

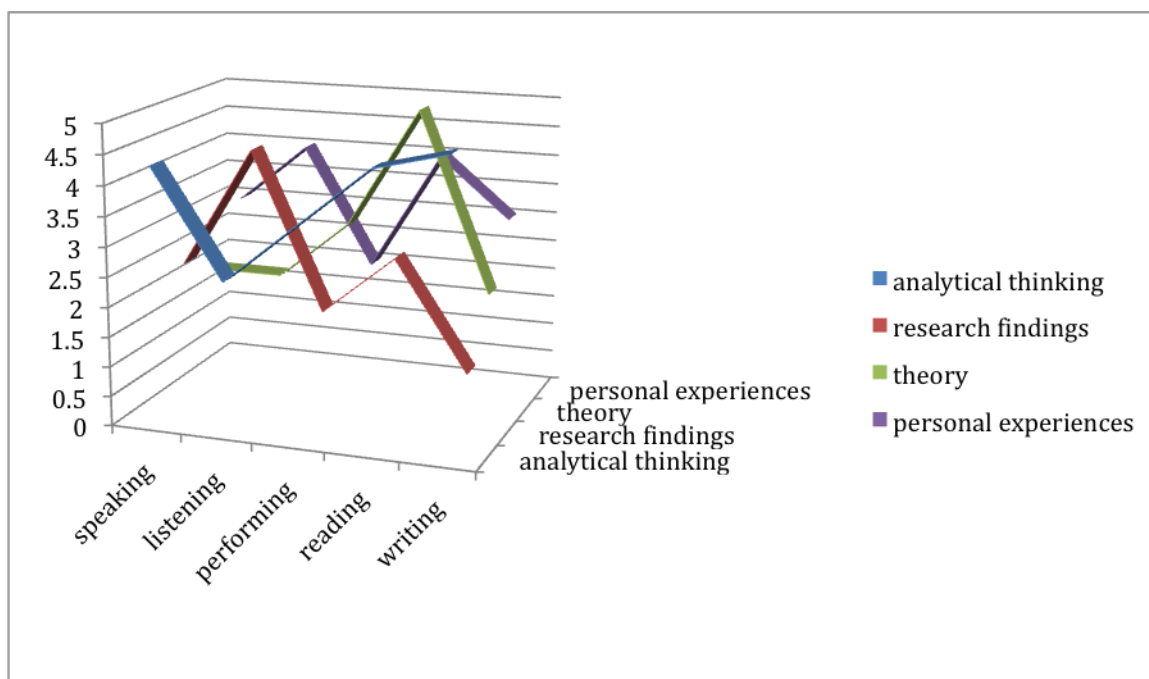
Communication Studies Department: Assessment Report, Spring 2012

For the past two academic years, the Communication Studies department has focused on working toward a more meaningful and feasible assessment model for our undergraduate program. In this report, we include a brief review of the background of our SLO matrix as well as the changes we proposed as a department for future assessment.

Background Information

Until Fall of 2011, the student learning objectives that the Communication Studies department had in place were ideally placed on a three dimensional axis. This axis served as a model and was explained in prior assessment reports.

Student Learning Objectives – Individual (example)



However, subsequent attempts at assessing student learning within the 3 dimensional model has served challenging at best. Initially, we found that the construction of our “breadth area” model for course selection did not map well onto the SLO model with which we had been operating. The following table (explained in prior reports as well) demonstrates that we tend to focus on different SLOs *within* each of the breadth areas such that it was difficult to choose a sampling of courses from which to assess student outcomes.

Departmental Analysis of SLO Focus by Breadth Area

	Diversity	Group/Org	Interpersonal	LSI	Performance	Public	Research	Rhetoric
Speaking	1.86	1.5	1.86	2.25	1.11	2.25	2.5	2
Listening	1.14	2.17	1.71	2	1.33	3	3.5	3

Performing	3.14	3	5	5	1	2.5	3.25	4.5
Reading	1.14	1.67	1.86	1.5	1.78	1.33	1.25	1
Writing	1.29	1.5	1.71	2	2.33	1.5	2.25	1
Analyzing	1.43	1.17	1.14	1	2.11	1.25	2	1.5
Criticism	1.57	2.5	4	1.25	2.22	2.25	2.5	1
Theory	1.57	1.5	1.71	1.33	3.11	1.75	2	1.5
Research	1.86	2.83	3.43	2	4.33	1.67	1	1.5
Practical App	1.71	1.5	2.14	1.75	2	1	1.5	1.5
Collaboration	1.86	1.5	2	1.5	1.89	3	3.67	2

Assessment Attempts Revealed Challenges

Our assessments of both our “performance” SLO and our “writing” SLO during the 2009-2010 academic year revealed two very important challenges:

1. Although we agreed about rubrics generally across sections of the same course, we did not agree on rubrics across courses within a certain breadth area. Thus, while “performing” was a SLO that was focused on in the course we assessed, other performance studies courses did not have as much of a focus on “performing,” rather, they might focus more on “theory” or “analyzing.”
2. Although it was possible to assess SLOs from courses that focused on specific SLOs, assessment was being done on a course by course basis. Thus, it is possible, in this model, for a student to move through our Communication Studies program without ever having a course that focuses on one or more of our program SLOs. For instance, a student could move through the program without ever focusing on “speaking” if they were to take COMM 503, 531, 527, 561, 352, 366, 664, 341, 685, 562, and 544.

Thus, we began to rethink our SLOs in terms of the major and our assessment strategies. Our past assessment processes became meaningful for us specifically because of our challenges – our celebration of the diversity of our course offerings and flexibility of our major seemed in tension with our accuracy in measuring student learning outcomes.

Re-envisioning our SLOs

To date, the assessment committee explored the courses in which our faculty members teach our SLOs, and an assessment of our students’ achievement in “performance” and in “writing.” The philosophy behind assessment in our department is that our assessments should contribute to, and challenge, our practices in the classroom, and as such, the assessment committee engaged in a 3-pronged approach to assessment during the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 academic years: SLO “placement” in breadth areas, further discussion of performance and

writing results with faculty, targeted assessment of the “reading” objective in the Diversity, Research and Rhetoric breadth areas.

At the first faculty meeting in September of 2010, the assessment committee the assessment findings thus far, and asked for input from faculty members about how they would like to go about assessing the reading objective. During our facilitation of that discussion, it became clear that as a whole, the faculty were concerned the process of assessment and our learning objective matrix because we are not reliably focusing on specific learning objectives within each breadth area, nor do we have an intro or exit course that would facilitate those foci. We decided to revisit our matrix to determine whether we would like to continue on this path or if minor or major modifications to the assessment process would be beneficial.

In January of 2011, we gathered at an off-site all day retreat that focused on re-envisioning our SLOs such that they would be more aligned with our breadth areas. We brainstormed and revised a list that included multiple learning objectives within each of the 8 breadth areas. Throughout the spring of 2011, we worked toward condensing that list to allow for fewer, more overarching goals. At the last meeting of our faculty during the spring 2011 semester, we were able to pare down our 20+ SLO list to a comfortable 4 overarching SLO areas: Theory, Ethics, Application and Scholarship.

During the academic year of 2011-2012, we worked toward two major goals. First, we wanted to provide specific conceptualizations of each of the learning objectives such that they could be interpreted and applied across multiple courses and breadth areas. Second, we wanted to develop a clear assessment plan that would allow us to both signal specific breadth areas that would focus on at least one of the SLO areas (thus identifying courses in which assessment of those areas would take place) and also ensure that we would be meeting our programmatic objectives such that no student could take a path through our major that left them without the opportunity to focus on one or more SLO areas.

At the conclusion of the Fall 2011 semester, we agreed upon the following SLO areas and conceptualizations:

1. **Theory:** Communication Studies majors will be able to articulate and use appropriate theories to analyze communication in a way that is methodologically consistent in paradigm and context.
2. **Ethics:** Communication Studies majors will be able to articulate ethical standards and will be disposed to engage in ethical practice within specific communication contexts.
3. **Application:** Communication Studies majors will apply course material to aspects of their personal life, social life, and/or their local communities (e.g., delivering public speeches, performances, or other community focused discourse, even if that delivery happens only in the classroom).
4. **Scholarship:** Communication Studies majors will be able to read critically and evaluate appropriately original scholarship in the discipline.

The assessment committee then needed to develop a plan for assessment of the SLOs. During the Spring of 2012, the assessment committee conducted a series of interviews with each of the full time faculty to ask about the specific foci that they might take in their most typically taught courses. The objective of this research was to descriptively analyze where we believe we are

currently focusing on each of these areas and then identify breadth areas in which we might reasonably assess the SLOs.

However, we were met with a familiar challenge because even though we had minimized our SLO areas to four, we were still unable to find, through our descriptive analysis, a clear mapping of our SLOs onto our eight breadth areas. At the conclusion of the Spring of 2012, we conclude this year's assessment with a clear understanding of our SLOs, but as yet, not a clear understanding of our assessment plan.

Future Assessment Plans

During the 2012-2013 academic year, our assessment committee will explore alternative models of assessment. Rather than assessing our SLOs within multiple courses throughout the major, we may work toward assessment in a limited number of select courses that are required by all majors. Although we wish to continue the flexibility of our major for students, we recognize that some more direction might be necessary. We will also explore the concept of e-Portfolios as possible avenues for assessment (and also for student capstone experiences).