

COMMUNICATION STUDIES DEPARTMENT

PROGRAM REVIEW

Six-Year Report

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Lesa Stern, Ph.D., Professor & Department Chair

Deborah Dunn, Ph.D., Professor

Gregory Spencer, Ph.D., Professor

I. INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY

None of the things which are done with intelligence take place without the help of speech.
--Isocrates, "Antidosis" II

No matter how many papers we have to grade or appointments to keep, we in the Department of Communication Studies find reward in meaningful and consequential work. Our program is doing well. Students are learning and being transformed. Because communication choices usually make the key difference between living that is merely human and living that is truly humane, we teach and counsel and write. We do this because we believe in biblically informed communication, because we see the changes our students make in their own communication, and because we have hope in the wider cultural change our students will make in their churches, communities, and workplaces.

There are challenges facing our society that are of importance to any adult paying attention in America today. Four of these challenges are outlined by the National Communication Association in its publication, *Communication: Ubiquitous, Complex, Consequential*. The first challenge is **to maintain and enhance a vigorous, self-renewing democracy**. A significant body of research shows that communication affects political involvement and shapes civic discourse via interpersonal communication and various mediated technologies. Many courses in our program (such as Rhetoric, Public Discourse, and Conflict & Reconciliation) help students become motivated to be true citizens, and provide principles to aid thoughtful, compassionate and skilled participation in a democracy.

The second challenge is **to promote the health and well-being of all**. Our students examine doctor-patient communication, social effects of media and communication technologies, media literacy campaigns, and learn about public deliberation and dialogue sessions. In courses such as Health Communication, Mass Communication, and Persuasion & Propaganda, students gain knowledge and skill in crafting messages that will decrease risky behaviors and increase healthy behaviors.

The third challenge is **to help our organizations and institutions change in ways that enable our society to prosper in the emerging global economy**. Our students learn that they can transform society by transforming organizations, from the for-profit corporation to the little country church. In courses such as Organizational Communication, Media Ethics, and Communication Criticism, students recognize that institutions are made up of human agents who make moment-to-moment choices in how to structure society, morality, and the economy. Students also practice theory in internships, off campus study, and experiential exercises in the classroom. Our majors are encouraged to view communication as a lens through which to view human society.

Finally, the fourth challenge is **to enable people to live meaningful lives and to have fulfilling relationships**. Our students regularly tell us, before and after graduation, how a particular course has changed how they interact with others, from roommates to parents (and later, from spouses to co-workers). In courses such as Public Speaking, Interpersonal, and Group Communication & Leadership, students learn and practice how to articulate their own ideas respectfully and competently, while also listening well. They learn how to communicate with diverse others in an increasingly global society, and to communicate gospel truths appropriately and lovingly. These are big challenges, and we have big aspirations.

Our mission statement captures the essence of our aspirations, and it is from our mission statement we derive our primary Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs):

The Communication Studies Department mission is *Sapientia et Eloquentia*. In this centuries-old phrase promoted by Cicero, St. Augustine and others, the Department of Communication Studies finds its purpose, to educate students toward the union of wisdom and eloquence, recognizing the limited impact of wisdom without eloquence and the social harm that comes from eloquence without wisdom. We are committed to helping students become wise analysts regarding the techniques and structures of human influence in a globally-oriented, media-saturated culture. We intend for our students to be informed by Scripture and able to draw upon resources in the historic discipline of communication studies. We are committed to helping students become eloquent in mind and heart and speech, articulate and compassionate implementers of their wisdom. We intend for our students to communicate well and to imitate Christ by practicing reconciliation.

Our four PLOs reflect our commitments to wisdom and eloquence: Oral Communication; Written Communication; Biblical & Ethical Principles; and Disciplinary Knowledge and Application. Over the past five years, we have assessed these outcomes, identifying where our students excel and where our students need work. Here are the big-picture conclusions drawn from work with each of our PLOs:

- **Oral Communication:** After viewing 25 speeches for seven key speech elements, we concluded that student presentations were, overall, quite good, and met our benchmarks. The strengths were in topic selection, organization, and providing supporting evidence. Areas of improvement centered around language choice, building rapport with the audience, and establishing an energetic physical presence.
- **Written Communication:** After reading 29 papers for four key writing elements, we also concluded that student writing met most of our aspirational benchmarks, but could be improved. We fell shy of our 85% benchmark. Specifically, students could improve in developing and articulating a thesis that is worthwhile and needs defending, and in articulating sound arguments.
- **Biblical and Ethical Principles:** After studying 47 student essays, we concluded that students met our benchmarks for biblical and ethical principles. We saw that our students discussed and applied values well, but tended toward proof-texting when citing Scripture as evidence for a position.
- **Disciplinary Knowledge:** After evaluating 22 essays according to four major categories for demonstrating disciplinary-specific knowledge, we concluded that students fell shy of meeting our 85% benchmark. We found that students did very well recalling, articulating, and applying theories, but they tended to do so with less nuance and complexity than we hoped.

What did we learn? For the most part, we are meeting and exceeding our goals. Students are positively affected by matriculating through our program. They are good speakers and writers, they are thoughtful practitioners of biblical/ethical principles, and they retain and can apply specific

knowledge about communication theories. Our very high alumni ratings attest to effectiveness that endures. Alumni are warm and positive about the content of courses, their sense of preparation for the future, and professors in the department. Yet we have some work to do. We would like our graduates to be more articulate, to use more developed and supported reasons in their arguments, to refer to theories more readily and by name, and to see their lives more fully under the sacred canopy of Christ's gospel of love and reconciliation.

We agree with Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy's¹ observation that "speech is the lifeblood of society" (16). He argues that society's primary problems and its solutions are rooted in communication commitments. If we don't tell the past's stories respectfully, we will be rebellious. If we don't have enthusiasm to teach the young, the future will be given over to decadence. If our inner worlds are not unified (symbolically through song), anarchy will reign. If we are not on speaking terms with others in our outer worlds, various kinds of war will result. In all, word choice is vital: "... our words must strike a balance; language distributes and organizes the universe, in every moment, anew" (19). We take inspiration from these words. We have a high calling.

We are looking forward to spending the next year developing conversations around a few key questions and planning. This report presents us with opportunities to more faithfully strike that balance, to distribute and organize our little bit of the universe, as we decide what shall be part of our future. We hope to (with some additional funding) hold a signature campus-wide event, to build relationships with students in a retreat setting, and to send our students out with a more developed portfolio of excellent work. In summary, our six-year study confirms significant achievement in the past, and points us toward tasks that will improve our program for the sake of student learning and for the impact of that learning as students graduate and face challenges that lie ahead.

II. FINDINGS

A. Student Learning

The Department of Communication Studies has identified Four Program Learning Outcomes:

- Oral Communication;
- Written Communication;
- Biblical & Ethical Principles; and
- Communication Knowledge/Application

Benchmarks: Our benchmarks are *aspirational*: 85% of our graduating seniors will perform at a satisfactory or excellent level on all PLOs.

Overall, our students are meeting the program learning outcome benchmarks we've set for appropriate and acceptable learning, and some excel beyond what might normally be expected of undergraduates. Our focus now is to move more students toward the "excellent" end of the continuum. Our annual assessments of each of these PLOs provide detailed evidence of their performance and our reflections on each. Here, we present a summary of the student learning we assessed over the past six years.

¹ Rosenstock-Huessy, Eugen. *Speech and Reality*. Norwich, Vermont: Argo Books, 1970.

Oral Communication

Method. In order to assess the Oral Communication PLO, we recorded 25 presentations given by seniors and assessed them using an adapted National Communication Association Core Presentation Competency Rubric. See the annual assessment document or our department web page for the rubric. Presentations were reviewed by faculty for: Appropriate **topic** selection; clearly communicated **thesis**; sufficient, varied, and valid **supporting materials**; clear and memorable **organization**; vivid **language**; energetic/enthusiastic vocal **delivery**; and strong physical **presence**. Each presentation was rated on every element as excellent, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory.

Findings. The assessment process yielded positive results for oral communication. We exceeded our benchmark of 85% of students performing at satisfactory (or above) levels in their presentations. Students' presentations were rated "excellent" for appropriate topic selection and quality supporting evidence. They did well in communicating their theses, although similar to the written communication assessment findings, students tended to inform rather than persuade (although they "informed" in convincing and attractive ways). Student presentations met expectations in the areas of organization, language, and delivery.

<i>PRESENTATION COMPETENCIES</i>	<i>EXCELLENT</i>	<i>SATISFACTORY</i>	<i>UNSATISFACTORY</i>
Topic Selection	80	20	0
Communicating Thesis	24	68	8
Supporting Material	64	32	4
Organization	32	64	4
Language	32	68	0
Vocal Delivery	20	72	8
Physical Presence	44	52	4

Percent of presentations rated excellent, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory by element, n=25

Interpretation. While the students generally scored well (acceptable or better) in most areas, they have room for improvement in choosing organizational devices that draw the audience in and make the speech memorable. We'd also like to see students use more vivid language, communicate more energy, and be more purposive in establishing their physical presence. We also realized that students should improve in making and defending their arguments in oral presentations. This same issue was apparent in their written communication.

Action. One question to be addressed departmentally is how best to teach the kinds of things we want to see improved in our student speeches. Helping students make better language choices is a theme that is repeated throughout many courses, but there are (again) cultural and generational pressures to limit one's vocabulary and rely on fillers and meaningless phrases. Worksheets and assignments that specifically focus on language choice are being drafted to incorporate into courses, potentially including the public speaking course as well as upper division courses requiring oral presentations. Establishing an energetic presence seems to come with practice and confidence, so we are discussing ways to incorporate more opportunities for public speaking into other courses or internships. We anticipate that the argumentation worksheets used in COM 015, COM 006, and COM 130 (as a result of the written communication assessment) will improve their oral argumentation skills as well.

Written Communication

Method. We evaluated 29 papers written by seniors on 17 different writing elements. The writing elements focused on: **content of paper** (ideas, claims, reasons, support, research); **organization** (intro, clarity/flow, transitions, conclusions); **style** (voice/tone, word choice, sentence construction, creativity); and **conventions** (mechanics, citations, editing, appearance). Each writing element was evaluated as excellent, acceptable, or unacceptable.

Findings. Overall, 25% of papers were evaluated as excellent, 48% acceptable, and 27% unacceptable. Our students chose excellent topics and structured their papers well. The assessment results indicate that we fell a little below our benchmark, by having 75% instead of 85% of papers evaluated at the satisfactory or excellent levels. A review of the unsatisfactory papers showed that students had difficulty writing clear theses and distinguishing claims (reasons) from facts (evidence).

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION		EXCELLENT	SATISFACTORY	UNSATISFACTORY
<i>Content</i>	Ideas	**		
	Claims		*	*
	Reasons		*	*
	Support	*	*	
	Research	*	*	
<i>Organization</i>	Introduction		*	
	Clarity/Flow	*	*	
	Transitions	*	*	
	Conclusions		*	
<i>Style</i>	Voice/Tone		*	
	Word Choice		*	
	Sentences		*	
	Creativity		*	
<i>Conventions</i>	Mechanics		*	
	Citations		*	
	Editing		*	
	Appearance		*	
Paper evaluated as a whole (percent)		25	48	27

n=29, *Note: The percentages for the overall paper ratings are accurate. The 17 element percentages by rating are not available. Therefore, we placed an asterisk in the categories where the bulk of the papers were rated.

Interpretation. We believe there are cultural causes to poor argumentation—that the ease of electronic writing and spell-checking encourages students to start writing before they have adequately prepared their ideas, that the speediness of American and academic culture discourages the thoughtfulness required to create and evaluate good propositions, and that cultural values of tolerance get misapplied to “the tolerance of poor arguments.” Further, many students are trained before college to simply summarize, so there is a natural learning curve to progress toward more sophisticated analysis and argumentation. Students need practice thinking about why a thesis needs defending and then communicating that clearly and eloquently in writing.

Action. To address the deficits in student papers, we created an argumentation worksheet that is posted on our departmental website, and we began using these worksheets in the following courses (integrated with at least one assignment): COM 006, COM 015, and COM 130. We believe that

repetition of this material in multiple classes will help reinforce student learning and increase the possibility that these will become more natural skills for the students.

Biblical and Ethical Principles

Method. The Communication Studies Department wants students to graduate with biblical and ethical **knowledge** (show evidence of strong to sophisticated understanding of biblical and ethical perspectives, able to articulate a mature treatment of Scripture and detailed explanation of ethical principles); the ability to **apply** that knowledge to complex situations (thoroughly apply their selected biblical or ethical perspective and demonstrate nuanced connections to concrete situations and show complex Scriptural connections). We would also like for students to have a biblical/ethical **self-awareness** (clearly articulate a commitment to biblical and ethical perspectives, and then be able to evaluate their own behavior in accordance with these principles). In order to assess this PLO, 47 essays written by seniors in multiple classes were evaluated. The faculty developed a rubric (see rubric appendix) and assessed each essay based on these three dimensions.

Findings. Results revealed that students are well grounded in biblical and ethical knowledge and application. For the most part, they are able to identify appropriate ethical and biblical perspectives and apply them to complex situations. Seniors also evidenced a developed to highly developed sense of biblical/ethical self-awareness. Seniors met our benchmark of 85% at developed or highly developed.

<i>BIBLICAL AND ETHICAL PRINCIPLES</i>	<i>HIGHLY DEVELOPED</i>	<i>DEVELOPED</i>	<i>EMERGING</i>
Biblical/Ethical Self-Awareness	28	56	17
Biblical/Ethical Knowledge	28	64	8
Biblical/Ethical Application	33	51	16

Percent of papers that evidenced highly developed, developed, or emerging biblical/ethical principles, n=47

Interpretation. We would like more of our students to perform in the highly developed category. Though students are comfortable and generally competent in discussing their values, we noticed a tendency toward proof-texting of Scriptures. Students need to establish more context when they reference scripture. A related concern is the practice of assuming the correctness of their ethical positions instead of explicitly defending their arguments or providing good reasons for their ethical approach.

Action. In order to enhance student learning in this area, each instructor has committed to create one course assignment that helps students to defend their biblical claims by establishing context when they reference scripture. Faculty members are currently in the process of creating these assignments.

Disciplinary Knowledge

Method. Graduates in communication studies are expected to know and be able to apply disciplinary knowledge, including theories, concepts, perspectives, and methods. We evaluated how well students **articulate communication knowledge** (summarizes theory/concept well, is specific about how the theory/concept works, names key authors or contributors, and correctly identifies central tenets & propositions); **applies that knowledge to the workplace** (application is thorough and holistic, and use of the whole theory or concept appears to fit the situation well, deftly incorporates language appropriate to the theory); **and provides insight to the communication event** (demonstrates a sophisticated, holistic understanding and appreciation of the theory and its

application, and if theory is applied in a novel fashion, this is acknowledged and explained in a way that adds to the richness of the application).

When students participate in the internship course, they are required to write three essays in which they show how communication knowledge provides insight into their experiences at their internship site. Students summarize the theory, concept, perspective, or method from the communication discipline and then show how it provides insight (application). Twenty-two papers (each one from different seniors over the past five years who have taken the internship course) were evaluated by the faculty for their depth of articulation, application, and insight.

Findings. Overall, the graduating seniors did well articulating and applying their chosen concepts. Several received only satisfactory marks, however, because they did not apply all aspects of their chosen theories or concepts to the situation. That is, if the concept was multidimensional, they might have applied only *one* of the dimensions in the essay, effectively ignoring the other dimensions. This, in turn, produced a domino effect by consequently also lowering the “insight” rating since they were missing parts of the application. In this area, the students did not meet the benchmark of 85%. In response to this assessment, the faculty will reinforce that students must pay attention to the full breadth of the theories/concept, that their complexity is what provides the greatest insight into communication phenomena. We also noticed that some students relied on introductory course lectures and/or summary textbook sources more so than primary sources.

<i>DISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE</i>	<i>EXPERT</i>	<i>SATISFACTORY</i>	<i>NOVICE</i>
Articulation of Theory or Concept	50	27	23
Application	36	32	27
Insight	14	68	18

Percent of papers evaluated on disciplinary knowledge, application, and insight as expert, satisfactory, or novice, n=22

Action. The faculty decided to reinforce the genealogy of communication knowledge as well as increase their use and citation of primary sources in lectures and in feedback on exams and papers. Faculty will also reinforce that students need to articulate and apply the whole theory/model/concept rather than just parts of the whole.

Assessment Methodology

As we reflect on our assessment process, we come to these conclusions:

We believe that our assessment methods captured the “general truth” of our students’ abilities/knowledge. As we continue to do assessment, we believe we will be able to fine-tune our process for selection of documents to be assessed as well as refine rubrics to get at more nuanced aspects of our PLOs.

We also learned that if an assessment tool is not graded/worth course credit, then students do not put forth their best effort and we do not get data that is indicative of what students know/can do. For example, upon our first attempt at gathering data on disciplinary knowledge, our seniors were invited to participate and while some wrote very brief answers, most chose not to participate. Accordingly, we re-tooled our assessment data collection in disciplinary knowledge from an existing course assignment in the internship course, thereby resulting in good data for good assessment. Using

embedded course assignments completed by seniors is a best-practice for assessment and we hope to identify ways to capture even more nuanced and varied snapshots of student learning (data) within the context of meaningful course assignments for all future assessments.

A theme throughout all of our assessment is that the courses students are currently taking, and the courses we pull the assessment data from, impact the assessment process. For example, students taking argumentation did better in our argumentation assessment than students who had either not taken the class or who had taken it the prior year. Therefore, we need to be strategic about which classes the assignments (to be assessed) are taken from, while keeping in mind that the more we repeat central tenets and provide practice in what we consider most valuable will build students' skills and knowledge toward long-term retention and skill.

B. Alumni Survey and Reflections

Procedures. An alumni survey was created in SurveyMonkey based on a template we adapted from the one provided by the Dean of Educational Effectiveness. In late January 2015, the survey link was emailed to all communication studies alumni (as provided by the office of alumni relations), as well as posted on our alumni pages on LinkedIn and Facebook. The survey was anonymous, and we asked the alumni to answer all items as honestly as possible so that we could obtain accurate feedback.

Respondents. One hundred and fifty-six alumni took the survey (note that many of the email addresses were bounced back as "invalid"). Women comprised 74% of the sample. Most of those (80%) who completed the survey graduated from 2001 to 2014, making the survey responses most reflective of the last 14 years of the department.

Findings. The alumni survey results were tremendously encouraging. Below we highlight some of the patterns, but see "[Alumni Survey Results.pdf](#)" for complete questions, response sets, and the percentages for every item.

Ninety-three percent of the alumni were *satisfied* or very satisfied with the communication studies program. In fact, only *one* individual was not satisfied with the program. Almost all the alumni rated the *teaching* in the department to be outstanding (63%) or strong (35%).

When reflecting about life after college, alumni continue to rate the Communication Studies Department very strongly. Consistent with the satisfaction ratings, 89% of alumni believed that the department *prepared them well* for life after college.

When asked to reflect on the communication studies degree and their current employment, 90% of alumni believe that their learning from the degree is *being used* moderately to very much in their workplace. Alumni also evaluated how important our four PLOs are to their current work: Written and oral communication rated as very important, with communication knowledge rated very and moderately important.

(In Percentages)	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Strongly
How well did Communication Studies prepare you for life after college?	2	9	37	52
Satisfaction with their Skills				
How satisfied are you with your ability to acquire information?	1	3	20	76
How satisfied are you with your ability to evaluate information?	1	3	23	74
How satisfied are you with your ability to resolve conflict?	0	4	36	60
How satisfied are you with your appreciation of different communication styles?	0	2	32	66
How satisfied are you with your skills in the workplace?	1	5	41	54
How satisfied are you with your ability to work well/productively in groups?	0	4	17	79
How satisfied are you with your ability to develop rewarding interpersonal relationships?	0	4	23	74
How satisfied are you with your ability to communicate the love of Christ/gospel to others?	2	13	48	37
How satisfied are you with your leadership skills?	1	3	36	60
How satisfied are you with your presentation skills?	0	9	33	58
How satisfied are you with your ability to construct clear arguments?	0	8	37	55
Westmont Values				
To what extent did Westmont encourage you to be a thoughtful scholar?	0	3	20	77
To what extent did Westmont encourage you to be a grateful servant?	0	9	29	62
To what extent did Westmont encourage you to be a faithful leader?	1	11	25	64
To what extent did Westmont encourage you to be prepared for global engagement with the academy, church, and world?	1	13	36	50

*Category with highest percent is bolded

Applying biblical and ethical principles was about evenly split among slightly, moderately, and very important to their work. When asked how well they have achieved each of the four PLOs in the workplace, most alumni rate their achievement as strong or superior.

How important are the following competencies for your work?					How successfully have you achieved these outcomes in your work?					
In Percentages	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Strongly	In Percentages	Very weak	Weak	Average	Strong	Superior
Oral Com	0	3	15	82	Oral Com	0	1	8	51	40
Written Com	2	7	17	73	Written Com	0	1	9	53	38
Applying Com Knowledge	1	10	32	57	Applying Com Knowledge	0	1	20	46	32
Applying Biblical/Ethical principles	8	27	30	35	Applying Biblical/Ethical principles	3	4	30	43	19

*Category with highest percent is bolded.

How have our alumni fared? Nearly fifty percent of those who took the survey also went on for an advanced degree program. Of those alumni, 89% said that the communication studies program prepared them well for their advanced program.

These results from the closed-ended items reflect the comments in the open-ended items that asked alumni to identify the *best aspects* of the communication studies program. One hundred and thirty five alumni completed this item (see “[coded-best COM](#)”). Two themes emerged quite frequently. The most frequent response was that the professors were excellent (73 of the 135 said this without prompting). The second most frequent “best aspect” of the program was that it provided a good education—strong critical thinking, writing, speaking skills, and the comprehensiveness of their education in the department (54 of the 135 mentioned something in these areas). These are all part of our PLOs as well as foundational to the liberal arts.

The survey also included an open-ended item that asked alumni about how the communication studies program can *improve*. Two themes emerged from the 102 alumni who provided comments (see “[coded-improve COM](#)”). The most frequent response (45% of the 102 who responded) was that the department and school needs to help students get internships as well as educate them better for the kinds of jobs they can get upon graduation. The only other theme that emerged with some frequency was that students wanted some classes that were more practical and directly related to skills and jobs that they might be applying for (17 of the 102 mentioned something along these lines). The courses that were most often mentioned were marketing, advertising, and public relations classes.

Interpretation. It was affirming and heartwarming for us to see such favorable responses from alumni. The alumni data support our sense that faculty are doing well in teaching and preparing students for success in graduate school and life. Our PLOs are validated as important to the workplace and their personal lives—and the self-perception of our alumni is that they are strong in those learning outcomes. The faculty need to keep doing what they are doing!

Action. Helping students prepare for the next stage of life, through career planning and internships, is on our agenda. Students have had access to many good internships over the past six years. In the past several years the Department of Communication Studies has highlighted alumni and their job paths on the department website. Additionally, a few years ago, we started a Linked-In page for alumni that seniors can join so that they can see how our alumni have navigated their careers over time and to network with our alumni for informational interviews. We are confident that the Career Center also will be providing much needed assistance with their newly reorganized structure (incorporating internships into the office) and new leadership.

C. Curriculum Review

We analyzed our curriculum in light of our program learning outcomes, our current staffing (four full-time, tenure track positions, one of which is currently unfilled); our alumni survey (distributed January 2015); our knowledge of disciplinary advances, trends, and standards (based on reading current Communication Research and Theory Network postings, National Communication Association publications, and our conversations with other faculty at national and regional conferences); and our comparison with similar institutions [including APU (CA), Biola (CA), Calvin (MI), Gordon (MA), Pepperdine (CA), Point Loma (CA), Seattle Pacific University (WA), and

Wheaton (IL)]. Overall, we are satisfied with the range and kinds of courses offered to our majors, especially given our size and liberal arts context. We may need more attention and courses in media/applied studies, as well as a capstone course, and we are taking these concerns into consideration as we look for new faculty and strategize about hiring adjunct faculty.

Opportunities for Student Learning

We are doing a very good job, especially for the size of our faculty, in terms of introducing students to the broad diversity of scholarly traditions in communication studies. We base this on feedback from our alumni, internship supervisors, and our review of communication studies departments at other Christian liberal arts colleges (see “[comparison of curricula](#)” pdf). The colleges offering the most robust majors that include both social science and humanities traditions usually have a much larger faculty than ours. Having embraced a liberal arts perspective in our discipline, we are not as applied or professionally focused as some programs (in media, public relations, and marketing), though we do promote internships and various opportunities for experiential learning, from study abroad opportunities to skill intensive courses such as public speaking. There were some suggestions from alumni surveyed that we consider adding an applied course in marketing and public relations.

Structure of Major

We restructured our major six years ago, devising categories that solved problems we had at the time. While we are generally pleased with the structure, we have one minor concern and one more substantive concern. The minor concern involves naming our major categories rather than referring to them by numbers. The more substantive concern involves thinking through how to provide and require a capstone course. Though an optional Senior Seminar course has been offered off and on for years, a required capstone course would help all students transition as they leave Westmont and provide an opportunity to reflect on what they’ve learned. (As a side benefit, it will also help us more conveniently and accurately assess their learning.) Given our size and resources, however, this will demand some serious thought as to the current structure of the major and staffing of courses, given both the numbers of students we graduate and that existing faculty schedules are already quite full.

Sequencing and Range of Courses

Because we are committed to providing as much of an overview of the discipline as possible, this means that students have a wide variety of courses to choose from both within required categories and among the major electives. The broad choice, however, means that we “pay the price” in some other ways. Faculty are teaching a wide variety of courses, which means that there are very few “repeat” courses over the course of a year, and no repeat courses in any given semester (except for public speaking). That is, each faculty member teaches at least 5 *different* courses each academic year. While we would like to offer additional in-depth courses, we recognize that given our size, we would have to give up something else in order to make this happen. When faced with the choice of what we would give up, we then determine that given our resources and commitment to liberal arts, we are making the best possible choices for our majors. We choose to introduce them to a broad variety of contexts and traditions and methods rather than eliminate one to go deeper into a particular sub-discipline. Our alumni consistently affirm this approach by saying they feel well prepared for graduate school and that they appreciate the breadth of disciplinary knowledge.

Co-Curricular Learning Opportunities

We provide learning opportunities beyond the classroom. We are encouraging more students to complete an honors thesis, and two students have done so in the past two years. A small number of students collaborate with faculty members' research, as well as work one-on-one with faculty on their own student research. Consequently, some students present research papers at regional and national conferences as well as during the annual student research symposium.

We offer an off-campus Mayterm that has taken students abroad (mostly to Northern Ireland to study conflict and reconciliation, but also to Israel/Palestine, Germany, South Africa, and England) every other year since 2002. This program gives students a chance to see how their learning plays out in very specific contexts different from their own.

We also offer opportunities to earn internship units in Santa Barbara as well as on off-campus programs, from the Los Angeles Film semester to Westmont's San Francisco semester to new off campus offerings in Buenos Aires, the Hague, and Paris.

Previously, our department sponsored an annual speech and debate tournament that was very well funded and open to all majors. Our majors typically helped run the tournament, earning valuable experience as well as money for college. Communication students also typically made the final rounds and sometimes won the tournament or their bracket. We are looking to find another signature event to provide these valuable co-curricular learning opportunities.

D. Program Sustainability

We examined the numbers of majors we graduate each year, gender ratios, and alumni reports of program satisfaction. We also examined our program's connections to serving Westmont and the larger society.

The Program's Demographics

Since the re-institution of the communication studies major in 1987, the department has attracted and graduated a higher-than-average number of students compared to other departments. In the past ten years, we have graduated, on average, 34 students. Looking at declared majors across the college, we have had the fourth highest number of majors, and we typically have several minors as well (as of Spring 2015, 10). Currently, three full-time faculty are advising 92 students (as of 9/10/15).

Number of Graduates in Communication and the College by year

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Communication	30	29	37	30	32	37
Westmont	304	312	331	313	301	353
Percent of grads that are com majors	10	9	11	10	11	10

Our declared majors count has been steady for the past 6 years. (Fall 2015 course enrollments are lower than normal, but our 92 advisees indicate that this may be a temporary blip on the radar).

For most of the last six years, our female (66%) and male (33%) percentages were not too far off the college-wide numbers, though in 2014 and 2015 our male student population declined. We have

theories about this, but it may be a temporary state of affairs. We think we are welcoming to men. From 2010 to 2014, non-white ethnicities comprised 35% of our majors, a number higher than college-wide percentages.

Action. Our department has discussed and continues to discuss ways to attract and retain majors (perhaps by featuring a flagship/showcase event, by helping majors build a resume-enhancing portfolio, and/or by instituting more community events such as socials, retreats and local service projects). We continue to discuss ways to welcome students into the major, starting with incoming first-years and transfers who indicate an interest in communication.

The Program's Service to Westmont and Society

Contribution to Westmont's Mission. Our program strongly promotes a liberal arts perspective. Not only does the discipline draw from both humanities and social sciences, our courses challenge students to think well and articulate thoughts clearly, to cultivate wisdom in understanding the complexities of the world (especially as they pertain to symbol-using and human influence), and to make good decisions. In reading core publications, such as *What We Want for Our Graduates*, we see aspects of our courses in almost every potential outcome or college aspiration. We are a broad discipline that contributes in many areas, but there is also a depth regarding the nature of language and the complex interactions negotiated by individuals in society. We teach specific courses that enable students to be grateful servants, thoughtful scholars, and faithful leaders toward the Westmont teleology for the academy, the church, and the world.

Many of our majors are student leaders on campus, as well as hired as assistants in the residence halls. We often have conversations with these leaders about how the communication studies program helps them establish positive habits in their group decision-making and communal living. Though we do not track these numbers, we are heartened to see our majors taking on leadership and service roles throughout the college.

Our program emphasizes Christian perspectives, and specifically focuses on applying biblical and ethical principles appropriately to complex communication situations. For example, in Media Ethics students are asked to analyze advertising in light of the biblical call to contentment, in Interpersonal Communication students examine marital communication in light of biblical calls to faithfulness, and in Rhetoric students learn how to think about loving one's neighbor appropriately through speech.

Preparation for Future Professions. The communication studies major is both theoretical and practical. We find that a high percentage of our graduates are working in communication-specific fields (see "[Alumni-current job titles](#)" pdf). Our alumni survey revealed that the communication studies program not only has prepared them well for their professions, but also has enhanced their personal lives. Many alumni commented that the program was transformational in how they related to people in general, and more specifically, how they interacted with their spouses (see alumni survey results).

Preparation for Service in Society. Because of our program's emphasis on good thinking and analysis, competent speaking and writing, and empathetic involvement with others, our students are equipped to be helpful citizens in a democratic society. Because of our program's emphasis on interpersonal communication values, our students are prepared to be healthy members of their

families, churches and neighborhoods. Additionally, polls perennially highlight the need for good communication in the workplace (see Association of American Colleges & Universities' website for one such poll, "How Should Colleges Prepare Students to Succeed in Today's Global Economy?"). Though many of our courses build skill in several of the areas listed below, we have listed a course or two in each corresponding area:

Top Ten Things Employers Look for in New College Graduates:

1. The ability to work well in teams, esp. with different others (COM 110, 127, 145)
2. Understanding of science & technology and how it is used in real-world settings (COM 98, 125)
3. The ability to write and speak well (COM 15, 101)
4. The ability to think clearly about complex problems (COM 103, 145)
5. The ability to analyze a problem to develop workable solutions (COM 127, 130)
6. An understanding of the global context in which work is now done (COM 134 & Global Communication Requirement)
7. The ability to be creative and innovative in solving problems (COM 133)
8. The ability to apply knowledge and skills in new settings (COM 098, 190, 198)
9. The ability to understanding numbers and statistics (COM 98, COM elective MA 5)
10. A strong sense of ethics and integrity (COM 129, 140)

Action.

To more actively welcome students, we would like to connect earlier and better with incoming students who indicate an interest in communication studies. We also want to get these first year students enrolled in COM 006 right away, rather than discovering that they have been placed in SOC 001 (which meets the same GE requirement).

We are considering a capstone course that would help provide graduating seniors with a "culminating experience" as well as prepare them for their next stage as graduate students or young professionals.

We would like to more often invite alumni to campus to talk with students about their occupations and career paths to inspire current students and help them learn networking skills.

E. Additional Analysis

Faculty. We are all active scholars and writers (see CVs for current publications), we are all involved in the Westmont community serving on various committees, task forces, and boards, we all received excellent feedback from our alumni (see the alumni survey), we have won four teaching awards in the department, and we are highly rated as advisors and professors. Furthermore, we are actively involved in our church and other communities, including local and international charitable organizations.

Finances. We have known for some time that we are hamstrung by our departmental budget, which is one of the smallest on campus. This program review cycle has confirmed for us that we need a modest increase in our yearly operations budget in order to better serve our students. Our yearly budget has been around \$8800, \$2000 of which is dedicated money for student workers. That leaves \$6600 for our department to function on for the year. TWO line items take up more than half of the

budget: \$2600-3400 in photocopying (despite using the copier more and more to make electronic scans) and at least \$1000 for the senior breakfast (around 35 students plus 4 faculty limits options of places that can accommodate us). The rest of the budget enables us to keep the department running at a minimal level. That is, we usually have only one department event in the Fall for all our majors, and we often make that event a “pack-out” which shifts the cost to them. We rarely sponsor honorarium-required speakers. Costs have increased over the years on all items we purchase, and yet our budget saw only a very modest increase nearly 10 years ago. There are historical reasons for how departmental budgets have come into being, but there should be some recognition that as a department we serve a lot of students with a lot less money than most other academic departments on campus. If we offered nothing new, we would need additional funding to continue doing what we are already doing.

If we want to serve our students better, respond to alumni feedback, and create a more vibrant department, we need a more significant budget increase (of at least \$2000). Some of our goals include: Inviting guest speakers (in classes and for special events), providing support for honors or other student researchers (for materials and/or conference presentations as well as help with membership fees for the national honor society); hosting a departmental “signature” event, offering a day-long majors retreat, bringing in alumni to connect with students, and hosting alumni events to enhance their “life long learning” and connect them with current students.

3. Advising

What we do well. The communication studies faculty have done an excellent job advising our students, despite our high load. We typically have around 30 advisees, and sometimes 35-40 advisees each. We advise students on their courses (fulfilling GE and major requirements) as well as on off campus programs, potential internships, and strategies for success in college. We also, obviously, meet with our students enrolled in classes, where we discuss issues specific to our classes. In general, we provide guidance, go over matriculation worksheets (see [COM major reqts](#)), and make referrals to the Office of Life Planning and the Counseling Center. Our advisees report that these sessions are valuable, as evidenced by the last two advising surveys collected by the Registrar’s office. We also encourage students to contact alumni for informational interviews and try to connect graduating students with people in their chosen fields (the alumni Facebook and LinkedIn pages are helpful here). We also continue to advise students who’ve graduated when they begin applying for graduate school, providing them letters of recommendation, and helping them connect to faculty and alumni of graduate programs.

Where we can improve. We would like to offer some orientation to our department and the major, especially for first year and sophomore students getting started on their core courses, and would like to offer yearly one-day retreats for majors. We’d also like to start the advising process a bit earlier by contacting newly admitted students who’ve declared an interest in communication studies over the summer.

4. Internship Supervisors

What we are doing well. Our internship course is highly effective. Students who choose to complete an internship have been successful in attaining quality internships where they learn new skills and implement their classroom knowledge and skills in a workplace setting. The “employers” have also confirmed that the interns have been successful. Supervisors complete an intern evaluation for every

intern. Their evaluations of interns are highly positive. Almost all of our interns over the past 6 years have received either exceptional (highest) or commendable (second highest) ratings on 20 items that assess their ability to learn, their reading/writing/analytical skills, communication skills, organizational skills, and character attributes ([see “supervisor eval table” in appendix for all results](#)).

Sampling of Supervisor Evaluations of Interns related to our PLOs

Supervisor Evaluations of Interns (percentages)	Unsatisfactory	Uncomplimentary	Fair	Commendable	Exceptional
Reading/Writing					
Reads/Comprehends/Follows written directions			3	30	67
Writes clearly and compellingly			4	44	52
Interpersonal Communication Skills					
Listens to others actively and attentively			3	19	78
Communicates well (face-to-face, online, telephone)			7	14	79
Organizational Effectiveness					
Demonstrates assertive, yet appropriate, behavior			7	21	72
Exhibits professional behavior and attitude		4		14	82
Character Attributes					
Exhibits Integrity			4	13	83
Behaves Ethically			5	14	82
Respects Diversity (religious, cultural, gender) of co-workers				14	86

n= 29 supervisor evaluation. Not all supervisors completed all ratings.

Note: 3, 4 or 5 % is just one student. Therefore all but one or two students are rated as commendable or exceptional.

What we can improve. Our alumni survey results suggested that internships would be valuable. There is a disconnect in that there are many available internships for our students that go unfulfilled each semester. Majors and minors are sent emails alerting them to opportunities, and in advising we encourage students to build internships into their schedule. Specific (valuable) internship opportunities are shared with students on the com-majors list serve. The main obstacle for most students is that they need to dedicate 12 hours a week for their internship (for 4 units of COM credit that counts toward their major) and this does not fit into their other academic/co-curricular schedules. Many intern employers are not looking to “hire” someone for only 6 hours a week, so even if a student wants fewer hours, the better intern opportunities will go to those who can work the 12 (or more) hours per week. We are currently discussing ways to communicate the importance of doing an internship to our majors and minors. We also recently approved some off-campus programs for majors that may encourage them to complete internships in international locations, furthering their ability to be competitive in a global economy.

5. Facilities

First, we want to thank the College for installing air conditioning in Deane Hall a couple of years ago. This has enhanced the quality of our work life in many ways.

What we need. Office and meeting space is an issue, and has been for many years. We are housed on the first floor of Deane Hall. We have small offices that do not allow us much room to meet with students in small groups. Additionally, for those faculty who have student research groups, we do not have enough space to work effectively together in these small offices. It would help to have an extra room or two for these purposes. For several years, we have requested an experiential learning lab for students that would work well both for conducting research and learning simulations. Though this may not be feasible until we move into a new building, it is important to note that we have to run these kinds of activities in homes and in cobbled-together spaces that are less than ideal.

Also, Deane Hall has no place for faculty or students to congregate (other than faculty offices, which generally are too small to accommodate more than 2 people comfortably). An indoor space (lounge) with a dining table and chairs is long overdue. Many faculty in Deane also support constructing an outdoor patio where faculty can meet with students or have lunch together. The Deane Hall faculty would like to be in on the planning of such a space and be able to have some seating/tables that are comfortable for women (the teak chairs that Westmont uses outdoors are often too tall/big for several of our female faculty and students).

6. General Education

For the most part, we are satisfied with our GE offerings. Although we may make changes in the future, we have a present concern. The current “writing and/or speaking intensive course” requirement is, obviously, related to our program. Even so, we have not consistently been included in conversations about potential and upcoming changes in the GE that would impact our program. In addition, we are concerned about the speed of GE decisions that seem to occur without consulting our department. Since oral communication is a vital aspect of contemporary education and professional life, we expect to participate in these GE and Senate discussions.

III. Looking Forward: Changes and Questions

Having finished our review, the Department of Communication Studies is ready to state what we have done and what we intend to do. Note that our proposed changes will require additional funding.

Changes Made in Light of What We’ve Learned

- We’ve made concerted efforts to more explicitly instruct students to make better arguments and defend their thesis statements by creating an argumentation worksheet/post-write that must be attached to specific assignments in COM 006, COM 015, & COM 130. The worksheet is also posted online for student access ([see Making an Argument worksheet](#)). We will re-examine senior papers and essays to look for changes in our next round of assessment research.
- We highlighted alumni and their job paths on the department website. Additionally, a few years ago, we started LinkedIn and Facebook pages for alumni both to help our alumni connect with one another but also so that graduating students may see how our alumni have navigated their careers over time and to network with our alumni for informational interviews.

Changes Proposed in Light of What We've Learned

- *Biblical/Ethical Principles.* Each instructor committed to create one course assignment that helps students think about and defend their biblical claims by establishing context when they reference scripture.
- *Disciplinary Knowledge:* The faculty committed to reinforce the genealogy of communication knowledge and use/citation of original authors and primary sources so that students more easily see and hence value and adopt the proper naming and citation of where their knowledge comes from. Faculty also will stress that students need to articulate and apply all parts of a theory/model rather than small portions of the whole.
- *Oral & Written Communication:* We are currently drafting worksheets and assignments that specifically focus on language choice to then incorporate into our writing and speech intensive courses.
- *Major requirement explanations.* We will change our currently numbered categories into named categories.
- The department has committed to working out the logistics of a *capstone course*. The feasibility of this commitment is one of our key questions.

Changes Proposed in Light of Discussion of Program Sustainability

- Feature a flagship/showcase communication event for the entire college. This event would serve as an outlet for our majors to showcase what they are doing and how their efforts contribute to society. Additional funding would be necessary for us to have a flagship event. We have mourned the loss of the Speech & Debate Tournament, which had previously been a generously funded, highly visible, and well-attended event. What we might offer in place of this event is one of our key questions to explore in the next program review cycle.

Possible Key Questions

- Given the number of majors and size of our faculty, is it feasible to have a capstone course? What form/content would/should it take? How would the faculty rotate through the teaching/administration of it?
- What “flagship event” could we sponsor that provides value to our faculty, majors, the Westmont community, and the broader Santa Barbara community?
- Shall we take the advice of some alumni and offer a course (either yearly or every two years) in applied communication, such as public relations?

We will continue to work on building a vision for students' academic and professional pursuits, to enhance a culture of academic rigor combined with intellectual humility and service. We believe the changes we have already made have led to improvements in our program. We are excited about the proposed changes listed here and the rich conversations we will have as we sort out our key questions.

Appendix

1. [Program mission, vision, goals and program learning outcomes](#) for the current six-year cycle.
2. [Summary of assessment results for every PLO](#)
3. Rubrics for every PLO
 - a. [Written communication](#)
 - b. [Oral communication](#)
 - c. [Biblical Knowledge and application](#)
 - d. [Disciplinary knowledge](#)
4. [Reports on closing the loop activities for every PLO](#)
5. [Syllabi internship course](#)
6. [Communication Map and the PLOs Alignment Chart](#)
7. [Alumni Survey](#)
 - a. [Alumni Survey](#)
 - b. [Alumni Result](#)
 - c. [Coded Improve](#)
 - d. [Coded Best](#)
8. [Peer institution comparison](#)
9. [Full-time faculty CVs](#)
 - a. [Deborah Dunn](#)
 - b. [Greg Spencer](#)
 - c. [Lesa Stern](#)
10. [Core faculty instructional and advising loads](#)
 - a. [2009/2010](#)
 - b. [2010/2011](#)
 - c. [2011/2012](#)
 - d. [2012/2013](#)
 - e. [2013/2014](#)
 - f. [2014/2015](#)
11. [Faculty race/ethnicity and gender breakdown](#)
12. [Adjunct faculty profiles](#)
 - a. [Michael Graves](#)
13. [Student race/ethnicity and gender breakdown](#)
 - a. [2010](#)
 - b. [2011](#)
 - c. [2012](#)
 - d. [2013](#)
 - e. [2014](#)
 - f. [2015](#)
14. [Student graduation rates](#)
15. [Review of library holding \(to be developed in collaboration with the departmental library liaison\)](#)
16. [Internships report](#)
17. [Budget: 2010-2015](#)
18. [Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators](#)
19. [Overview of proposed changes](#)