Millikin University Student Learning in the Communication Major Jeffrey Brand (Chair), Nancy Curtin, Thomas Duncanson, Samuel Meister 2011-2012

Executive Summary

The Department of Communication at Millikin University is committed to providing a marketsmart, challenging, and high quality major to students with a variety of professional and personal aspirations. We celebrate and inform our students about the wide variety of ways a major in communication can prepare them for a future life of meaning and value.

Communication is about the construction of meaning between people and their various stakeholders: friends, families, professional colleagues, communities, and more. The study of communication focuses on understanding the symbols and the processes that construct those meanings, whether the symbol is a word, a gesture, a song, a billboard, a website, or any other meaning-generating object in our world. We also examine the relationship of those symbols to the people who use them. We examine the pragmatic and ethical principles that guide people's communicative choices. We apply this learning to our personal and professional lives.

al success, citizenship in a global environment,

James Millikin Scholars Educator of the Year Award. This recognition comes from her work with the Honors program and as an excellent teacher and senior project advisor in the honors program.

Sarah Reed was recognized multiple times for her scholarship. She won a top poster award at the Central States Communication Association Conference and Convention. She also won a poster award at the Millikin University COS Poster Symposium. She presented her James Millikin Scholars Project at the end of the year. She was also offered and accepted a

Communication.

Students participated in the annual Celebration of Scholarship with programs highlighting collaborative work between WJMU radio and a freshmen IN 140 seminar course; poster presentations by students in the environmental communication course; reporting of student experiences in London e ; and a student

Three student posters were

presented by Sean Roe, Sarah Reed, and double major, Isabelle Jeffries, who also won a poster award for her biology project presentation. Four majors presented their Senior JMS projects, a large number of honors students for the department.

the Decatur *Herald & Review* summer SMASH camp for junior high students as well as an earlier article this year on the station in *Thrive* magazine.

Communication Department Goals

The drive to communicate forms the basis for human social behavior and is a critical element of any organization or field of employment, regardless of technological advancement or changes.

- 2. Students will distinguish the theories pertinent to communication studies and demonstrate the skills needed to create, present, analyze, and evaluate messages in relevant contexts.
- 3. Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills when generating, consuming, and evaluating messages in communication contexts.

Successful majors in Communication move into careers in human services, media, sales, counseling, training and development, public relations, business, and publishing. Recent graduates are currently pursuing graduate work, working for radio and TV stations, planning media events, working in universities, organizing PR campaigns, etc. A strong liberal arts background and intensive work in all aspects of communication uniquely qualify communication graduates for these positions. We expect that majors who have mastered the program learning objectives will, at a minimum, be successfully employed in their chosen field and/or successfully

These departmental learning goals match well with Millikin's University-wide learning goals:

- 1. Millikin students will prepare for professional success.
- 2. Millikin students will actively engage in the responsibilities of citizenship in their communities.

3.

Communication Department Snapshot

The Communication department in 2011-2012 consisted of 4 full-time faculty and 9 adjuncts that helped deliver 75 traditional and PACE classes for the year. We ended the Spring of 2012 with approximately 120 majors. In addition to majors and minors, we also service students throughout the University who take our courses to satisfy their general education requirements in public speaking, and sequential elements (University Seminar). Students are also required to take communication courses by the Tabor School of Business and for the secondary language arts degree requirements in the School of Education. Various faculty and programs often encourage students to take communication courses for enrichment or remedial purposes. In addition to courses in the major, Communication faculty have also taught IN 251 U.S. Studies, January and May Immersion courses, and in the PACE adult degree completion program by providing courses for the Organizational Leadership major and general education needs.

The Communication department currently occupies 5 offices on the 4th floor of Shilling Hall and shares a secretary with the Political Science department and Math Department (a new assignment). In addition, the Communication Department has a video-editing lab in the basement of Staley Library and a radio broadcast facility in the basement of the Richards Treat University Center, including office space for a faculty member who also serves as general manager for the radio station. Editing equipment and software have been upgraded in the two facilities in the past four years including new automation hardware/software for the radio station in January 2009. The current video equipment is critically limited. Currently only two cameras are available for use for a class of 15 in addition to use for other student productions. The lack of adequate camera equipment is considered a significant threat to the video production area of the major. If any breakdown occurs, failure to replace equipment will require cancellation of the courses, even mid-semester.

The Department of Communication in the Fall of 2006 completed a self-study of its current curriculum and successfully passed through University governance a new curriculum structure that went into effect in the Fall of 2007. After thorough review of existing classes and curriculum structure, three concentrations, or tracks, were created and adjustments were made in the curriculum in areas of writing and ethics. In the Spring of 2008, the department added a fourth track in sport communication to the major. These four tracks are the only formal tracks planned for the department.

In the Fall of 2007, the Millikin University faculty passed a new curricular structure including general education requirements. All students must now have an oral communication course under the new general education requirements. This requirement began with students entering Millikin University in the Fall of 2008.

The Department offered 30 sections of oral communication courses (CO 200 and CO 242) in the 2011-2012 school year between the traditional program and PACE and summer school. We are monitoring the demand levels to see if it is necessary to further expand on the number of courses being offered each year. Part-time, adjunct teachers taught all sections of the oral communication requirement. Although the department values the quality and commitment of its adjunct faculty, the lack of administrative support for full-time faculty to help teach this general education requirement does not demonstrate strong commitment to this general education requirement. In comparison, full-time, tenure line or tenured faculty teach a majority of other

general education courses. A review of the assessment reports by the

Students join the communication major at many different times during a Millikin University experience. As an incoming freshman, transfer student, change of major, second major, or interdisciplinary student, our majors have a variety of demands to make on our curriculum. With its flexibility, and as a small department with limited offerings, we are able to advise and teach students at all stages of their Millikin University experience.

In the Fall of 2006, the department revised its curriculum in light of data and experience through the QPC project, self-evaluation, student feedback, and industry and disciplinary trends. The new curriculum structure offers clear concentrations or tracks in four areas of the major, it expands its emphasis on written communication skills in two of those areas (public relations and journalism), requires an internship experience for the professional development of all majors, and integrates ethical reasoning into the department's core course requirements. Our track programs have been a way to improve our major in the following ways:

Students have a stronger identity for their major and professional goals.

The tracks have aided in the process of advising majors.

The tracks have directed students to take more advanced coursework in their areas instead of a general set of choices.

The tracks also help to recruit new students. Many of our applicants identify a specific track in their admissions profile.

The four tracks are designed to help students find greater meaning and interconnectedness in their curricular choices. Any students, for whom these tracks do not fully meet their requirements, may choose another combination o

areas such as publicity, event planning, marketing, broadcasting, editing, sales, etc. Students will be encouraged to take additional coursework from the English Department, Exercise Science Department, and the Tabor Business School as needed to supplement their program of study.

Throughout these tracks we have expanded the writing requirements for many majors, incorporated a senior-level internship experience, and approved inclusion of courses from other departments that might enhance our own tracks including coursework from the departments of Art, English, Psychology, Entrepreneurship and Marketing. Our students are also required to complete a 1-credit capstone course in conjunction with the internship experience designed to provide reflection, assessment, and preparation for future professional activities.

A communication program in the twenty-first century must be prepared to engage every facet of communicative competency from the physiology of sign production to the politics of institution formation and legitimation. A fully functional university program in communication must provide:

first courses, non-remedial first courses, appropriate to the maturity and self-reflective habits of traditional university aged students and adult learners, instilling meta-vocabularies of risk, effects, and critique

skill courses, especially in the arts of public communication

intermediate and advanced courses, with special support for skill building, in interpersonal, small group, and organizational communication

initial and advanced courses in media production

specific preparation for the norms and standards of specific communication professions and industries

research methods training

creative outlets for student performance

Student Interviews: A random sample of students is interviewed each year. These have included exit interviews for graduating seniors, discussions held with student leadership, and student feedback provided in the capstone course.

Internship Evaluations: Communication majors are encouraged to have at least one internship experience. At the end of the internship, students, supervisors, and faculty

from several different perspectives

their ability to apply coursework in the professional arena. The internship advisor also collects informal data as she places student interns and checks in with employers.

Assignment Evaluations: Assessment of particular assignments to track implementation of learning goals is planned. Each year, a select set of courses and assignments will be evaluated for their contribution to the major and to student learning.

Student Activities/Experiences: Assessment of experiential activities will also take place at regular intervals to assess the contributions of departmental opportunities outside of the traditional classroom. The student radio station provides on-campus media experience to students, both majors and non-majors. Lambda Pi Eta provides students

Communication Assessment 9

Learning Goal #1

Core Courses

for example, in the last four years, the Department has had one faculty member teaching for Millikin University in London or on a sabbatical leave for a semester. New teaching and advising duties were the priority for the department during these short-handed periods. In the Spring of 2010, both senior faculty

crisis concerning instructional resources. Faculty are advising 30-40 students each and spend significant time helping to advise and mentor student majors. Time, resources, and opportunities for assessment are limited. Results of current assessment efforts include:

Student Exit Interviews: The chair of the department conducted interviews with 37 students enrolled in the capstone course and planning to graduate from the department in December 2011, May 2012, or anticipating graduation in August or December 2012. Students were generally positive about their overall experience with the University and the Department of Communication. These interviews have been valuable sources of information on our students. Many of the changes made over the years in the department have started with student recommendations that occurred with the capstone interview or reflection paper. This process has resulted in almost every student being interviewed prior to graduation. Some of the more frequent and valuable comments are summarized below:

Advising

work or selecting graduate school options. The portfolio pieces showed better understanding of their potentials as graduates but limited active effort to pursue jobs. The requirements of the capstone course were seen as motivating some students to prepare more fully for graduation and the job hunt. More interaction with the Career Services Center was observed and hopefully this effort will pay off later.

the same few issues in a variety of ways:

- Better resources for video production and hands-on media work.
- More advanced courses with a focus on applied and real world experiences.
- Better quality classroom experiences with fewer underprepared or unmotivated students. Students have advocated for either a selective admission into some advanced courses or a GPA requirement for majors. Both options are being investigated for the future. This year a large number of French business students were placed into some of our courses. Their presence was disruptive and not a positive contribution to the classes. Students would like more hands on courses and better quality of overall participation by those enrolled. This is an ongoing discussion topic with our faculty.

Internship Evaluations: Consistent with the mission of the university for performance learning, the departmental requirement for student internships has been a successful one. Approximately 41 internships were completed in 2011-2012 for a combine total of 153 credit hours. Student internships were located in a variety of places, both on campus and in the community at large. Summer internships also included experiences outside of the Decatur community. Students worked with campus organizations, corporate organizations, small businesses, and not-for-profit organizations. Examples of sites for internships include: the Chicago Field Museum, Clear Channel Communications, the Holocaust Museum, WIBI radio, Walt Disney World, WAND TV,

the Farm Progress Show, United Cerebral Palsy, Decatur Public Schools, Rutherford Photo, An Affair to Remember, Macon Resources, Target, and other locations on campus, in the community, and beyond.

The Department continues to have an internship advisor who has been instrumental at getting students meaningful and interesting learning positions. The students complete a learning contract, submit a portfolio, certify their hours, and receive feedback from the internship site. It takes a lot of time and effort to

it has been a valuable experience and distinctive requirement for our majors.

<u>Curriculum Evaluation</u>: The department reviewed its curriculum and made changes in the Fall of 2006. Since that time, the numbers of majors participating in the advanced courses necessary for the tracks are up. For example, CO 343 Conflict, CO 351 Writing for Communication Professions, CO 425 Media Law and Policy, CO 456 Applications in Public Relations, show growing or higher enrollments than before the new changes, with some unevenness due to other curricular choices or conflicts in scheduling. Media production courses are also up but uneven. The video area is taught by an adjunct that makes it difficult to build up a demand for

advanced course work. The adjunct position has also turned over frequently, making the task of building an audience for the course more difficult. A new course, CO 342 Applications in Organizational Communication, was added to the curriculum in 2009. It was piloted as CO 360 in Spring 2009 with 23 students and in Spring 2010 with 21. It fell short this year and was combined into a team taught course with Drs. Curtin and Kruml. The course was not offered in The overall number of Organizational

Communication Assessment 16

Communication Assessment 18

Improvement Plan for the Department of Communication

mission goals. Theory to practice, and performance learning is difficult to accomplish when the

being afforded sufficient time to work hands-on with the equipment. The addition to the oral communication requirement has also occurred without any resources improvements in staffing, equipment, office space, or office expenses. The current departmental budget cannot handle these expanded expectations without new resources.

for the department with regards to assessment and student learning for 2012-13 include:

- Expand and enhance oral communication course assessment and continue to evaluate the effective meeting of its learning goals.
- Plan for a process of external program review for 2012-13 or the next year depending on funding.
- Continue the process of course assessments on a multi-year plan.
- Begin process of external evaluation of student learning in the major through alumni and internship supervisor feedback.
- Develop media resources to bring this part of the major into greater focus and strength.

The Communication Department has accomplished a great deal over the years. We expect to continue to function as a successful department with interesting courses and valuable experiences that are appealing to students at Millikin University.