativity. The actual assessment of student skills, however, was actually done by industry professionals who have expertise in each capstone subject area. The visiting professionals observed students reviewing and discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the work under review, and then wrote their assessment of the students' overall evaluation skills. (The procedure is being refined by the Assessment Committee and

will be implemented in the School's assessment routine in 2015-2016.)

We additionally used two indirect measures: the annual Senior Satisfaction Survey and the Alumni Satisfaction Survey, both of which are administered annually by the University Assessment Office. The Senior Survey had a response rate of roughly 50 percent, as only 58 of the School's 116 graduating seniors participated in the overall survey. The survey was administered over Summer 2014, Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 to those students who applied or were approved to graduate in those semesters. The Alumni Survey suffered from a low response rate, as only 18 of 74 subjects completed the questionnaire—although the JMC Alumni response rate (24.32%) was greater than that of the overall University (18.38%) and the College of Arts and Sciences (18.5%).

Student Learning Outcomes

SLO 1: Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievance.

The scores on the assessment exam indicated that 68% of our graduating seniors either met or exceeded expectations on questions relating to media law, as 62 students exceeded expectations, 21 met the minimum level of expectation and 39 did not meet departmental expectations.

When compared to pre-major assessment scores, seniors in the three capstone classes scored a 51.9% on law questions, while freshmen answered 26.9% of the items correctly, indicating a 25% improvement for seniors over pre-majors who took the assessment exam as part of the School's introductory class. This indicates that A.Q. Miller School students benefit greatly from studying media law principles in a dedicated core class and through repeated exposure to legal issues and applications in sequence courses. This coincides with a question on the Senior Survey, where 80.4% of the respondents agreed that as a result of their JMC courses, they have a better understanding of media law principles.

SLO 2: Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.

History is commonly taught as an element of all classes in the A.Q. Miller School; yet it is an area in which past assessments have shown only modest gains among seniors when compared to the Freshman group scores. In analyzing the performance by seniors, 84 exceeded expectations (68/9%), 16 met minimum expectations (13.1%) and 22 (18.0%) failed to meet expectations.

The senior scores signify an improvement in history competency, as seniors achieved a score of 60.1%, compared to the freshmen score of 48.6%, a 11.5% difference.

On the indirect Senior Satisfaction Survey, 62.7% of seniors agreed that the curriculum had given them a better understanding of historical concepts.

SLO 3: Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications.

The A.Q. Miller School teaches elective classes dealing with diversity issues, and we require instructors to address the subject in their courses. Additionally, diversity is a common topic in ethics classes or in campaigns courses that consider the composition of audiences.

This is reflected in the senior assessment exam, where 107 students (87.7%) exceeded expectations, and 15 students (12.3%) failed to meet expectations (there were no students who met the minimal level). The senior scores represented an impressive 91.3% of respondents who correctly answered diversity related questions, an 11.3% improvement over the score of pre-majors, who also had an impressive performance at 81.4% correct answers.

The self-reported opinions of graduating seniors reveals that they also have a high opinion of what they learned on the subject, as 88.3% agreed that their curriculum taught them much about diversity-related concepts. Clearly, diversity education is a strength of our curriculum.

SLO 4: Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.

Senior exam scores indicate that 77 (63.1%) exceed expectations, 21 (17.2%) meet minimum expectations and 24 (19.7%) did not meet expectations in this criteria.

This means that seniors correctly answered 62.5% of the questions, which is 16.6% higher than beginning students (45.9% correct).

On the senior satisfaction survey, 66.7% agreed that their education in the A.Q. Miller School had made them aware of global perspectives. We expect that the A.Q. Miller School's greater emphasis on study abroad opportunities will allow for higher scores on future exams. A greater number of elective courses with an international communication focus may also bear fruit in creating greater international standing.

SLO 5: Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information.

Theory represents a challenge, since we have no dedicated courses in this area. While theory is a component of all classes, many of the theories we study are sequence-specific and are not necessarily represented on the assessment exam.

Eighty seniors (65.6%) met or exceeded expectations, while 23 (18.9%) met minimum expectations and 19 (15.6%) did not meet expectations at all.

Seniors correctly answered 65.5% of theory related questions, which was 20.7% better than pre-majors, who correctly answered 44.8% of questions in this category. In terms of indirect assessment, seniors reported that the curriculum had helped them better understand theory (68.6% agreed).

SLO 6: Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.

Several questions on the assessment exam addressed media ethics. In this category, 95

students (77.9%) met or exceeded expectations, while 6 students met minimum expectations and 17 (13.9%) did not meet expectations. Seniors correctly answered 77.7% of the ethics questions on the exam, representing a 32.9% improvement over the baseline pre-major scores (44.8% correct). Senior survey responses somewhat support the indication that ethical issues and principles are understood by the students, as 98.1% of seniors agreed that their education has helped them in this area.

SLO 7: Think critically, creatively and independently.

Critical and creative thinking is a problematic area due to its difficulty in measurement and because of the fact that this objective is “double barreled” in the way it is written, meaning that the concepts “critical,” “creative” and “independent” are not necessarily the same thing. On the indirect senior survey, the concepts “critical” and “creative” were separated, and 83.3% of the respondents agreed that the program had enhanced their critical thinking skills, while 78.4% said their curriculum had helped them be more creative thinkers.

But the concepts were lumped together as one variable on the assessment exam, where seniors answered 60.1% of the answers correctly, as opposed to 48% of the freshmen, a 12.1% difference. As is, 88 seniors (72.1%) met or exceeded expectations, 18 (14.8%) met the minimum level of expectations and 16 (13.1%) failed to meet expectations. As was noted last year, further refinements in procedures may be necessary, since these skills may be easier to assess in other formats beyond a quantitative exam.

SLO 8: Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communication professions for which they work.

Conducting research and understanding findings is an important skill for practitioners in this field. Our core curriculum is constructed with the goal of instilling basic research literacy. On the assessment exam, 68.8% of students answered research-related questions correctly, while pre-majors correctly answered 57.3% of the time (an 11.5% improvement). Among seniors, 95 (77.9%) met or exceeded expectations, 12 (9.8%) met minimum expectations and 15 (12.3%) failed to meet expectations.

The indirect measure shows that 78.4% of seniors believe our curriculum has helped them better understand research principles.

SLO 9: Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.

A.Q. Miller School graduates must be able to write well, a natural assumption for students in a mass communication related program. In fact, writing has been the anchor for program assessment since 2004. There were several writing-related questions on the assessment exam, where 68 seniors (55.7%) met or exceeded expectations, 25 (20.5%) met minimum expectations and 29 (23.8%) failed to meet expectations. Seniors answered 61.3% of the questions correctly, as opposed to 47% for pre-majors (a 14.3% improvement). On the senior survey, the skills of writing and grammar were broken down into two questions, where 88.4% agreed that they are better writers and 76.5% agreed that the curriculum had made them more proficient at grammar.

SLO 10: Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.

This objective was not represented on the assessment exam, since the committee could not develop a satisfactory bank of questions to measure these skills. Instead, the committee decided to assess SLO 10 through an entirely different procedure, using a qualitative observational approach, whereby media professionals observed students' examination of work produced in capstone classes from past semesters and directly led discussions of

strengths and weaknesses of the older assignments. The industry assessors then wrote their observations of the student competencies. From their comments and recommendations, the assessment committee will develop a more routinized (and quantifiable) method of measuring student performance in this SLO.

In MC 580, 18 students were observed in this exercise. In MC 640, 16 students participated, while 25 students participated in MC 645. Again, since this was a trial procedure, there was no established level of achievement. The results below are anecdotal.

MC 580: Students showed an excellent understanding of the core journalism concepts, an exceptional understanding of how to effectively tell stories across media platforms and were able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the group project they had been asked to critique.

Evaluators were also able to recognize the group's ability to use research to localize a story and use tools and techniques effectively. Overall, they felt our students were very capable of evaluating each other's work using the above criteria. BUT they both had one concern: Theory was a struggle for ALL the students. Students could not recall a single theory that could apply to the project. When students were further asked to recall any theories that they may have learned during their time at K-State, most of them could not.

Based on this evaluation our students are well prepared and knowledgeable to evaluate each other's work but we may want to rethink the way we teach theoretical concepts.

MC 640: The industry professional who observed the student critiquing process made the following observations:

- "I was impressed that the students were willing to dig right in to the plan. Of course some students were more vocal than others, but by the end, every student contributed to the conversation. That surprised me."
- "I was pleased that the responses were not cookie cutter or full of jargon. They were clearly not trying to find the **only** response, as that doesn't exist. There was good debate among the students about possible directions the previous plan could have gone. There was also a sound evaluation of **how** the previous students derived the plan."
- "It was much easier for the students to talk about strategies and tactics than addressing bigger picture goals of the project, but that is understandable. When prompted on some of these items, they were able to exhibit a comprehension of tying research into action."
- "The plan that was being reviewed was solid, but I did identify several possible items that should have been highlighted or capitalized on by the previous team, and I found at least two places with minor flaws. This student group identified three of the four questionable findings. I would consider that very successful as at least two of them included some very elaborate connections."
- "Overall, I was pleased with the responses and the discussion. The work met or exceeded my expectations of where a group of people trying to make the jump from student to professional should be. Very pleased."
- "I think the written student evaluations are very similar to my impressions I gathered during the video conversation."

- “In our discussion the students talked quite extensively about theories or concepts we use like innovation diffusion, and how messages spread through channels and groups. They seem to have marked themselves as lower than how I interpreted our discussion. I assume the students didn’t even realize they were using theory, but they showed a strong grasp on concepts that explain the *why* of things.”

MC 645: The specific observational categories upon which Mr. Tidwell based his detailed comments included: understanding of goals and objectives and proper plan design; connecting research and analysis with recommendations; identifying flaws within the plan and recommending enhancements; and strategic alignment with audience.

His evaluation of the students in this capstone course was favorable, as evidenced by his summary concluding statement:

“Overall, I judged these students to be competent and well-prepared. Based on the depth and diversity of their responses, they displayed a mastery of public relations and strategic communications that I judged to be proficient based on their educational level. I am very confident that these students demonstrated a level of understanding and proficiency that was commensurate with their educational level and training. It was clear to me that they understood the basic elements and concepts of the strategic communications planning process. They were able to suggest incremental enhancements to the plan and were also able to identify obvious flaws and deficiencies.”

Based on the anecdotal results reported here, it is possible to conclude that students in all three sequences showed competency in reviewing the work of others and were able to gauge the degree of professional competencies according to the basic evaluations of outside observers. The assessment committee will now be able to take reviewers’ comments and develop them into a quantitatively based strategy that can be implemented each year to establish a meaningful examination of student competency in this area. It is naturally important to assign numeric values and a baseline achievement level for this procedure. Although inconclusive, reports here indicate that students do indeed understand most of the program’s core values in application of other students’ work, although there are varying inconsistencies due to the fact that it is impossible to develop a common body of work for review among all three sequences, which differ greatly in terms of their core class objectives.

The indirect senior survey split this learning objective into two questions: one item relating to student evaluation of their own work, and the other item sought to ascertain students’ perceptions of their abilities to evaluate the work of others based on classes they have taken with us. On the first question, 78.5% of students agreed that the curriculum has enabled them to evaluate the work of others. On the second question, 75.4% agreed that they are better able to evaluate their own work.

SLO 11: Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.

Statistics and numerical data are applied in each of the School’s three sequences in various higher-level reporting courses and in capstone strategic communications classes. Fifty-one (41.8%) of seniors taking the assessment exam met or exceeded expectations, 43 (35.2%) met minimum expectations and 28 (23%) failed to meet expectations. Additionally, 40.4% of seniors correctly answered questions pertaining to this SLO correctly, while pre-majors correctly answered 30.6% of the items (a 9.8% improvement for seniors). Seniors responding to the indirect measure agreed (64.7%) that the program had helped them do a better job of interpreting data.

SLO 12: Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world.

The assessment survey included several questions designed to gauge students' knowledge of production terms and procedures, as 67.3% of the senior respondents and 52.3% of pre-majors answered the items correctly (a 15% improvement over the pre majors' scores). This means that 88 (72.1%) of seniors met or exceeded program standards, nine (7.4%) met minimum expectations and 25 (20.5%) failed to meet expectations.

Indirect measurement of senior attitudes shows that 74.6% agree with the statement "I can use tools and technologies appropriate to the communications profession and to my chosen sequence area."

C. Program Self Review

Faculty Review of Annual Assessment Data and Process

A.Q. Miller School faculty members routinely review assessment results, but the process now takes on more importance since we are in the process of developing a new curriculum for the School. Three curriculum development retreats in the past year have focused on curricular deficiencies revealed in the assessment process, and our overall need to improve in writing and production skills, critical thinking classes and research and data analysis skills is reflected in proposed realignment of the School's core curriculum. That process is underway, and most of the changes will be submitted to the KSU Faculty Senate this year.

Program Improvements

As the A.Q. Miller School revises its curriculum, there are key areas where program assessment reveals a need for improvement in senior-level competencies. As our new curriculum emerges this year, faculty members are recommending major changes to the core curriculum. For example, findings from 2013-2014 are being used to evaluate our methods for teaching writing and production skills, areas where past assessments have revealed that student competencies are lacking, meaning that a heavier emphasis on teaching the basics in these areas across the curriculum is needed; in fact, a new remedial writing class is being planned in the curriculum revision now underway. Deficiencies in numerical and statistical concepts are being addressed in the proposed new curriculum by requiring more research and data analysis classes.

Future Plans

Student competencies in our learning objectives are directly monitored annually through an assessment exam given to our capstone class seniors, and where specific measurements of applicable SLOs are examined through a systematic review of senior-level capstone work in a biannual basis. Annual indirect assessment through alumni and senior satisfaction surveys, which include questions relating to the School's learning objectives as well as student and alumni perceptions of operational issues in the School, allow us to gain additional feedback from students.

Needed changes in our assessment procedures that were identified last year, and the need for developing an observable procedure for measuring SLO 10, forced our committee to make adjustments in our assessment procedures this year. We purged questions from the assessment exam that were too detailed or unclear, and we increased the number of questions for each learning objective. This year's qualitative approach to operationalizing procedures for SLO 10 will be inaugurated in 2015-2016, meaning that we now have a fully revised

assessment procedure, where direct and indirect measurements for our 12 SLOs have been mostly perfected and we should be able to yield more reliable results.

Our faculty is likely to enact curriculum revisions requiring students in all three sequences to complete an internship (presently, students on the advertising track do not have that requirement). Once this provision is enacted, we are likely to adopt another direct assessment for evaluating our students in a workplace setting by internship supervisors using a rubric based on applicable learning objectives.

Summary of this Report

Senior students taking the assessment exam in the A.Q. Miller School generally showed improvement in all learning outcomes that were tested, although some areas for improvement remain. The major strengths are as follows:

- An effort by faculty to include domestic diversity issues in and promote learning about demographic and cultural differences among audiences classes (SLO 3) seems to be a major strength of our program, as evidenced by the fact that a greater number of seniors (107) met or exceeded expectations, and scored higher (91% correct) in this criteria on the assessment exam.
- Ethical issues and professional standards are also a component of all classes in the A.Q. Miller School curriculum, and that grounding shows on the assessment exam, as scores on ethics-related questions ranked second in terms of meeting or exceeding expectations (99 students were in this category). Seniors attained a score of 77.7% on ethics related questions.

The Assessment Committee believes that students should ideally achieve minimum exam scores in the 70th percentile on any learning objective. We failed to achieve this goal in most areas, which calls for continual committee review of testing procedures as well as faculty review of curriculum standards.

- Critical thinking is an important skill for employees in our profession, and while Seniors correctly answered questions related to this SLO 60.1% of the time (88 students meeting or exceeding expectations), this is an important component for our department and the University at large, and we must continue to promote critical thinking and develop effective measures for this objective.
- History is a component of most courses, and there is a stand-alone History of Mass Communication course in our curriculum. On the assessment exam, seniors attained a score of 60.1%, while 84 students met or exceeded expectations.
- Questions on the application of theoretical concepts showed a score of 65.6% for seniors, as 80 students met or exceeded expectations on this SLO.
- Mass Communication Law questions reflected significant improvement for graduating seniors (51.9% correct), who scored 25% better than the pre-major group, and 62 students met or exceeded expectations.

Writing is an area that shows improvement, but the scores achieved by seniors are lower than desired since this is a major skill that our graduates must have to be successful in the industry. Seniors scored 61.3% on writing-related questions on the exam, and 68 students exceeded expectations in this area. Obviously, curriculum revision is in order, and some new approaches to teaching in this area may improve scores in the future.

Seniors answered production-related questions correctly 67.3% of the time, as 88 students exceeded expectations in this area. While this represents an overall acceptable performance on the exam, our faculty regards production skills as vitally important, especially on the digital media side of the journalism curriculum. This is clearly an area for improvement.

The A.Q. Miller School still must address obvious—and glaring—deficiencies in numerical concepts and data analysis. Fifty-one seniors met or exceeded expectations in this area, while achieving a score of 40.4% on the exam (pre-majors were 30.6%). The overall performance in this SLO suggests the need for a significant curriculum change that forces students to make greater use of numbers and statistical concepts. Research (SLO 8) was stronger; in fact, 98 students met or exceeded expectations in research, possibly reflecting the fact that we have a dedicated course in research methods, and research principles are a component of all capstone classes. Statistical and numerical concepts simply are not included in enough courses.

Senior Satisfaction Survey

The Office of University Assessment also administers a survey to all graduating seniors as a means of ascertaining their attitudes and opinions about their experiences in the A.Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications. In addition to the above-cited specific questions relating to our SLOs, general questions provided by the University Assessment Office were focused on the overall student experience at K-State. Many questions dealt with research, since the University's 2025 goals mandate growth in research skills and interpretation of findings. Among JMC majors, 64.2% reported having participated in research projects, which exceeds Senior responses of students University-wide (55.8%). A majority of JMC respondents (59.6%) said they had been encouraged to participate in research/creative projects (65% of University students as a whole indicated participation) and most research (84.8%) resulted in class presentations (compared to 75.5% University-wide). When asked if they were encouraged to attend professional seminars and colloquia, 40.4% indicated that they had done so (26.9% campus-wide). Seventy-five percent of responding JMC Seniors felt that research experiences had contributed to their academic success, and 63.6% rated their mentor as either "good" or "excellent." Most important, 69.7% of the subjects said that their classroom research experiences at least somewhat contributed to their career choices. Overall, the student perceptions of research knowledge acquired at K-State indicate that the A.Q. Miller School is on par with the University as a whole in teaching research literacy and execution, perhaps reflective of the fact that the School teaches research methods classes in all three sequences, and that primary research is a component of the capstone classes in each of the School's three sequences.

Alumni Survey

As an indirect measure of our program, we use the Alumni Satisfaction Survey, which is administered by the Office of University Assessment to A.Q. Miller School graduates who have been in the workplace for a year. While it is desirable to have people who have been in the job market for a longer period of time, Assessment Office officials report that getting accurate contact information (in this case, that means reliable e-mail addresses from the KSU Alumni Office becomes a greater challenge).

Future surveys of our alumni will include questions about the School's 12 learning objectives (this study did not include such items). But we are able to extract some meaning about our curriculum and department services from questions that were asked.

Initially troubling is the fact that only 18 of 74 subjects completed the questionnaire, although the JMC Alumni response rate (24.32%) was greater than that of the overall University (18.38%) and the College of Arts and Sciences (18.5%). Certainly, the A.Q. Miller School can

work closely with the University Assessment Office to promote the importance of the completing survey among alumni in an effort to boost possible response in the future.

In keeping with the University's Vision 2025 research goals, the survey reflects that a majority of the respondents (N=9; 69.23%) reported having participated in research and creative endeavors, with most students indicating that their exposure to research came over a semester or two (N=6; 66.67%). Most of the research was presented on campus (N=6; 66.67%). Most alumni reported that their research activities were at least somewhat in line with their current jobs, and that the research skills they acquired contributed to their career choices (both were N=5; 55.56%). Subjects were at least somewhat confident that their research projects contributed to their academic success (N=7; 66.68%).

The study shows that of the subjects who responded, 61.5% reported that their courses at K-State somewhat increased their knowledge and understanding on their academic field "very much", and 53.8% said their degree had helped them "gain knowledge, technical skills and/or competence required for a job or career." In terms of "increasing intellectual curiosity," 53.8% of respondents noted that K-State had very much helped them, while 46.2% said K-State has helped them become aware of world issues and "pressing social, political and economic problems." In terms of K-State 8 classes, the study showed that these alumni feel that more emphasis should be placed on improving: interpretive skills (15.4%), academic research skills (23.1%), making ethical decisions (16.7%), exploring alternative perspectives from around the world (7.7%), understanding the past and considering the future (30.8%), gaining multiple perspectives about U.S. society (15.4%), evaluating scientific claims (7.7%) and how groups and individuals influence the environment (15.4%).