

Communication Studies –ASSESSMENT RESULTS 2005-06

Susan Ryan

Learning Goal/Outcome

To understand the assumptions and organizing principles governing key subdivisions of the communication discipline. To recognize contemporary analysts, theorists, artists, and concepts in the study of human communication and mass media.

Question

What are the indicators of mastery in the field of communication studies?

General Methods

Our assessment activities took place during the spring of 2006. Communication Studies is a field which poses a challenge for assessment in that there are three different tracks/specializations within the major: public and mass communication, organizational/interpersonal, and radio/tv/film. As a department we elected to perform multiple pilot assessments using the common core classes of COM 103 (Introduction to Communication Studies) and COM 310 (Methods of Persuasion). In addition, we also ran a pilot in COM 271 (Film and Society) which most students in the radio/tv/film track take.

The results of these three separate pilots with different methodologies follows.

COM 103: Introduction to Communication Studies

Course-specific methods

The purpose of the Introduction to Communication Studies course is to help students understand the nature of communication, the role of theory and research related to the study of communication, and how knowledge of communication applies to major issues students will confront as communication specialists and world citizens. Thus, this pilot assessment focused on assessing if students were able to:

- Recognize the major sub-fields of communication
- Understand the unique emphasis of the field of communication on audiences, messages, performance, and theory
- Understand and apply the social and philosophical perspectives that govern most forms of knowledge about communication

Course-specific results

To assess students (N=23), four multiple-choice questions (MC 1-4), four true-false questions (TF 1-4) and one short answer question (SA 1) were added to the student final examination. The MC and TF questions addressed all three objectives previously noted. For the SA question, students were provided with a situation and asked questions about the situation to test their comprehensive knowledge regarding the major social and philosophical perspectives in the field of communication, elements of theory, and the application of a specific theoretical perspective. Students were told a few comprehensive questions would appear on the exam, but no specifics regarding content area or concepts were provided prior to the examination. Following are the percent of students who correctly answered the comprehensive questions.

Able to differentiate the seven major sub-fields of communication and identify key elements of a theory when prompted with an MC or TF question

MC 2	88%
TF 1	88%

TF 2	88%
TF 3	88%
Average	88%

Able to recall and apply the major philosophical perspectives of the field

MC 1	60%
MC 3	43%
MC 4	60%
TF 4	82%
SA 1	71%
Average	63.2%

Given these results, it appears students are able to differentiate the seven major sub-fields of communication, as well as identify key elements of a theory when prompted with an MC or TF question (average on questions MC 2, TF 1-3 of 88%). They had a bit more difficulty recalling and applying the major philosophical perspectives of the field (average of questions MC 1, 3, 4; TF 4; SA 1 of 63%).

Com 310: Methods of Persuasion

Course-specific methods

Goal: To determine the percentage of students in a required core course who could use selected important course concepts without a formal prompt. Most of the course is theory-driven.

Method: A system was developed to use unobtrusive measures of persuasion analysis skills, one of the instructional goals of the class. Final course projects in two classes were evaluated and coded. Students in the project were asked to develop a complete analysis of their own health persuasion messages, using ideas, models and theories from the course *they judged to be relevant and appropriate*. Because of the range of messages that would be assessed, not all concepts would be applicable to all messages. The papers were graded in the normal manner and returned. After grading, the papers were reassessed by the instructor on the use of seven key course ideas. Papers were coded to indicate (a) when a form of analysis would be appropriate to the paper, (b) if the analysis was indeed included, and (c) if the concept was applied or used correctly. Seven key persuasion concepts listed below were coded. Note that in this study there was no external prompt to use a course idea. Students needed to make the inferential leap about the appropriateness of an analytical concept on their own.

Course-specific results

Results: N=31

Concept	% of papers where concept was appropriate to the Message, and applied correctly
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Audience-Driven message Design

53

Cognitive

Dissonance Theory	78
Identification	37
Fear-Drive Model	71
Need Theory	32
ELM Theory	75
Attribution Theory	67

Course-specific implications

Outcome Assessment: Two of seven key measures scored significantly below 50%, one was just about 50%. These obviously are cause for some concern. A bit more than half of the measures scored near or above 70%.

Each of the concepts was discussed in course lectures, readings and discussions. Though many interpretations for some of the low scores are possible, several seem especially plausible. First, saying is sometimes not teaching. The instructor could do a better job of finding ways of amplifying or using some concepts. Second, it is clear some students found it difficult to conceptualize theories, or use theories as generative sources of knowledge. Evidence can be found in exam questions where examples often substitute for the more abstract theories behind them. Third, the course may be better focused on teaching *recognition* of ideas. Fourth, it is clear that more student work would benefit from reinforcement of key concepts in prior coursework.

COM 271: Film and Society

Course-specific methods

The final examination for this course was an all-essay one. Students were allowed to pick three questions from a list of six. On each exam, I identified a question that asks the student to demonstrate and apply an understanding of a theoretical system relevant to film studies. This could be semiotics, cognitivism, psychoanalytical theory or narrative structure.

In each case, the “marker” question could potentially earn 33 points on the exam. The points awarded tally in this manner:

Course-specific results

Highest score:	33 points
Lowest score:	20 points

Average score:	28 points
Percentage value:	84
Letter grade average:	B