

**Degree/Certificate: MSC**

Major/Option:

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**Part I – Program SLO Assessment Report for 2014-2015**

**Part I – for the 2014-15 academic year:** Because Deans have been asked to create College-Level Summary Reports annually, the template has been slightly modified for a) clarity for Chairs and Directors, and b) a closer fit with what the Deans and Associate Deans are being asked to report.

**Student Learning Outcome:** The student performance or learning objective as published either in the catalog or elsewhere in your department literature.

To facilitate understanding of the fundamentals of research methodology as it is used in the field of communication with the emphasis on the development of quantitative and qualitative research designs, as well as interpretation and critical evaluation of findings.

**Overall evaluation of progress on outcome:** Indicate whether or not the SLO has been met, and if met, to what level.

\_\_\_\_ SLO is met after changes resulting from ongoing assessments, referencing assessment results from the previous year to highlight revisions;

\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_\_ SLO is met, but with changes forthcoming;

\_\_\_\_ SLO met without change required

1. **Strategies and methods:** Description of assessment method and choices, why they were used and how they were implemented.

The most important goals of CMST 520 were to foster students' insight into the techniques of scientific inquiry. The "competency building" approach (cognitive "I know", affective "I feel", behavioral "I do") was used to evaluate the students' ability to apply course related concepts to their own research of communication phenomena. The students studied the main scientific paradigms: Discovery, Interpretative, and Critical along with theoretical schools and methods affiliated with each paradigm (Cognitive approach). The students evaluated their own research values and motivations (Affective). The class culminates in creating of students' own thesis or research proposal (Behavioral).

**Observations gathered from data:** Include findings and analyses based on the strategies and methods identified in item #3.

a. Findings:

Assessment data were gathered via on-going classroom assessment, e.g. tests, oral presentations, classroom discussions, homework assignments, and examples of students' research questions, presentations in-depth analysis of specific theoretical positions or theorists. Students were orally interviewed during class and at the end of the quarter in CMST520 regarding specific strengths and weaknesses of the readings and their fit with student interests and needs.

A similar assessment was carried in CMST 501.

Analysis of findings:

Findings from the collected data indicate that approximately 85% of students were able competently to apply the concepts from the course to their personal research. These numbers reflect the demographics of a large contingent of Saudi students (about 30%) as well as changes in our traditional student enrollment. For most of the students, the concepts from CMST 520 and CMST 501 were new.

Data revealed a need to introduce changes to the materials covered in the classes. Specifically, an introduction to feminist and post-colonial theories and readings with more focus on contemporary theoretical developments while maintaining some areas of traditional communication theories as a background.

**2. What program changes will be made based on the assessment results?**

- a) Describe plans to improve student learning based on assessment findings (e.g., course content, course sequencing, and curriculum revision, learning environment or student advising).

Much of the traditional basis of communication theories could be incorporated into student research and presentations in the class. Overlap of some theories can be stove-piped more often into readings and assignments.

The department continues to support Graduate Student Assistants of the CMST department in maintaining a peer-advising group. This group provides support for both international and traditional students.

Comprehensive Exams rather than Thesis or Research Project continue to be more popular. The bulk of these exams consist of questions on method and theory. Thus the

changes to the core theory course (CMST 501) and methodology (CMST 520,521,522) courses will impact the material covered in the exams.

- b) Provide a broad timeline of how and when identified changes will be addressed in the upcoming year.

Dr. Gary Krug will implement preliminary changes to areas of CMST 501 and CMST 520 in Fall 2015. For example, CMST 501 will introduce readings and assignments that focus students on the praxis of research using standards such as C. Wright Mills' *The Sociological Imagination* and Geertz's "Deep Play".

The GSA peer advising group will continue its work of helping international and traditional students in 2015-16.

The Graduate Advisory Committee will continue on curriculum revision in Winter and Spring 2016.

3. Description of revisions to the assessment process the results suggest are needed and an evaluation of the assessment plan/process itself.

The assessment process is working well. Continued assessment must remain attentive to significant, though sometimes subtle, changes in the demographics of MSC students. It is important to track these changes clearly so that fine-tuning to materials and methods of teaching continue to best serve MSC students.

## **Part II – Closing the Loop**

Follow-up from the 2013-2014 Program Assessment Report

Student Learning Outcome(s) assessed for 2014-15

To facilitate understanding of the fundamentals of research methodology as it is used in the field of communication with the emphasis on the development of quantitative and qualitative research designs, as well as interpretation and critical evaluation of findings.

**Strategies implemented** during 2014-15 to improve student learning, based on findings of the 2013-14 assessment activities.

- 1.) Faculty teaching other methods courses (i.e. CMST 521, Qualitative Research and CMST, 522 Qualitative Research) needed to work on developing a more individual approach in meeting the research needs of each particular student in the program. In addition, there need to be increased attention paid to research/ design proposals from CMST 520 to determine which areas should be paid more attention to in the following research methods classes.

Most work has been done on the first strategy mentioned above. In CMST 522, Dr. Stearns adjusted to the increase in international students (primarily Saudi students) with an additional emphasis on writing and working individually with the students (she notes that it is not as necessary to work with U.S. students in this way). With respect to international students, Dr. Stearns notes that three issues have become important to address. Each of these revolves around working closely with individual students. This means reading numerous paper drafts (three papers per quarter) and having one-on-one conversations with some of these students (sometimes one student will come as the representative of a small group and then relay the information back to the other students). The three main issues are: (1) Ensuring students understand the actual meaning of the content in the transcripts (slang and other language issues like sarcasm are misidentified sometimes with international students only understanding a denotative meaning from a dictionary); (2) Encouraging each student to understand that in qualitative methods, he/she must build the argument and own it with confidence (many have training only in quantitative methods and do not value the importance of this type of research so have a hard time accepting its justifiability); (3) Working on overall writing skills that are appropriate for graduate level work in the Communications discipline (Dr. Stearns does not work with the international students on basic English since they work with the English Writing Center or friends and family).

With respect to CMST 521, Dr. Stafford (along with Hannah Seagrave, one of our graduate students) created several step-by-step videos for students as a means of

enhancing the experience and success of students in CMST 521. These videos were produced in response to Dr. Stafford's assessment that knowledge of SPSS would increase student success in completing class assignments. Specifically, he and Hannah produced tutorial videos for the creation of descriptive statistics, mean comparisons, ANOVAs and factor analysis. The videos also showed the students how to take the information from SPSS and represent it in Excel (e.g., how to create pie charts, bar charts, etc.). The videos also helped the student with some of the technology/software knowledge so they could focus on the methods rather than the computer skills.

The GSA peer-advising group (made up of senior graduate students) was available to incoming graduate students (including our international students). Peer advisers held longer office hours for students to stop by and ask questions. Typically these questions consisted of inquiries about current assignments that the peer advisers had previous experience with. While the advisers did not limit their tutoring to international students, they did promote their assistance to that target audience. Advisers were available by phone, email, and in-person meetings. Often the international students would email advisers their papers and drop by their office to ask questions. It also helped that professors would hand out adviser contact information each quarter. Many students emailed advisers to review term papers for Dr. Stearn's Qualitative Research Methods class (CMST 522). Students also sought guidance from the advisers in understanding concepts and applications in Dr. Stafford's Quantitative Research Methods class (CMST 521). While all GSAs were technically "members" of the advisory group, the international students tended to gravitate toward two advisers in particular. The availability of peer tutoring seemed to enhance the international students' overall experience and success in the program

**Summary of results** (may include comparative data or narrative; description of changes made to curriculum, pedagogy, mode of delivery, etc.): Describe the effect of the changes towards improving student learning and/or the learning environment.

The Department Graduate Advisory Committee was formed as the result of the previous assessment.

The new Comprehensive Examination Exams option for graduation continues to be refined.

The MSC Curriculum Revision process has started.

What **further changes to curriculum, pedagogy, mode of delivery**, etc. are projected based on closing-the-loop data, findings and analysis?

More nonwestern traditions in communication will be included in the existing curriculum. Specifically, post-colonial and developing-world issues and theories shall be incorporated into the two introductory courses, CMST 501 and CMST 520.

The MSC comprehensive examination process has been implemented and is being refined. These exams are successfully providing students with an option to finishing the degree that is well received.

A couple of points need to be noted. First, the MSC program's assessment activities of 2014-15 were hamstrung at the end of 2014/beginning of 2015. Dr. Sinekopova, the Director of the MSC program, was seriously injured. Due to the injury she was unable to attend to as many tasks as she usually would normally do during the Winter and Spring of 2015 – this included allocating time to coordinating the MSC's program assessment activities.

Second, as the MSC program moves forward, its program assessment plan needs to change. Specifically, in 2013-14, the SLO that was assessed was a class SLO (CMST 520) and not one of the two program SLOs printed in the catalog. This needs to be rectified. In 2015-16, the program will need to assess the following program SLO:

Analyze various cultural products through the application of contemporary communication theories and methods.